

## CHAPTER IX

### SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE AGITATOR

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The democratic leader usually tries to present himself as both similar to and different from his followers—similar in that he has common interests with them, different in that he has special talents for representing those interests. The agitator tries to maintain the same sort of relationship to his audiences, but instead of emphasizing the identity of his interests with those of his followers, he depicts himself as one of the plain folk, who thinks, lives and feels like them. In agitation this suggestion of proximity and intimacy takes the place of identification of interests.

The nature of the difference between leader and follower is similarly changed. Although the agitator intimates that he is intellectually and morally superior to his audience, he rests his claim to leadership primarily on the suggestion of his innate predestination. He does resort to such traditional American symbols of leadership as the indefatigable businessman and the rugged frontiersman, but these are overshadowed by the image he constructs of himself as a suffering martyr who, as a reward for his sacrifices, deserves special privileges and unlimited ascendancy over his followers. The agitator is not chosen by his followers but presents himself as their pre-chosen leader—pre-chosen by himself on the basis of a mysterious inner call, and pre-chosen as well by the enemy as a favorite target of persecution. One of the plain folk, he is yet far above them; reassuringly close, he is yet infinitely aloof.

While spokesmen for liberal and radical causes refrain, for a variety of reasons, from thrusting their own personalities into the foreground of their public appeals, the agitator does not hesitate to advertise himself. He does not depend on a "build-up" manufactured by subordinates and press agents, but does the job himself. He could hardly trust anyone else to paint his self-image in such glowing colors. As the good fellow who has nothing to hide, whose effusiveness and garrulousness know no limit, he does not seem to be inhibited by considerations of good taste from openly displaying his private life and his opinions about himself.

This directness of self-expression is particularly suitable for one who aspires to be the spokesman for those suffering from social malaise. The agitator seems to realize almost intuitively that objective argumentation and impersonal discourse would only intensify the feelings of despair, isolation, and distrust from which his listeners suffer and from which they long to escape. Such a gleeful display of his personality serves as an *ersatz* assertion of individuality. Part of the secret of his charisma as a leader is that he presents the image of a self-sufficient personality to his followers. If they are deprived of such a blessing, then at least they can enjoy it at second remove in their leader.

Those who suffer from malaise always want to pour their hearts out, but because of their inhibitions and lack of opportunities they seldom succeed. Conceiving of their troubles as individual and inner maladjustments, they want only a chance to be "understood," to clear up the "misunderstandings" which others have about them. On this need the agitator bases his own outpouring of personal troubles. When he talks about himself the agitator vicariously gratifies his followers' wish to tell the world of their troubles. He lends an aura of sanction and validity to the desire of his followers endlessly to complain, and thus his seemingly sincere loquacity strengthens his rapport with them. His trials are theirs, his successes also theirs. Through him they live.

By seemingly taking his listeners into his confidence and talking "man to man" to them, the agitator achieves still another purpose: he dispels any fear they may have that he is talking above their heads or against their institutionalized ways of life. He is the elder brother straightening things out for them, not a subversive who would destroy the basic patterns of their lives. The enemy of all established values, the spokesman of the apocalypse, and the carrier of disaffection creates the atmosphere of a family party in order to spread his doctrine the more effectively. Blending protestations of his weakness with intimations of his strength, he whines and boasts at the same time. Cannot one who is so frank about his humility also afford to be equally frank about his superiority?

The agitator's references to himself thus fall into two groups or themes: one covering his familiarity and the other his aloofness, one in a minor key establishing him as a "great little man," and the other in a major key as a bullet-proof martyr who despite his extraordinary sufferings always emerges victorious over his enemies.

## THEME 20: GREAT LITTLE MAN

Unlike those idealists who, sacrificing comfort in behalf of a lofty social goal, "go to the people," the agitator comes from the people; in fact, he is always eager to show that socially he is almost indistinguishable from the great mass of American citizens. "I am an underdog who has suffered through the depression like most of the people."<sup>1</sup> Like millions of other Americans, he is "one of [those] plain old time, stump grubbing, liberty loving, apple cider men and women."<sup>2</sup> Yet he is always careful to make it clear that he is one of the endogamic *élite*, "an American-born citizen whose parents were American born and whose parents' parents were American born. I think that's far enough back."<sup>3</sup> There is no danger that anyone will discover he had an impure grandmother.

Not only is he one of the people, but his most ardent wish is always to remain one and enjoy the pleasures of private existence. He hates to be in the limelight, for he is "an old-fashioned American" who, he cheerfully admits, does not even know his "way around in the circles of high society at Washington."<sup>4</sup> If it were really up to him and if his conscience didn't tell him otherwise, he'd spend all his time on his favorite hobby: "If we had a *free* press in America I doubt if Gerald Smith would publish *The Cross and the Flag*. I am sure I wouldn't publish AMERICA PREFERRED. In my spare time I'd play golf."<sup>5</sup> Even when he finally does seek office, it is only after a heart-rending conflict and after he has received the permission of his parents: ". . . first, I would have to get the consent of my Christian mother and father, because years ago I had promised them that I would not seek office."<sup>6</sup> And on those rare occasions when he can escape from his duties for a few minutes of relaxation, he proudly tells his listeners about it: "Well, friends, Lulu and I managed to get time out to attend the annual carnival and bazaar of the Huntington Park Chapter of the Indoor Sports Club."<sup>7</sup>

Even at this rather uncomplicated level of identification the agitator is ambiguous. By his very protestations that he is quite the same as the mass of Americans he smuggles in hints of his exceptional status. Public life, he intimates, is a bother, and whoever deserts his private pleasures in its behalf must have some good reason for doing so. By constantly apologizing for his abandonment of private life and his absorption in public life, the agitator suggests that there are special provinces and unusual responsibilities that are limited to the uniquely endowed. If one of the plain people, such as he, gains access to such privileges and burdens, then it must surely be because of his unusual talents. He has

embarked on a difficult task for which he is specially qualified, and therefore his followers owe him gratitude, admiration, and obedience.

**A GENTLE SOUL.** Although he is, by virtue of his special talents, a man who has risen out of the common people, the agitator remains a kindly, gentle soul—folksy, good-natured, golden-hearted. Far be it from him to hold any malice against any fellow human being, for “if we must hate, let us hate hate.”<sup>8</sup> Nor is he “the kind of person who carries hatred or bitterness for any length of time . . . In spite of all I have gone through . . . I have never lost my sense of humor, my ability to laugh, even right into the face of seeming disaster.”<sup>9</sup>

Like all other Americans, he is a good and solicitous father to his children, and in a moment of difficulty appeals touchingly to his friends for help: “My son, 9½ years old, is pestering me, wanting a bicycle. Get in touch with me, please, if anyone knows where I could obtain a second-hand bicycle very cheap.”<sup>10</sup> But his virtues come out most clearly in his role as model husband. He regales his audience with bits of intimate family dialogue: “I said one day to my sweet wife.”<sup>11</sup> And even he, the would-be dictator, does not hesitate to admit that the little, or not so little, wife is the boss at home: “If I don’t look out I’ll be looking for a boss’ lap on which to sit and chew gum. Well, Lulu’s the boss and, having gained about 25 pounds during the past six months, she has plenty of lap on which to sit.”<sup>12</sup>

As he makes the rounds of his meetings, his faithful wife accompanies him: “A few weeks ago found Mrs. Winrod and me spending Sunday at Sioux City, Iowa, holding meetings in the Billy Sunday Memorial Tabernacle.”<sup>13</sup> And when he wishes to express his gratitude to his followers, it is again as the gentle soul, the faithful family man: “The wife and I are very grateful for the prayerful letters, kind words, and sums remitted so far . . .”<sup>14</sup> So sweet and lovable are both his personality and his family life that he offers family pictures for sale: “How many have received 1. Calendar of Mrs. Smith, me and Jerry? 2. A copy of my ‘undelivered speech?’”<sup>15</sup>

**TROUBLES SHARED.** One of the agitator’s favorite themes is his economic troubles, about which he speaks to complete strangers with perfect ease:

I must confide to you without reservation . . . I have spent everything I have; I have surrendered every possession I had in this world in order to carry on this fight. I will not be able to borrow any more money; I have nothing left to sell.<sup>16</sup>

Another agitator complains that by engaging in political activity he has embarked on "a gamble with the security of my wife and children at stake."<sup>17</sup> And still another offers the audience a detailed financial statement:

The taxes on my Kenilworth home are unpaid and there are some \$1800 in outstanding bills accrued since I stopped depleting my few remaining securities, although I have paid light, phone and groceries . . . his [her husband's] refusal to give us any of the milk check income from my farm, his continuing to spend this income while associating with the woman he brought to sleep in my own bed at my farm, finally made it necessary to take some legal steps to protect the family.<sup>18</sup>

The agitator is just as frank about the condition of his health as about his financial or marital contretemps. We find him making great sacrifices that cause him to commiserate with himself: "I come home and say to Mrs. Smith, 'How does this old heart of mine keep up?' . . . But I know how men like that go—they go all of a sudden."<sup>19</sup> And even when his heart doesn't bother him, his teeth do: "The last time I saw Charlie Hudson, he still had been unable to afford to get needed dental work done. His wife takes roomers."<sup>20</sup> His afflictions threatened to handicap his political work:

My dentist informed me I must have four teeth removed at once. I don't mind that so much as I do the fact that I may come on the air tomorrow, after the teeth have been extracted, and sound like a dear old gentleman who has been drawing old-age pension for forty years or more.<sup>21</sup>

By multiplying such references to his family, his health, and his finances, the agitator tries to create an atmosphere of homey intimacy. This device has immediate, gratifying implications. The personal touch, the similarity between agitator and audience, and the intimate revelations of "human interest" provide emotional compensation for those whose life is cold and dreary, especially for those who must live a routinized and atomized existence.

Equally gratifying to listeners may be the fact that such revelations help satisfy their curiosity—a universal feature of contemporary mass culture. It may be due to the prevalent feeling that one has to have "inside information" that comes "from the horse's mouth" in order to get along in modern society. Perhaps, too, this curiosity is derived from an unconscious infantile desire to glimpse the forbidden life of the grown-ups—a desire closely related to that of revealing and enjoying scandals. When the listener is treated as an insider his libido is gratified, and it matters

little to him whether he hears revelations about crimes and orgies supposedly indulged in by the enemy or about the increase in weight of the agitator's wife. He has been allowed to become one of those "in the know."

**PUBLIC PRIVACY.** When the agitator indulges in his uninhibited displays of domesticity and intimacy, he does so not as a private person but as a public figure. This fact endows his behavior with considerable ambivalence. His lyrical paeans in praise of the pleasures of private existence imply *ipso facto* a degrading of this privacy when he exposes it to public inspection. This gesture has the double meaning of an invasion of the agitator's private life by his public life and of his public life by his private life. In this way the traditional liberal differentiation between the two is made to seem obsolete and in any case untenable. Privacy is no longer possible in this harsh social world—except as a topic of public discussion.

Finally, these revelations of private life serve to enhance the agitator's stature as a public figure, who, it has already been suggested, vicariously symbolizes the repressed individualities of his adherents. He establishes his identity with the audience by telling it of his financial troubles and other kinds of failures, but he also underlines the fact of his success. He has risen from the depths in which the followers still find themselves; in contrast to them, he has managed to integrate his public and private personalities. The proof of this is simple enough—is he not talking to the followers and are they not listening to him? As a symbol of his followers' longings, the agitator centers all attention on himself, and soon his listeners may forget that he is discussing, not public issues, but his qualifications for leadership.

That the agitator simultaneously stresses his own weakness, that he pictures himself as all too human, does not impair the effectiveness of his attempt at self-exaltation. By the very fact that he admits his weaknesses while stressing his powers, he implies that the followers too can, if to a lesser extent, become strong once they surrender their private existence to the public movement. They need but follow the path of the great little man.

#### THEME 21: BULLET-PROOF MARTYR

Aside from his remarkable readiness to share his troubles with his fellow men, what are the qualities that distinguish the great little man from

the rest of the plain folk and make him fit to be one of "those . . . who lead"<sup>22</sup> Here again the agitator is ready to answer the question. Although the agitator calls himself an old-fashioned Christian American, Christian humility is hardly one of his outstanding virtues. For all his insistence that he is one of the common folk, he does not hesitate to declare that he is an exceptionally gifted man who knows and even admires his own talent.

That he has no difficulty in overcoming conventional reticence about such matters is due not merely to his quite human readiness to talk about himself but also to the fact that his prominence is not merely his own doing. As he has emphasized, his natural inclination is not to lead humanity: he would rather play golf. But he cannot help it—forces stronger and more imperious than his own will push him to leadership. Both because of his innate dynamism and because he has been singled out by the enemy, the mantle of leadership, like it or not, falls on his shoulders.

**THE INNER CALL.** Suggesting that his activity is prompted by sacred command, the agitator speaks of himself as the "voice of the great unorganized and helpless masses."<sup>23</sup> He is "giving vocal expression to the thoughts that you have been talking about around your family tables."<sup>24</sup> But it also comes from holier regions: "Like John the Baptist," the agitator is "living just for the sweet privilege of being a voice in the wilderness."<sup>25</sup> As such, the agitator does not hesitate to compare himself to Christ: "Put down the Crown of Thorns on me."<sup>26</sup> He sees himself continuing the work of the "Divine Savior."<sup>27</sup>

But for all his suggestions that he has a divine responsibility the agitator does not pretend to bring any startlingly new revelation. He does not claim to make his audience aware of a reality that they see only partially; he does not claim to raise the level of their consciousness. All he does is to "say what you all want to say and haven't got the guts to say it."<sup>28</sup> What "others think . . . privately," the agitator says "publicly."<sup>29</sup> And for this purpose he is specially talented: as one agitator says of another, he delivered what was "perhaps the greatest address we have ever had on Christian statesmanship."<sup>30</sup>

Like a new Luther, he bellows defiance of established powers without regard to consequences: "I am going to say some things this afternoon that some people won't like, but I cannot help it, I must speak the truth."<sup>31</sup> Nothing can "halt and undo the innermost convictions of stalwart

sons of Aryan blood,"<sup>32</sup> not even the ingratitude of those who spurn him: "Nevertheless, there I will stand demanding social justice for all even though some of the ill-advised whom I am endeavoring to defend will take a pot-shot at me from the rear."<sup>33</sup>

Nor is the agitator's courage purely spiritual:

If the Gentiles of the nation back up Pelley now in his challenge to the usurpers of American liberties, they are going to get a "break" that they have never dreamed possible till Pelley showed the spunk to defy the nepotists.<sup>34</sup>

The agitator, aware of both his qualifications and his courage, knows that

When the history of America is written . . . concerning the preservation of the American way of life, I am going to be thankful that in the day when men were cowardly and overcautious and crawled under the bed and allowed themselves to be bulldozed by a bunch of wire-whiskered Communists and atheists and anti-God politicians, that there was one man by the name of Gerald L. K. Smith that had the courage to be an old-fashioned, honest to God, Christian American!<sup>35</sup>

And the agitator knows too that his courage extends to somewhat smaller matters as well:

When I went to the Auditorium, although it was very cold, probably five degrees below zero—twenty degrees the first time, five degrees the second time—the place was packed and every inch of standing room was taken. I had to pass through a picket line, one of those vicious picket lines organized by Reds and enemies of our meeting there.<sup>36</sup>

It is this blending of seriousness and unseriousness, of the sublime Crown of Thorns and the toothache that characterizes the agitator's approach to composing his self-portrait as well as to the other themes of his speeches and writings. He is both the little man suffering the usual hardships and the prophet of truth: Walter Mitty and Jeremiah rolled up into one.

Such an indiscriminate mixture of trivial and sublime symbols might appear blasphemous or simply disgusting, but the agitator seems to count on a different kind of reaction. Instead of imposing on his listeners the difficult task of following a saint, a task which might after all cause them to feel that they too must assume some of the traits of sainthood, he gratifies them by dragging the lofty notions of sainthood down to a humdrum, *kleinbürgerlich* level. The followers thereby are offered an object



of admiration, the image of the desanctified saint, that is closer to their own level of feeling and perception. The agitator imposes no strain on them.

There is still another gratification for the audience in the agitator's narcissistic outbursts of self-praise. A courageous and self-reliant man might be disgusted with the spectacle of someone celebrating himself as the repository of all the manly virtues, but people who are acclimated to self-denial and self-hatred are paradoxically attracted by the selfish narcissist. As a leading psychoanalyst puts it: "This narcissistic behavior which gives the dependent persons no hope for any real love arouses their readiness for identification."<sup>\*</sup> Accordingly, the agitator does not count on the support of people capable of self-criticism or self-reliance; he turns to those who constantly yearn for magical aids to buttress their personalities.

**PERSECUTED INNOCENCE.** Like any advocate of social change the agitator appeals to social frustration and suffering, but in his output there is a striking contrast between the vagueness with which he refers to the sufferings of his listeners as a social group and the vividness with which he documents his personal trials. He speaks as though the malaise resulted in tangible hardship in him and him alone. His trials and ordeals are truly extraordinary, almost superhuman, and by comparison the complaints of his followers seem merely to refer to minor nuisances, insignificant reflections of his glorious misfortunes. He is the chosen martyr of a great cause—himself. As they compare their lot to his, the followers cannot but feel that they are almost like safe spectators watching a battle between the forces of evil and their own champion of virtue.

In building up this image of persecuted innocence, the agitator uses religious symbols. He "has come through the most heart-rending Gethsemane, I believe, of any living man in America today,"<sup>37</sup> and he does not hesitate to compare himself to the early Christian martyrs: "Many leaders . . . sneered at Father Coughlin and turned thumbs down on the Christian Fronters, as did the Patrician population of Rome turn their thumbs down on the Christian slave martyrs . . ."<sup>38</sup>

But these religious associations are only decorations for ordeals that are strictly secular; the agitator's sufferings are of this world. Here he runs into a difficulty. In actual fact, he has met with little interference

\* Fenichel, O.: *The Psychoanalytical Theory of Neurosis*, New York, Norton, 1945, p. 510.

from the public authorities.\* Yet he realizes that as a man with a mission, he must be persecuted. If the past will yield no evidence, perhaps the future will, for who is to deny him the right to premonitions:

I don't know what is going to happen to me. All I ask you to do is, don't be surprised at anything. If I am thrown in jail, if I am indicted, if I am smeared, if I am hurt physically, no matter what it might be, don't be surprised at anything, because everything in the calendar is now being attempted. . . . I am glad to make that sacrifice.<sup>39</sup>

One reason why the agitator has difficulty in specifying the persecutions to which he is subjected is that his enemies work in secret. They force him to the most surreptitious behavior: "I, an American, must sneak in darkness to the printer to have him print my booklet and to get it out to the people like a bootlegger."<sup>40</sup> He is beset by vague dangers that are difficult to pin down: "One of these newspapermen, according to another newspaperman, is said to have predicted somewhat as follows: 'Two Jews from England were over here to see that Hudson does not get home alive.'<sup>41</sup>

But when the agitator gets down to bedrock, it becomes clear that what he most resents is public criticism, which he describes as "smeared" and "intimidation." He complains that "Jewish New-Dealers in the Congress . . . started a mighty ball rolling to smear Pelley from the scene."<sup>42</sup> And "because I dare to raise my voice foreigners are intimidating me and trying to get me off the air."<sup>43</sup> Nor does he feel happy that "frequently we have heard it prophesied over the radio by such noble patriots as Walter Winchell and others, that we were about to be incarcerated in concentration camps."<sup>44</sup>

**A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER.** However insubstantial the evidence he can summon for his martyrdom, the agitator, it must be admitted, works it for all it is worth. He continually suggests that he has embarked on a dangerous career and that he is actually risking his life. The threat never abates, as we shall see in tracing it during the course of one agitator's statements over a period of twelve years.

As early as October, 1936, he realized that his death warrant had been signed. Like his political boss, who was assassinated, ". . . it may cost my life."<sup>45</sup> And not without reason: "Ten threats came to me within twenty-four hours here in New York City."<sup>46</sup>

\* Except for those involved in the wartime sedition trial and one agitator convicted as an enemy agent, the American agitators have suffered only from exposures and criticism.

Three years later these threats of murder were still harassing him: "I continued to receive all sorts of threats against my life . . ." <sup>47</sup>

By 1942 the rather slow-working murderers had a definite objective: to keep him out of the Senate. "I am convinced that there are men in America who would rather commit murder than see me in the United States Senate."<sup>48</sup> Other murderers, or perhaps the same ones, found his literary output more objectionable than the possibility of his becoming a Senator: "I have been warned that I will not live to complete this series of articles."<sup>49</sup>

Half a year passes, and the enemy is still intent on murder. "A certain set of ruthless men in this nation have actually called for my assassination."<sup>50</sup> The murderers seem finally to have worked up enough energy or courage to come within striking distance:

I held a meeting down in Akron, Ohio, one time and my Committee resigned the afternoon of the meeting . . . I had to walk into that armory alone . . . I walked from the hotel over to this place which seated about 6,000 people alone, and when I got over there, the place was packed . . . I walked down the center aisle, walked right up to the microphone and the first thing I said was this, "There are men in this room who would like to see me killed tonight" . . .<sup>51</sup>

Yet even then there is no record of the murderers doing anything. Two more years went by and by the spring of 1945 the still healthy agitator noted that the threat to his life had become so real that it was even confirmed by police authorities: "Shortly before the end of the meeting I received a message from the police detectives to the effect that they were convinced that there was a definite plot to do me great injury, perhaps kill me."<sup>52</sup> Nothing seems to have come of that danger, but by the summer of the same year the agitator reported that "people who know what is going on are convinced that a plan is on foot to actually get me killed at the earliest possible moment."<sup>53</sup> As of the moment of writing, the agitator remains alive and unharmed, never having once been the victim of assault or assassination. As late as April 29, 1948, he still maintained that he was the object of an attempt on his life, this time by means of "arsenic poisoning."<sup>54</sup>

That he has no genuine factual data to support his charges does not seem to disturb the agitator: he persists in believing that an evil force is out to get him. His recital of fears, smearing, premonitions, anonymous letters—all this adds up to the familiar picture of paranoia. The paranoiac's conviction that he is persecuted cannot be logically refuted since it is itself extralogical. In agitation the leader acts out, as it were, a

complete case history of persecution mania before his listeners, whose own inclinations to regard themselves as the target of persecution by mysterious forces is thus sanctioned and encouraged. Nevertheless it is the agitator who remains at the center of the stage; it is on him that all the imaginary enemy blows fall. By symbolically taking upon himself all the burdens of social suffering, he creates unconscious guilt feelings among his followers, which he can later exploit by demanding their absolute devotion as recompense for his self-sacrifice. And since the enemy exacts the heaviest penalty from him, he has the implicit right to claim the highest benefits once the enemy is defeated. Similarly, since the enemy singles him out for persecution, he has the right to engage in terroristic reprisals. All of these consequences follow from the agitator's self-portrait as martyr.

But simultaneously the agitator, for all the dangers to which he is exposed, does manage to survive and continue his work. He is not merely the martyr but also the remarkably efficient leader, and on both counts he deserves special obedience. Since he is both more exposed and better equipped than his followers, his claims to leadership are doubly vindicated.

**THE MONEY-MINDED MARTYR.** There are many indications that, at its present stage at least, American agitation is a racket as well as a political movement. To what extent the agitator actually depends on his followers' financial contributions it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty. In any event he does not account for the use of the money he collects. It seems probable that at least some agitators have been heavily subsidized by anonymous wealthy donors, while it is known that some of the smaller fry make a living by selling their literature.

When the agitator appeals to his followers for money, he strengthens their devotion to the cause by leading them to make financial sacrifices. In agitation such psychological factors are probably of greater importance than in other movements. For it must be remembered that in agitation the follower has no precise idea what his cause is, that the whole background of the agitator's appeal is one of destruction and violence, with a meager minimum of positive stimuli. What remains then is the agitator himself—his inflated personality and his pressing needs. The agitator does not hesitate to act the insistent beggar. He begs meekly: "Oh, I'm just a common American citizen, friends, poor in the world's gifts, depending on the quarters and dollars of friends and radio listeners."<sup>55</sup> But he also

begs for himself as the agent of history: "It is a long grind to get the thousands of dollars absolutely necessary as a minimum in this way. But it must be done if the fight is to go on."<sup>56</sup> "Why hold back your financial aid NOW—when revolution itself is being shouted from our public rostrums?"<sup>57</sup>

He begs for aid, but he also warns that those who do not come through now may live to regret it: "If any of you don't agree with the principles of America First and don't care to contribute to our cause, this is the time for you to get up and walk out."<sup>58</sup> Those who do not comply face the dreaded penalty of exclusion—they have to walk out and be alone with themselves.

MAGIC OF SURVIVAL. That he has managed to survive under terrible financial handicaps and political persecution arouses the agitator's self-admiration. ". . . How could he emerge unscathed with such colossal forces arrayed to smash him?"<sup>59</sup> His invulnerability is remarkable and is only slightly short of miraculous. His safety is, in fact, adduced as proof that he has gone through dangers, and as he concludes his report of the plot hatched against him by English Jews, he remarks with a note of defiance in his voice: "I arrived safely Sunday night."<sup>60</sup> His life seems to him protected by an anonymous providence: ". . . *Pelley is an absolute fatalist . . . he believes that nothing can harm him until he has done the work which he came into life at this particular period to do!*"<sup>61</sup> And he always returns to the fight: "I intend to . . . toss off the shackles that have been thrown around me . . . to spread my wings again . . . and to soar to new heights to carry on the battle."<sup>62</sup> For his powers of exertion are tremendous: "I speak two hours here and two hours there, and write all night and talk all day to people and write letters and work and . . . and everything else, and still I always seem to have the strength to do what lies before me."<sup>63</sup>

Seen from one perspective, all this bragging is rather harmless. A narcissist naturally believes himself invulnerable and omnipotent, and his slightly ridiculous posturings only endear him to his audience. He is reduced to a level that is within their vision. Like the extraordinary exploits of the hero of a movie or a cheap novel, the agitator's adventure ends on an ultimately happy note—the hero is saved. From this harmless relapse into an adolescent atmosphere, the followers, together with the agitator himself, draw a certain simple gratification. They have been in the company of a hero who is not too heroic to be akin to them.

And yet somewhere in the interstices of this harmless braggadocio there

lurk the grimmer notes of violence and destruction. The agitator's self-portrait of miraculous survival has a solid reality basis; he really does enjoy a high degree of impunity. He is safe and sound, magically immune, secretly protected—and this despite his verbal violence and scurrilous denunciations of the powers that be or of some of the powers that be. If his enemies do not carry out their threats of murder, it is not because they would not want to but because they do not dare. Their power, the agitator thereby suggests, is rather less impressive than it appears; they have only the façade of power. Real power is on his side.

Behind this defiance of the enemy's threats lurks another suggestion: when the hour strikes and the seemingly strong enemy is revealed in his true weakness, the agitator will take revenge for the torments of fear that have been imposed on him. Perhaps it is not too bold to conjecture that as the agitator continually stresses his own bodily vigor, he is implicitly developing a complementary image to his leading metaphor of the enemy as a Low Animal. His own body is indestructible, but the helpless bodies of the enemy—those parasitical and disease-breeding low animals—are doomed to destruction. Behind the whining complaints and the triumphant self-admiration of this indestructible martyr looms the vision of the eugenic storm troops. The agitator is a good little guy, to be sure; he is a martyr who suffers endlessly; he survives by virtue of superior destinies; but in the long run he makes sure to protect himself.

**TOUGH GUY.** The agitator knows that sometimes he must bare his teeth. Often he does it with the air of a youthful gang leader testing his hoodlums:

I am going to test my people. I am going to see if the fathers that left their bones on the desert had real sons. I am going to find out if the children of the men that rebuilt San Francisco after the earthquake are real men.<sup>64</sup>

Such vague anticipations of the agitator's future role are supplemented with more direct hints about his present strength. He means business, even if he is a great little man. "I am a tough guy. I am tough because I have got the goods on them."<sup>65</sup> The easy-going braggart is also a brutal swashbuckler. "They can threaten me all they want to. I am not a damned bit afraid to walk the streets of New York all by myself. I don't have to. I have the toughest men in New York with me."<sup>66</sup> Nor does he always have to sneak in the dark to his printer: "Huskies of my 'American Group' protect me when I take my printed booklets from the printer's plant."<sup>67</sup>

The bodyguard, however, is used not merely against the enemy. The

same bodyguard that protects the leader from the enemy also protects him from any interference from his listeners: their role is to listen, not to participate. When he speaks, you had better listen—or else. In this way the agitator already establishes himself as a constituted authority. The agitator brags about this:

So as we moved down through the middle of the meeting I said, “Now, we are not going to have any disturbance, we are not going to be heckled and the first man who attempts that, we will throw him out through the nearest window.” So one fellow like this boy, way up in the balcony said something and somebody didn’t understand what he said and he was almost pitched out of the window.<sup>68</sup>

It is in this atmosphere, in which even the followers are threatened with manhandling if they step out of line, that the agitator tests out a future device: the totalitarian plebiscite. “Do you authorize me to send a telegram to Senator Reynolds . . . put up your hands . . . All right, that is number one.”<sup>69</sup> He feeds them cues: “I bid for the American vote under that flag. Give that a hand.”<sup>70</sup> Such presentiments of the plebiscite are in themselves trivial enough, but they serve to emphasize the agitator’s role as the sole legitimate voice to which everyone must listen in silence except when told to speak up in unison.

**INSIDE KNOWLEDGE.** Not only is the agitator physically powerful and something of a terrorist to boot, but he also has access to secret and highly important information, the source of which he is most careful not to reveal. He quotes mysterious “sources” that enabled him “to correctly diagnose 3 years ago that the 1940 presidential election would not be bonafide . . .”<sup>71</sup> He claims that “there has fallen into my hands a copy of these confidential instructions which came out from New York City concerning the underground science.”<sup>72</sup> By miraculous but unspecified means he manages to penetrate into the heart of the enemy fortress where his sharp ears hear the confidences that “Zionists in America whispered within secret circles . . .”<sup>73</sup>

On other occasions the agitator can offer only promises of revelations to come: “I shall try to keep you posted concerning the diabolical conspiracy.”<sup>74</sup> Or his information is too horrible to disclose: “I personally have had some experiences in the last year that would make your blood run cold, if I could tell you what they were.”<sup>75</sup> Or he is bound by professional secrecy:

Two contacts, best unnamed on account of nature of information divulged, inform: “. . . believes that he has discovered the hdqtrs. of what seems to be

Grand Orient Masonry . . . uptown in New York City. A building in the middle of a large block, surrounded by apartment houses; in a sort of courtyard, with a high barbed wire fence around it. No one is ever seen to enter this place, altho access could be had underground from one or more of the surrounding houses. A large telephone cable, sufficient for over 100 lines, goes to the place which is guarded night and day by armed guards . . .”<sup>76</sup>

The agitator uses the language of an adolescent gang leader. He seeks to ingratiate himself with his listeners by promising them some highly important information. Some day the listeners will be “let in.” But the agitator uses this technique of innuendo in ways other than the relatively harmless promise to divulge secrets. He withholds information in the very gesture by which he seems to give it out. He reveals not secrets but the existence of secrets; the secrets themselves are another variety of “forbidden fruit.” Those affected by the promise to be “let in” are even more affected by the fact that the agitator has access to information inaccessible to them. To listen to innuendo and to rely on deliberately vague statements requires a certain readiness to believe, which the agitator directs towards his own person. So long as he does not reveal the “sources” of his knowledge, the agitator can continue to command the dependence of his followers. Unlike the educator, he never makes himself superfluous by revealing his methods of gaining knowledge. He remains the magical master.

This secret knowledge, like his toughness, is a two-edged weapon. It implies an ever present threat from which no one is quite safe: “Some day that thing is really going to come out, and when it comes out it is going to smell so high that any man that is connected with them, with that outfit, will be ashamed to say that he ever knew them.”<sup>77</sup> or: “I have written a letter containing some mighty important information which I have placed in the hands of attorneys in this city. . . . The letter will not be printed . . . if we arrive home safely at the end of our campaign.”<sup>78</sup>

Behind such statements there is the suggestion that he knows more than he says, and that nothing can ultimately remain hidden from him. If his self-portrait as a tough guy anticipates the storm trooper, then his insistence on his “inside knowledge” anticipates the secret files of the totalitarian police, which are used less against the political enemy, known in any case, than as a means to keep the followers in line. Sternly the agitator indicates this to his followers: get used to the idea now, if you want a share in this racket, you have to obey its rules—and I make the rules.



**THE CHARISMATIC LEADER.** The self-portrait of the agitator may seem a little ridiculous. Such an absurd creature—at once one of the plain folk and the sanctified leader; the head of a bedraggled family and a man above all material considerations; a helpless victim of persecution and a dreaded avenger with fists of iron! Yet contemporary history teaches us that this apparently ridiculous braggart cannot be merely laughed away.

In establishing this ambivalent image of himself the agitator achieves an extremely effective psychological result. In him, the martyr ultimately triumphant over his detractors and persecutors, the adherents see all their own frustrations magically metamorphosed into grandiose gratifications. They who are marginal suddenly have a prospect of sharing in the exceptional; their suffering now can appear to them as a glorious trial, their anonymity and servitude as stations on the road to fame and mastery. The agitator finds the promise of all these glories in that humdrum existence of his followers which had driven them to listen sympathetically to his appeals; he shows them how all the accumulated stuff of repression and frustration can be lit up into a magnificent fireworks, how the refuse of daily drudgery can be converted into a high explosive of pervasive destruction.

The self-portrait of the agitator is thus a culmination of all his other themes, which prepare the audience for the spectacle of the great little man acting as leader. Taking advantage of all the weaknesses of the present social order, the agitator intensifies his listeners' sense of bewilderment and helplessness, terrifies them with the specter of innumerable dangerous enemies and reduces their already crumbling individualities to bundles of reactive responses. He drives them into a moral void in which their inner voice of conscience is replaced by an externalized conscience: the agitator himself. He becomes the indispensable guide in a confused world, the center around which the faithful can gather and find safety. He comforts the sufferers of malaise, takes over the responsibility of history and becomes the exterior replacement of their disintegrated individuality. They live through him.