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Journal in Turmoil

At Partisan Review, Intellectuals at War Over an Unpublished Article

By Sidney Blumenthal
Washington Post Staff Writer

One by one the mourners file past the stricken *Partisan Review*, once the most influential and prestigious journal of the New York intellectuals.

PR—the very letters still evoke awe in certain circles—had for years been living a kind of posthumous existence, mainly as the subject of nostalgic memoirs. Yet the quarterly journal still had its importance, if only because it stood as a monument to the achievements of these intellectuals, a family scattered and shattered by death and politics.

Now, it is laid out because of a terrific collision with Reagan's Washington, a world that mystifies many sophisticated New Yorkers. Today the PR board will meet to apply its collective intelligence to debris still falling on the magazine because of an article only about a dozen people have read.

This disastrous encounter—of the venerable PR with a veiled character from the unfolding Iran arms scandal, Michael Ledeen—is a tale of two cities and two different types of intellectual. "It reveals something about the New York intellectuals and their politics, alas, that they are New York intellectuals, often quite parochial about Washington," says Dennis Wrong, professor of sociology at New York University and PR contributing editor.

The affair began last fall, on the eve of the Iran-contra scandal, when the journal that had featured Sartre and Eliot, Lionel Trilling and Edmund Wilson, Delmore Schwartz and Saul Bellow—and Dwight Macdonald, Andre Malraux, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Hannah Arendt, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag and virtually the entire pageant of midcentury intellectuals—turned to a new writer.

A mysterious ideological adventurer, Ledeen was even then engaged in an exploit that would bring calamity to the Reagan presidency, playing "a key role in the initial contacts between the U.S. and Israel vis-a-vis Iran," according to the Senate Intelligence Committee report.

PR had been drifting with the neo-conservative tide. And William Phillips, one of PR's founders and its editor, so-

lited an article from neoconservative Ledeen on the meaning of "the national interest" to serve as the basis for one of PR's famous forums. Phillips wanted it to appear in early 1987.

When Ledeen's contribution was sent out to potential contributors to the PR symposium, letters of outrage and resignation came back in return.

The 8,000-word piece, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post, hails "the democratic revolution" proclaimed by the Reagan administration. It then attacks the "pseudo-democratic theory according to which everyone is entitled to a say in policy, regardless of his or her qualifications"; asserts, wrongly, that only the executive is "constitutionally charged with responsibility for foreign policy"; and approvingly quotes a French conservative on the need for "breaking the law from time to time." In particular, the article urges changing the law "that prohibits American officials from working with murderers" and the "executive order, dating to 1975, prohibiting any official of the American government to conduct, order, encourage or facilitate assassination."

Ledeen, as far as the PR illuminati were concerned, was one step beyond. Many sought to cast him into outer darkness.

Daniel Bell, a Harvard professor and contributing editor, an *eminence grise* among the New York intellectuals, refuses to comment publicly on Ledeen's yet-to-be-published article and its commissioning. But his withdrawal of his name from the PR masthead was like the withdrawal of the mandate of heaven.

"People like Dan Bell and I didn't want to be involved in such a discussion," says Diana Trilling, a distinguished critic and the widow of Lionel Trilling, who was the preeminent literary critic of his generation and the moral center of the PR universe.

When Bell declined to participate in the Ledeen symposium, she initially urged him to reconsider, insisting that he had an obligation to resist. He protested that the piece had no merit.

After reading it, Trilling decided that "I didn't want to have any discourse on this level, an unworthy level, unworthy of the intellectual enterprise as I define it. This was a practical ac-

tion program. Ledeen's no intellectual. There's been a debasement. The neo-conservatives, they really have debased the intellectual process, my chief argument against them. Sometimes some of them say that they descended from my husband. He'd be appalled at the way they have factionalized and polarized the intellectual life."

"It is completely innocent," protests Edith Kurzweil, PR's managing editor. "We hope to get to the issues. That's what William [Phillips] was thinking of."

"I alternate between feeling sorry and annoyed with Edith and William about their disingenuousness," says Dennis Wrong.

Phillips himself, a frail 80 years old, who endured more than a half-century of intellectual controversies, last week fell ill with pneumonia and was placed in a hospital's intensive care unit, stricken with pneumonia.

Ledeen, for his part, says, "I'm not talking to The Post anymore"—at least not directly. All inquiries are handled by his lawyer, R. James Woolsey, who processes Ledeen's written responses. In them, Ledeen still nurtures the belief that his article will see the light of day:

"According to my conversations with him [Phillips], it has not been rejected but is still under consideration. Since the piece was originally written long before the Iran-contra story broke, there was nothing in it about Iran. Mr. Phillips felt that *Partisan Review* could not publish the piece without my including something about Iran. The piece has recently been revised and resubmitted."

"It's not just that Ledeen is a necon, it's that he's a con," says Leon Wieseltier, literary editor of *The New Republic* and a PR contributing editor, who quit. He was also one of Trilling's last students.

In his letter of resignation, Wieseltier called Ledeen "an intriguer and an operator and an opportunist," and added, "If PR is embarrassed now by the revelation that Ledeen took part in the disgraceful Iran affair, it deserves to be: his predilection for such activity is well-known. You could have been warned."

Ledeen, in his written response, was unaware of Bell's resignation and believed that Wieseltier "resigned for reasons unrelated to my article." ("So bizarre," says Wieseltier.) Ledeen added, "I hope that the piece, once published, attracts as much attention as it has prior to publication."

His revised version was received by Kurzweil last Wednesday. "I don't know how to handle it yet," she says. "I don't think we can print the piece. I don't think we will. I really don't know . . . Ledeen hasn't been informed."

"If it's published," says Wrong, "who's going to be left to publish the magazine?"

Red Decade to Reagan Decade

PR was launched in 1934, with the backing of the Communist Party, to wage the ideological struggle in the field of culture. But the restless radicals who edited the journal broke with the party line, reforming PR as an independent entity. The New York they inhabited was "like the other side of the moon," Phillips wrote in his memoir. It was a life of youthful outsiders, first- and second-generation immigrants, mostly Jewish, removed from practical politics. They were an incestuous, squabbling family like no other, at the same time provincial and cosmic in outlook, consumed with world-historical events and ideologies.

The twin obsessions of the New York intellectuals were modernism in the arts and Marxism in politics. They defined the anticommunist liberalism that dominated the postwar era. And in time the avant-garde sensibility of the magazine was absorbed by much of the larger American intellectual community.

By the 1960s the generation of the 1930s had become middle-aged and tenured. The aging New York intellectuals were dismayed and often bewildered by the new generation that dismissed their wisdom. Even the Beatles were condemned as "anti-thought," in the words of one eminent figure. In this generational schism can be found a root of neoconservatism.

PR, however, did not join the united front against the new. Phillips viewed the fresh currents of the 1960s as a hopeful revival of the earlier radical spirit. And PR began to publish sympathetic pieces. But Phillips' move was belated, occurring in the 1970s, when what he was allying himself with was already fading.

In his 1983 memoir, Phillips dissociated himself from the "extreme positions" of the neoconservatives. The reviews by neoconservatives, in return, were ferocious. And, according to a Phillips friend, he was shaken. It

was then that PR began drifting rightward, slowly fitting itself to the fashions of the neoconservatives, from "Star Wars" to the Reagan Doctrine.

Finally, in the weeks before the Iran arms scandal threw neoconservatism into a tailspin, PR beckoned Ledeen.

Ledeen's Washington

The Iran-contra scandal differs from Watergate in part because of the appearance of new Washington types.

Michael Ledeen used the glamor of intellect to impress the powerful, and the glamor of power to impress the intellectual. When he played power politics with the truly powerful, as in the Iran arms deal, and when he entered intellectual combat with the genuinely intellectual, as in the PR fracas, he was undone.

But Ledeen had come to conquer Washington.

He was part of a small wave of neo-conservative intellectuals who arrived at National Airport in the late 1970s to undermine the Carter administration. The neoconservatives instantly provided him with an informal network. They got him jobs, grants, introductions, published his articles, invited him to parties and arranged for him to speak at conferences. When Reagan won the presidency, they sought influence and appointive office; they no longer saw themselves as alienated critics.

Ledeen appeared to others as enigmatic and yet knowing. His academic career began as a student of fascism at the University of Wisconsin. In 1977, he published a biography, "The First Duce," about Gabriele D'Annunzio, an Italian ideological adventurer, "a poet-warrior," as Ledeen put it, who was a precursor of Mussolini. D'Annunzio considered politics a form of theater and believed in the rule of a charismatic leader at the crest of masses mobilized by myth and symbols. D'Annunzio, Ledeen wrote, "possessed the key to modern politics," providing a "common point of departure" for "radicals of both Right and Left."

Ledeen's scholarship, however, did not earn him tenure at Washington University at St. Louis, where he taught. He left amid accusations of plagiarism, a charge he has denied. But his research into Italian politics proved to be useful.

His Italian career—or charges about it—surfaced in the case of Francesco Pazienza, a political intriguer.

Pazienza was a deputy to the chief of Italian military intelligence and a leading member of a clandestine organization called P-2, a parallel hierar-

chy of right-wing generals, colonels and politicians, which attempted to stage what the Italian press has called "a silent coup" through "a strategy of tension." When the influence of P-2 was exposed in 1981, the Christian Democratic government fell. Indictments charged P-2 members with crimes that included "subversive association with the aim of terrorism" and its cover-up.

In 1985, Pazienza was convicted in absentia of a long list of crimes, ranging from covering up the right-wing role in the 1980 Bologna train station bombing that killed 80 people to abuse of his intelligence position to "criminal associations of a Mafia type." Pazienza, in an interview with Jonathan Kwitny of The Wall Street Journal, claimed that Italian military intelligence, then under the control of P-2, paid Ledeen at least \$120,000, some of it to a Bermuda bank account, and that Ledeen operated under the code name Z-3—charges Ledeen has denied.

The indictment against Pazienza notes that, "in collaboration" with "the well-known American 'Italianist' " Ledeen, Pazienza "succeeded in extorting, also using fraudulent means, information—then published . . . in the international press—on the Libyan business of Billy Carter, the brother of the then president of the United States."

According to Pazienza, Italian military intelligence, under P-2, gathered information about Billy Carter and gave it to Ledeen, who in turn coauthored a piece with Arnaud de Borchgrave, now editor in chief of The Washington Times, breaking the "Billygate" story in The New Republic.

In Italy, during the transition between the Carter and Reagan presidencies, Ledeen and Pazienza set themselves up as the liaison team between the Italian government and the incoming administration, then-U.S. ambassador Richard N. Gardner told The Washington Post two weeks ago—a charge Ledeen denied.

Almost as soon as the new team was in Washington, then-Secretary of State Alexander Haig named Ledeen a consultant on international terrorism.

He was by then widely acknowledged as an expert of the school that believed that a "terror network" run by the Soviets was the fount of international terrorism. Every hijacking and car bombing became an illustration of global geopolitics, rather than intractable regional strife.

Ledeen's resume, a wonderfully illuminating document for future historians of the Reagan epoch, lists his voluminous publications and concludes with details of his television appearances, from "Nightline" to the "MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour," where he has appeared as an expert. He wore his articles the way Oliver North wore his medals; they were his credibility, which made all else possible, including an appearance—after the scandal broke—on "This Week With David Brinkley."

His public persona, in the meantime, helped sustain his secret activities as NSC consultant. He was appointed to the position in 1983 by then-national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane, on whom Ledeen lavished praise in the acknowledgements of his 1985 book, "Grave New World": "Robert C. McFarlane, who through friendship and the force of his example showed me the meaning of intellectual courage and discipline . . ."

According to the Senate Intelligence Committee report, it was Le-

deen who established the initial contacts with the Israeli government and Iranian arms dealer Ghorbanifar. McFarlane, in his testimony, says Ledeen "had been acting on his own hook"—a charge Ledeen has denied.

The Collision

Even as Ledeen was becoming embroiled in the scandal, he was trying to advance his reputation as a thinker. When the chance of appearing in PR loomed, he jumped. PR still carried the imprimatur of an honored past.

His unpublished article blames foreign policy "chaos" on the press, on Congress ("One cannot conduct foreign policy with more than 500 secretaries of state") and on lawyers and judges (" . . . they give opinions on the legality of proposed policies, and therefore they can often eliminate certain policy options before they even enter the broad debate").

These forces, he wrote, inhibit "those few persons who are seeking to advance the national interests of the United States." Who these "few persons" are, Ledeen does not say.

The piece was sent out to PR contributors in anticipation of a lively symposium. "You may agree or disagree," says managing editor Kurzweil. "It's a viable position."

"This is like sending 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion' [a classic anti-Semitic tract] to get some thought on Jewish culture," says Dennis Wrong. "I still may very well resign myself. I can't bring myself to say to William [Phillips] to pack it in, which may well be the very best thing after this long and brilliant history. William doesn't know how sad this is."

Paradoxically, the Ledeen affair has restored PR for the moment to its old role: shaping the temper of the intellectuals in an uncertain period. But it has done so by sheer inadvertence.

"Why did it have to come to this?" says author and critic Irving Howe, editor of Dissent magazine and contributor of many significant pieces to PR. "I felt it was like finding out a cousin was involved in public malfeasance. It's still a cousin. You feel embarrassment and shame, which goes beyond political differences. It's a pathetic ending."