

At the Eye of the Storm: A Remembrance of Paul Scheffer

HENRY REGNERY

THE CONTRIBUTION of three European scientists—Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard and Eugene Paul Wigner—working at the University of Chicago, to the development of the atomic bomb is well known. The first controlled release of atomic energy took place December 2, 1942 at the University of Chicago, and, by a peculiar twist of irony, under the stands of Stagg Field, which had stood unused since the new, bold young president of the University, Robert M. Hutchins, had announced some twelve years before that as the great center for learning and research he was determined Chicago under his administration would become, there would be no place for football. Football had been replaced by atomic fission, which was not precisely what President Hutchins had in mind, but the uncontrolled search for knowledge and power over nature recognizes no inhibitions. It must be said, however, that other European scholars were attracted to Chicago besides atom-splitting physicists, and their contribution to scholarship and American life, while not as spectacular, deserves to be remembered.

One of the most colorful of the group that found a haven at Chicago was G. A. Borgese, who became chairman of a project which could only have been invented by a group of intellectuals during the hysteria that followed the Bomb—the Committee to Frame A World Constitution, which the

president of the University, who was a member, often referred to as the “Committee to Frame Hutchins.” The result of its deliberations was published as *Foundations of World Government*, and rests peacefully in various libraries. Borgese had a vigorous mind, strong opinions on most subjects, and was singularly lacking in modesty. He described a book project to me one day about as follows—I can still hear his rolling r’s and the extra vowel sounds Italians like to add to English, projected in his deep, resonant voice: “We must recognize that for the first generation or so after Christ,” he began, “Christianity was little more than a dissident Jewish sect confined to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Then came Paul. By putting the message of Christ into the language and system of ideas of Greek philosophy, Paul made Christianity the religion of Rome and eventually of Europe, but it remains confined to the cultural world of Europe by the fact that it is expressed in the terminology of Greek philosophy.” Then drawing himself up and fixing his entire attention on me, he went on to say, “I, Borgese, will do for Paul what Paul did for Peter: by putting the message of Christianity into the language of *world* philosophy, I will make it the religion of the world!” So far as I know, he never wrote the book, but he was sufficiently persuasive to induce a New York publisher to give him a contract and a modest advance.

My chief association with émigré professors at the University of Chicago, however, was among the large group from Germany. Through John U. Nef, who was the founder, and when I knew him the chairman of the Committee on Social Thought of the University, I met the German art historian Otto von Simson, and through von Simson, a number of the German scholars who had come to the University, and Paul Scheffer, who was informally associated with the German group, but had no connection with the University itself. They were a remarkable group, all of them distinguished in their fields of scholarship, enormously grateful to our country for having given them a place of refuge and an opportunity for creative work, but still devoted to the cultural traditions of their native country and anxious to do what they could to heal the terrible wounds left by the war. One of the most active in this endeavor was Arnold Bergstraesser, a tall, distinguished looking, gracious Swabian, whose primary field of study was political philosophy, but whose scholarship also included German literature. He had come to the University in 1944 to teach soldiers who were later to be attached to military government, and after the war became an influential and much respected member of the German department. Among his many projects was the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation held in 1949 in Aspen, Colorado, which was one of the very first truly international meetings held after the war; papers were given by such figures as Albert Schweitzer, T. S. Eliot, Stephen Spender, Ernst Robert Curtius, Martin Buber, Jose Ortega y Gasset, and Ernst Simon.

Under the leadership of Arnold Bergstraesser a group of Germans, most of them professors at the University, met together regularly in the years immediately after the war to consider the problem of Germany, and the preservation of the German cultural tradition. The group included the historian Hans Rothfels; the professor for Far Eastern art Ludwig Bachofer; the art historian Otto von Simson; the theologian

Wilhelm Pauck; the professor for comparative law Max Rheinstein; the biologist Hans Gaffron; Otto Jolles and Fritz Caspari from the German department; Joachim Wach, professor of the sociology of religion; Helmut Seckel and Friedrich Wassermann from the Medical School; Hans Huth, a curator at the Art Institute of Chicago; Alexander Boeker, a former German Rhodes scholar who was then working for a Chicago paper; and Paul Scheffer. Rothfels, while still in Chicago, wrote *The German Opposition to Hitler*, the first scholarly study of the subject and still an important source book, and von Simson *The Gothic Cathedral*, which has established itself as an authoritative history of Gothic architecture. Caspari, Boeker and von Simson eventually returned to Germany to go into the newly established Foreign Office; Caspari is now German ambassador in Lisbon and Boeker the German ambassador to the Vatican. Otto von Simson is the German representative to UNESCO and professor at the Free University in Berlin. The group soon decided that the three areas in which their competence might enable them to have a constructive influence were de-Nazification, American educational policies in Germany, and the preservation of works of art and historic monuments.

On the subject of de-Nazification, Max Rheinstein, one of the leading authorities in the world in the field of comparative law, gave a speech early in 1947 at the University of Chicago pointing out the dangers and inadequacies of the system introduced by military government at the end of the war to root out Nazis, under which people were convicted not as individuals, but by categories—certain categories were simply dismissed from whatever jobs they held, and forbidden to work at anything but manual labor, others were subject to automatic imprisonment. While giving full credit to the positive achievements of military government, Professor Rheinstein pointed out that the de-Nazification process, if continued in its original form, would in-

evitably lead to chaos, bitter resentment, and re-Nazification. Senator Wayne Morse had the speech reprinted in the *Congressional Record* (March 28, 1947) and brought to the attention of the proper authorities. In a similar fashion, by presenting their case reasonably and factually and by taking it to the proper authorities, the members of the Chicago group were able to use their knowledge and experience in a constructive way with respect to American educational policy in Germany and the protection of historic monuments and works of art.

They were a distinguished and creative group—the German scholars at the University of Chicago, and the University performed a great cultural service by giving them a haven. If the rest of this essay is devoted to Paul Scheffer, who was only associated with the group in an informal way, it is not because I consider him to have been the most significant person among them, but because his life, in a unique way, reflects the realities of our century: he saw it, face to face. As few others, Paul Scheffer consciously experienced the forces that have shaped the contemporary world.

When Otto von Simson first introduced me to Paul Scheffer a year or two after the end of the war, Scheffer was living in a rather dingy hotel on the south side of Chicago, not far from the University. He was badly crippled, and at first glance might have appeared to be just another elderly man of no particular distinction who had seen better days, except for his wonderfully shrewd, intelligent eyes, which, behind rather heavy eyelids, seemed to have seen everything and to be capable of taking in everything still.

Paul Scheffer had been sent to Moscow in November, 1921, as the correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, then a leading European newspaper, and became, during his seven-year stay, one of the most influential foreign correspondents of his time. His reports to his paper, which are essays rather than the usual newspaper story, are

brilliant commentaries on Russian life under Communism, and are significant historical documents. An example of Scheffer's style is his account, which appeared in his paper January 8, 1928, of the exile by Stalin of a number of the leading figures of the revolution:

This is the most extraordinary historical phenomenon that the Russian revolution has brought forth. It involves people who, as few others, incited and then led the revolution, who created the state which now sends them into the wilderness.

After describing some of the figures involved, two former ambassadors, the former minister of the Post, the former editor of *Pravda*, Radek, and, of course, Trotsky—"the hero of all the heroes of the revolution, the great man of the Battle of October and of Kronstadt, first foreign minister and then minister of war of the Soviet Union, dialectician and orator like no other"—Scheffer goes on to observe:

It will be particularly interesting for all of these people to learn that for exiles of the present regime there is not even the 17 kopeks of pocket money the Czar still provided. . . . They must all take the road they had already taken under the Czars, or would have taken had they been caught. There are revolutionaries among them, Smirnow for instance, who have been in the party for almost thirty years [since 1898, therefore]. For all these men it must be particularly appalling, almost insane to consider that having prepared, led and served the greatest and most through-going revolution in history, the only result for their own persons is to be treated as though they had fought it, or still worse, as though the old regime had survived. History has never invented anything more ironical or cruel than the spectacle of these victorious revolutionaries who, under both systems, the one they destroyed and the one they led to victory, receive the same reward for their efforts—the silence of

Siberia. . . . Europe watches the performance with the curiosity of the non-participant. It must, however, seem to us that besides the "permanence of the revolution" Stalin and Trotsky argued so much about, the "permanence of Siberia," as the symbol of the unchanging Russian method of dealing with political dissidents deserves some attention.¹

Scheffer's career as a Moscow correspondent ended in 1928, when he was refused permission to return to Russia after a vacation because, apparently, of his account of the methods used to collectivize agriculture in the Ukraine, the reporting of which he regarded as the greatest achievement of his Russian career, and an article, "Terror as an Expression of Raison d'Etat." He spent several years as a correspondent in New York, when he was invited a number of times to lecture by the Foreign Policy Association as an expert on Russia, and to contribute to *Foreign Affairs*. Toward the end of 1933, after Hitler's rise to power, he returned to Germany, believing, as many did then, that the Hitler regime was only a passing phenomenon, and that the important immediate task was to preserve as much as possible of the national substance.

The *Berliner Tageblatt*, which was Jewish owned and in its general policy liberal, in the European sense of the word, was closed almost immediately after Hitler came to power. Permission was soon obtained to resume publication, but with a much reduced, demoralized staff and an uncertain future. Attempts were made to clarify the situation, at first without success, until one of the leading people on the paper was able to meet in September, 1933, with Joseph Goebbels, the Minister for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, in Geneva, where the latter had gone to attend the session of the League of Nations and to use the opportunity to present himself to the international press. In a letter written after the war to Margaret Boveri, who was associated with Scheffer when he became editor of the paper, Scheffer describes the result of this meeting as follows:

His reception by the all-powerful man was surprisingly friendly. Goebbels took the position that the Reich needed a paper which was read abroad and did not make the impression that it was a propaganda sheet. He released the *Berliner Tageblatt* from the obligation to reprint National Socialist propaganda—a promise which was not kept. In any case, there arose a clear distinction between the press of the party and the "bourgeois" press, as it came to be called. This arrangement gave the paper a degree of freedom, the limits of which could only be determined by experience. During the first half of my period as editor, I did have considerable freedom of action in the field of foreign policy.²

It was on the basis of this promise by Goebbels, apparently, that Scheffer decided, with the approval of the Jewish owners, to become editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt* and to try to restore it as one of the great European newspapers. In her fascinating, carefully documented account of this attempt to maintain an independent newspaper in the capital of the Third Reich, Margaret Boveri describes it as Scheffer's intention, when he took over the editorship on April 1, 1934, "to create a place, from which the tyranny of madness would not, indeed, allow itself to be excluded, but where the exactly opposite, tradition conscious point of view could still find expression in new forms."³ Scheffer's first day as editor, as it happened, was Easter Sunday; he wrote the leading editorial himself, on the Resurrection and the different meanings it can have in the life of the individual, which sounded, as Margaret Boveri put it, "as though the newly installed editor-in-chief wished to make clear to his readers the spirit in which he was taking over his new task."⁴

To restore a Jewish owned paper to its former standing in the capital of National Socialist Germany was no easy assignment, but Scheffer brought with him several distinct advantages: he knew where he stood, he was far more intelligent and experienced

in the ways of the world than his adversaries in the Ministry of Propaganda, and from his seven years in Communist Russia knew what to expect from a totalitarian, ideological regime. In addition, his excellent connections in the Foreign Office and the respect he enjoyed inside and especially outside Germany provided him with a considerable degree of protection. He went about restoring his paper in full awareness of what he was up against: in rebuilding his staff, for example, he relied almost entirely on young people, just out of the university. In this way he was able to surround himself with a group he could trust—he chose them with great care—who would follow his instructions, and, most important of all, had no political past to arouse the suspicions of the regime. Margaret Boveri describes in her book Scheffer's method of choosing his collaborators, and the skill with which he trained and guided them and for nearly three years kept the Nazi bureaucrats at bay. At one of the frequent editorial meetings Margaret Boveri quotes Scheffer as having said, and she takes this from notes made at the time:

The reporting must be different [than that of the Party Press]. . . . It is not factual enough. . . . Always garlands, laurel wreaths and verses to the Third Reich. We must become clear and factual. We are an anomaly and must remain so. There is always the danger that we will become a mere party paper. That we must make impossible.⁵

By means of book reviews and longer articles he kept his readers informed of what was going on in the outside world, and by various subterfuges his attitude toward what was going on in Germany was made clear. One of his favorite words, Margaret Boveri says, in the frequent editorial meetings was "eristic," from the Greek goddess of discord, by which he referred to the device of apparently saying one thing but meaning another. A critical position to a speech of Hitler on foreign policy could be indicated by an appropriate quotation from

Bismarck, Max Planck would be quoted on the necessity of independent research; what one could not say oneself could be expressed by quoting Goethe, Kant, the brothers Grimm, etc.

The following, from a letter to Margaret Boveri from Dr. I. G. van Maasdijk written November 29, 1960, gives a most interesting account of the impression Scheffer made in those years on a neutral journalist:

From 1933 on I was on very friendly terms with Paul Scheffer, and regarded him as an important advisor on politics in Berlin and Geneva (at the League of Nations) during the time I was diplomatic correspondent of the Amsterdam paper *De Telgraf*, of which I am now Chairman of the Board. The extent to which *De Telgraf* and I personally were hated by the Nazis is well known. During the war I was Commander of the Resistance and was arrested twice. The fact that I came into contact with Paul Scheffer again after the war (in the U.S.A.) is the best evidence that I regard him as a principled anti-Nazi.

For all diplomats and journalists stationed in Berlin before the war Paul Scheffer was one of the most respected editors, superbly educated and gifted with an almost prophetic vision of the future of the Hitler regime. From the very beginning he regarded the regime as a terrible adventure, and until 1935 or 36 was convinced that the outside world would intervene. After the militarisation of the Rhineland and the failure of the League of Nations action in connection with Abyssinia he became more and more pessimistic and discouraged. He constantly warned foreigners whom he trusted, among whom I had the honor to be, of the dangers of the Hitler regime.

He was hated from the beginning by leading people of the Propaganda Ministry, and it was only because of his excellent foreign connections that he was not relieved of his position in the early years

of the regime. The *Berliner Tageblatt* was often quoted by foreign correspondents in Berlin because of the critical observations that were to be found in its editorial columns, and I remember that the paper, and Scheffer certainly also, were frequently warned by the Ministry of Propaganda.⁶

Scheffer's situation finally became untenable, and on December 31, 1936 he resigned his position as editor-in-chief of the *Berliner Tageblatt*. In October, 1937, after a trip through China, Japan and Java he arrived in the United States, where he spent the rest of his life. He continued to write for the *Berliner Tageblatt* until it was finally closed by the Nazi authorities on January 31, 1939, and for other German publications until Pearl Harbor. His real mission in the United States, however, was to represent the opposition group that centered in the army under the chief of staff, General Beck, and the Foreign Office. When Adam von Trott arrived in the United States in October, 1939, shortly after the outbreak of the war, ostensibly to attend a meeting of the Institute for Pacific Relations, but actually to attempt to gain support for the opposition, it was Paul Scheffer who wrote the memorandum which George Messersmith, then Under-Secretary of State, requested when von Trott tried to arrange to see the President. It was not made possible for von Trott to see the President, but he did have an interview, which proved to be highly unsatisfactory, with Felix Frankfurter. Scheffer was strongly of the opinion that the names of some of the people involved in the opposition, which von Trott had been put under great pressure to disclose to prove his authenticity, were later communicated to the Nazi authorities by someone in Washington. Von Trott himself, who had been a German Rhodes scholar, was later executed for treason.

Scheffer was arrested immediately after Pearl Harbor and interned with the German diplomatic officials and other newspaper correspondents. As a result of a fall suf-

fered during his internment, which was carelessly and inadequately treated, he became badly crippled. For the first year or two he was treated as a "dangerous enemy alien," and, while lying in a hospital with a broken hip which had become gangrenous, was kept under constant watch by the F.B.I. After his release from the hospital he was confined for a time in a concentration camp near Philadelphia. All this, apparently, was under orders from the Attorney General, Francis Biddle, who had met Scheffer on several occasions before the war and had taken strong exception to Scheffer's outspoken attitude toward Communism. Through the intervention of an old friend, General William Donovan, Scheffer's status was changed, and for a time he was employed by O.S.S.; he was also invited during the war to write an article or two for *The New York Times* by another loyal friend, Francis Brown.

The rather grotesque situation whereby such a man as Scheffer could be treated by the Department of Justice as a dangerous enemy alien on the one hand, and employed on the other by the chief intelligence agency of the United States, was a result of the manner in which American participation in World War II was conducted: as a great moral crusade against totalitarianism, in alliance with the very epitome of totalitarianism. Francis Biddle regarded Scheffer as a dangerous enemy alien because he was anti-communist and distrustful of Soviet Russia, but he was useful to the Office of Strategic Services precisely because he was thoroughly familiar with the practice of totalitarianism, both red and brown, which was the basis of his attitude toward Communism and National Socialism.

It was Scheffer's original intention to devote himself to philosophy, but his life worked out quite differently: instead of the contemplative life of the philosopher, it was his fate to live at the very center of the storms of the twentieth century. He studied in Munich and Marburg, but was never able to make up his mind, apparently, whether to ally himself with the phenome-

nologists of Munich or the neo-Kantians of Marburg, and coming from a well-to-do banking family, could take his time. He finally gave up philosophy for a diplomatic career, and a year or two before the outbreak of World War I became associated with the German Embassy in London. He was declared unfit for military service because of an asthmatic condition, and the first years of the war were spent in the Foreign Office in Berlin; in 1917 he was sent to Holland, but soon became involved in newspaper work. It was his reporting from Holland, and particularly his brilliant reporting of the international conference held in Spa in 1920 that led to his being sent to Moscow in 1921, at the age of 38. In 1925, during his Moscow period, Scheffer spent several months in China, where he observed at first hand the careful and systematic way the Russians were going about bringing China under Communist control. This experience made a profound impression on him, and as a result of it he came to take Communism, which he had been inclined to regard as just another form of government, far more seriously than he had before as a world revolutionary movement.

During his stay in Moscow, Scheffer was much more than the ordinary correspondent. He played an important part in preparing the way for the German-Russian understanding that culminated in the agreement made at Rapallo in 1922, he arranged for the emigration of forty professors and writers, including such figures as Nicolai Berdyaev and Fedor Stepun and helped numerous others, and in the middle twenties, at the height of his influence, anyone who came to Moscow, according to Margaret Boveri, whether an industrialist looking for a contract, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Dorothy Thompson, Max Eastman or Louis Fisher, went first to Paul Scheffer for advice and help in getting to the right people. Dorothy Thompson, whom he first met in Moscow, remained a loyal and generous friend to the end of his life.

One of Scheffer's great coups was reporting Trotsky's exile. He somehow learned

when and from what station Trotsky was to leave, and managed to be on hand. With the help of Walter Duranty of *The New York Times*, who had an uncensored telegraph connection to Warsaw, he was able to get the story to the outside world, which, of course, made a sensation. A day or two later, Scheffer told me, he received a message from an elderly lady he knew who was always well informed that it was of the utmost importance that he come to see her. She began the conversation, he said, with the remark that she understood that he had been at the station when Trotsky left, which, rather proudly, he admitted was true. She then went on to take the wind out of his sails by informing him that the man he saw may indeed have looked like Trotsky, and everyone there may have thought that it was Trotsky, but that Trotsky was still in Moscow and would not be leaving for several days, and from quite a different station. The authorities were afraid of a demonstration, and chose this rather roundabout way to dispose of the hero of the revolution and their former comrade.

Scheffer attended the 1922 Conference of Genoa, which ended with the German-Russian Agreement made at nearby Rapallo, as a correspondent. The original purpose of the conference was to settle some of the economic problems left by the war, particularly reparations; it was the first such conference to which the Russians were invited, whom the French naively hoped to use to squeeze more reparations out of the reluctant Germans. Conversations between the Russians and Germans, in which Scheffer had taken an important part, had begun the year before in Moscow and were continued in Berlin, where the Russian delegation spent a few days on the way to Genoa. At this time it was agreed that neither party would make any agreement at the conference to the disadvantage of the other. After several days of maneuvering and fruitless discussion at Genoa, it was noticed that the Germans and Russians had disappeared. Scheffer described the rising

tension as the significance of their disappearance began to be realized, and the rumors that began to circulate. The return of the Russians and Germans and the announcement of the agreement they had made had the impact of a bomb, and broke up the conference. Lloyd George, Scheffer wryly remarked, who was head of the British delegation and had himself tried to lure the Russians into some sort of separate deal, was particularly incensed at the perfidy of his fellow man. Rapallo, which was doubtless the logical and inevitable consequence of the Versailles Treaty and the policies that followed it, marked a historic turning point; it was followed seventeen years later by the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the catastrophe of World War II. In both cases, as again with Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, the Russians skillfully exploited the German sense of isolation as a divisive weapon against the West.

During the early years of my new, struggling publishing firm, from 1948 to 1951, Scheffer worked with me on an informal basis. He read manuscripts, suggested publishing projects, helped with the editing of several books, including Freda Uteley's *The High Cost of Vengeance* and *The China Story*, and wrote catalog and jacket copy;

¹Paul Scheffer, *Augenzeuge im Staate Lenins*, Muenchen 1972, pp. 308-313.

²Margaret Boveri, *Wir lügen alle*, Olten and Freiburg, 1965, p. 163.

³*Ibid.*, p. 135.

in short, made his great experience and knowledge of the world available to me in any way he could to be helpful. When I knew him, he was badly crippled, was living in the most modest circumstances, and often suffered considerable pain and discomfort from his injuries. His external circumstances, therefore, were quite different than those he had known as a brilliant, carefree student in pre-1914 Munich, as an internationally respected correspondent in the 1920's, or as the distinguished editor of an influential newspaper in one of the capital cities of Europe, but I never knew him to utter a word of complaint or to feel sorry for himself in the slightest. He was always courteous, intensely interested in what was going on, and never lost his ironical sense of humor or the manner of the grand Seigneur. He was glad to read any manuscript that came in and there were many, in the hope and expectation that he would some day discover the T. S. Eliot or Hemingway of the post-World War II generation. This never happened, but it was through no fault of his. Paul Scheffer was a rare person: he experienced the winds of his time at their cruelest and bent with them when he had to, but never surrendered his integrity as a person.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

(Translation from the original German in all cases was made by Henry Regnery.)