

Ernst von Salomon, “We and the Intellectuals” (May 1930)

Abstract

The author Ernst von Salomon (1902-1972) was a member of various Freikorps as a youth. He took part in the suppression of the Spartacus Revolt and later participated in the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch as a member of the Marine Brigade Ehrhardt. In 1920, he joined the right-wing extremist, anti-republican *Organisation Consul*, which committed numerous political crimes, including the assassination of Walther Rathenau. In 1922, Salomon was sentenced to five years in prison for his involvement in the planning of the assassination, and he was also convicted of an attempted murder a few years later while in prison. However, he was pardoned by President Hindenburg in 1927. After his release from prison, Salomon began writing articles for national-conservative publications. In 1930, his first novel, *Die Geächteten* [*The Outlaws*], was published by Ernst Rowohlt. This excerpted article appeared in May 1930 in the magazine *Die Kommenden*, which was founded in 1926 by the “federated” [*bündisch*] youth movement. The German youth movement of the 1920s consisted of numerous independent groups or “federations,” the majority of which, however, had a nationalist political orientation. In this respect, political or cultural ideas that placed the individual above the collective (such as liberalism) were not compatible with the youth movement’s ideals. Salomon’s criticism of intellectuals (especially those who were “racially alien”) and the political theories they developed is a prime example of this ideological opposition.

Source

We and the Intellectuals

[...]

The intellectual speaks and writes “I.” He feels no connectedness. He causes disintegration, the disintegration of the mass of individual beings into the particularized individual being, who henceforth stands not under and not over the people, but at their side. The means by which this is accomplished is the misunderstood concept of “education.” Education in the German sense (*Bildung*) means giving form, both inner and outer. Form, however, can only be given where there is content, and content comes only from an idea. An idea always manifests a connectedness. A thought stands alone and is produced in a brain. An idea is something mutual. It grows out of the tensions between one individual and another. Where there is tension, there is also connectedness. For the intellectual, education is at most a highly developed acrobatics of thought and always only the property of the “I.” The arrogance attached to the concept of education could only have arisen in the intellectual’s conception, and this conception could only flourish in the empty space in which the intellectual lives.

The emphatic “we” of the new generation is a clear renunciation of intellectualism. The “we” of the young, nationalistic generation comes about consciously. We—that is the still small group of men and, in the broad sense, masculine youth—have gone beyond mere renunciation to establish values in place of the old ones or in the empty space. We have no intellectuals—we say it with pride; we say it because we are reproached for this alleged failing. What is intellectual in nationalism is of a different sort than the intellectual of the past historical period. It is tied to blood. It knows no dialectic and where it seeks new interconnections it does so in the sense of responsibility for the whole. The intellectual content of misconceived education knows no whole and has its goal and its zenith in prominence. We know a mutuality, from which we draw force, and this mutuality is rooted not in the word but in the deed and in the readiness to commit the deed. The individuals who come from our ranks, and whom we prize, do not in consequence stand aside, for they drew their force from the consciousness of connectedness with the

community, and they are, in the most heightened moment, never dissolved from us but over us, before us; they are leaders. Knowing about the unconditioned nature of leadership and the purification of this concept of all base superfluosity—that is what primarily distinguishes us from liberalism. The liberal system knows no leadership. Instead of leaders it has intellectuals. Marxism knows no leadership. Its first guides and masters were racially alien intellectuals and what it then, uneasily, bore in the way of “leaders”—those were philistines selected and thrown up from below; Marxists themselves call them “bosses.” The system that collapsed in November of 1918 had “representatives” who derived their leadership solely from “tradition.” The system was completely liberal and collapsed for one reason—because the ruling forces, who stood invisibly behind events waiting for the failure of those in charge, either wanted the collapse, or possessed, in their merchant’s mentality, no notion of leadership, or—and this is a special chapter—saw in every form of leadership a danger that could spoil business for them.

Whatever the case may be, we are now confronting a new situation. The structure of our movement is a particular one. It is rooted in the people. Every movement must be, and not only every movement, but every inspired thing that seeks to grow straight. But we draw conclusions from our commitment to the people. That only those who are conscious of their nationality can be part of the German people, that is one conclusion. That all ideas by which one lives must in turn exclusively serve the nation, that is another. That all the phenomena of our multifaceted life are to be recognized, tested, and embraced or repudiated according to the values by which we live, that is a third. Intellectualism we repudiate. It has been weighed and found too light. Our “we” grows out of our will and our service. And our will and our service belong, to the point of ultimate fanaticism, to the German people. Since we have in anguish become persuaded that it is different with others, we use this “we.”

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