

WILHELM REICH

*Listen,  
Little Man!*

TRANSLATED BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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*You sanctimonious philistines, who scoff at me!  
What has your politics fed on  
since you've been ruling the world?  
On butchery and murder!*

Charles de Coster, **TILL ULENSPIEGEL**

## P R E F A C E

**LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!** is a human, not a scientific document. It was written in the summer of 1946 for the Archives of the Orgone Institute.\* At the time there was no intention of publishing it. It reflects the inner turmoil of a scientist and physician who had observed the little man for many years and seen, first with astonishment, then with horror, what he *does to himself*; how he suffers, rebels, honors his enemies and murders his friends; how, wherever he acquires power "in the name of the people," he misuses it and transforms it into something more cruel than the tyranny he had previously suffered at the hands of upper-class sadists.

This appeal to the little man was a silent response to gossip and slander. When it was written, no one could foresee that a government agency charged with the safeguard of public health, in league with politicians and psychoanalytical careerists, would unleash an attack on orgone research. The decision to publish this appeal as a historical document was made in 1947, when the emotional plague conspired to kill orgone research (n.b., not to prove

\* There are indications in the Archives of the Orgone Institute that *Listen, Little Man!* evolved between 1943 and 1946.—Ed.

## P R E F A C E

it unsound but to kill it by defamation). It was felt that the "common man" must learn what a scientist and psychiatrist actually is and what he, the little man, looks like to his experienced eye. He must be made acquainted with the reality which alone can counteract his ruinous craving for authority and be told very clearly what a grave *responsibility* he bears in everything he does, whether he is working, loving, hating, or just talking. He must learn how he gets to be a black or red fascist. Anyone who is fighting for the safeguard of life and the protection of our children must necessarily oppose red as well as black fascism. Not because the red fascists, like the black fascists in their day, have a murderous ideology but because they make cripples, puppets, and moral idiots of living healthy children; because they exalt the state over justice, lies over truth, and war over life; because children and the preservation of the life-force that is in them are the only hope we have left. An educator and physician knows only *one* allegiance: to the life-force in child and patient. If he is true to this allegiance, he will find simple answers to his political problems.

This appeal does not ask to be taken as a guide to life. It describes the emotional storms of a productive individual who loves life. It does not propose to convince or to win adherents. It sets forth experience as a painting sets forth a storm. It makes no plea for the reader's sympathy. It formulates no program. The scientist and thinker asks but one thing of the reader: a personal reaction such as poets and philosophers have always been assured of. It is a hard-working scientist's protest against the secret, unavowed design of the emotional plague to destroy him with poison arrows shot from a secure hiding place. It

## P R E F A C E

shows what the emotional plague is, how it functions and how it obstructs progress. It is also a profession of faith in the vast treasures that lie untapped in the depths of "human nature," ready to be utilized for the fulfillment of human hopes.

Those who are truly alive are kindly and unsuspecting in their human relationships and consequently endangered under present conditions. They assume that others think and act generously, kindly, and helpfully, in accordance with the laws of life. This natural attitude, fundamental to healthy children as well as to primitive man, inevitably represents a great danger in the struggle for a rational way of life as long as the emotional plague subsists, because the plague-ridden impute their own manner of thinking and acting to their fellow men. A kindly man believes that all men are kindly, while one infected with the plague believes that all men lie and cheat and are hungry for power. In such a situation the living are at an obvious disadvantage. When they give to the plague-ridden, they are sucked dry, then ridiculed or betrayed.

This has always been true. It is high time for the living to get tough, for toughness is indispensable in the struggle to safeguard and develop the life-force; this will not detract from their goodness, as long as they stand courageously by the truth. There is ground for hope in the fact that among millions of decent, hard-working people there are *only a few* plague-ridden individuals, who do untold harm by appealing to the dark, dangerous drives of the armored average man and mobilizing him for political murder. There is but one antidote to the average man's predisposition to plague: his own feeling for true life. The life-force does not seek power but demands only to play

## P R E F A C E

its full and acknowledged part in human affairs. It manifests itself through love, work, and knowledge.

Anyone who wants to safeguard the life-force from the emotional plague must learn to make at least as much use of the right of free speech that we enjoy in America for good ends as the emotional plague does for evil ones. Granted equal opportunity for expression, rationality is bound to win out in the end. That is our great hope.

*Listen,  
Little Man!*





*You're a "little man," a "common man"*

**THEY CALL YOU** Little Man, or Common Man. They say your day has dawned, the "Age of the Common Man."

You don't say that, little man. *They* do, the vice presidents of great nations, the labor leaders, the repentant sons of the bourgeoisie, the statesmen and philosophers. They give you the future, but they ask no questions about your past.

You've inherited a terrible past. Your heritage is a burning diamond in your hand. That's what *I* have to tell you.

A doctor, a shoemaker, mechanic, or educator has to know his shortcomings if he is to do his work and earn his living. For several decades now you have been taking over, throughout the world. The future of the human race will depend on your thoughts and actions. But your teachers and masters don't tell you how you really think and what you really are; no one dares to confront you with the one truth that might make you the unswerving master of your fate. You are "free" in only one respect: free from the self-criticism that might help you to govern your own life.

I've never heard you complain: "You exalt me as the future master of myself and my world. But you don't tell me how a man becomes master of himself, and you don't tell me what's wrong with me, what's wrong with what I think and do."

You let the powerful demand power "for the little man." But you yourself are silent. You provide powerful men

with more power or choose weak, malignant men to represent you. And you discover too late that you are always the dupe.

I understand you. Because time and time again I've seen you naked in body and soul, without your mask, political label, or national pride. Naked as a newborn babe, naked as a field marshal in his underclothes. I've heard you weep and lament; you've told me your troubles, laid bare your love and yearning. I know you and understand you. I'm going to tell you what you are, little man, because I really believe in your great future. Because the future undoubtedly belongs to you, take a look at yourself. See yourself as you really are. Hear what none of your leaders or spokesmen dares to tell you:

You're a "little man," a "common man." Consider the double meanings of these words "little" and "common". . .

Don't run away! Have the courage to look at yourself!

"By what right are you lecturing me?" I see the question in your frightened eyes. I hear it on your insolent tongue, little man. You are afraid to look at yourself, little man, you're afraid of criticism, and afraid of the power that is promised you. What use will you make of your power? You don't know. You're afraid to think that your self—the man you feel yourself to be—might someday be different from what it is now: free rather than cowed, candid rather than scheming; capable of loving, not like a thief in the night but in broad daylight. You despise yourself, little man. You say, "Who am I that I should have an opinion, govern my life, and call the world mine?" You're right: who are you to lay claim to your life? I will tell you who you are.

You differ from a great man in only one respect: the

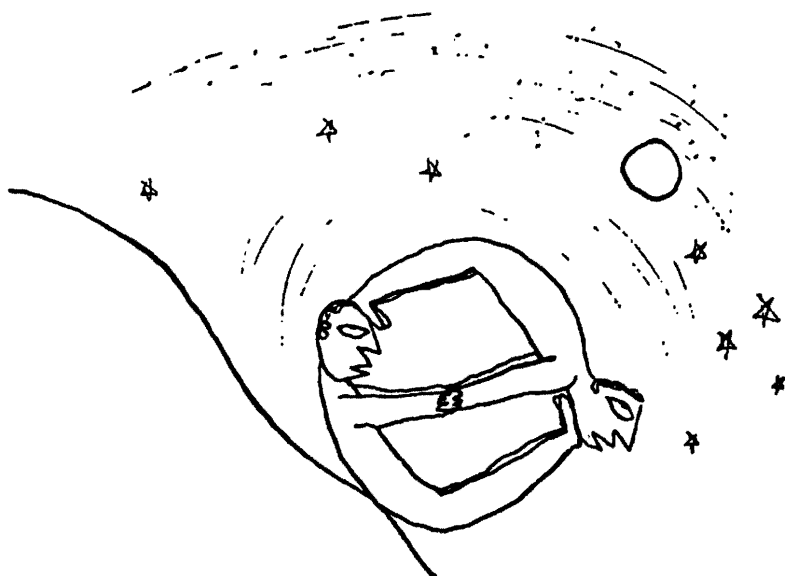
## LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!

great man was once a very little man, but he developed *one* important quality: he recognized the smallness and narrowness of his thoughts and actions. Under the pressure of some task which meant a great deal to him, he learned to see how his smallness, his pettiness, endangered his happiness. *In other words, a great man knows when and in what way he is a little man. A little man does not know he is little and is afraid to know.* He hides his pettiness and narrowness behind illusions of strength and greatness, *someone else's* strength and greatness. He's proud of his great generals but not of himself. He admires an idea he has not had, *not* one he has had. The less he understands something, the more firmly he believes in it. And the better he understands an idea, the less he believes in it.

Let me begin with the little man in myself.

For twenty-five years I've been speaking and writing in defense of your right to happiness in this world, condemning your inability to take what is your due, to secure what you won in bloody battles on the barricades of Paris and Vienna, in the American Civil War, in the Russian Revolution. Your Paris ended with Pétain and Laval, your Vienna with Hitler, your Russia with Stalin, and your America may well end in the rule of the Ku Klux Klan! You've been more successful in winning your freedom than in securing it for yourself and others. This I knew long ago. What I did not understand was why time and again, after fighting your way out of a swamp, you sank into a worse one. Then groping and cautiously looking about me, I gradually found out what has enslaved you: **YOUR SLAVE DRIVER IS YOU YOURSELF.** No one is to blame for your slavery but you yourself. *No one else*, I say!

That's news to you, isn't it? Your liberators tell you that



*Your slave driver is yourself*

your oppressors are Wilhelm, Nicholas, Pope Gregory XXVIII, Morgan, Krupp, and Ford. And who are your liberators? Mussolini, Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin.

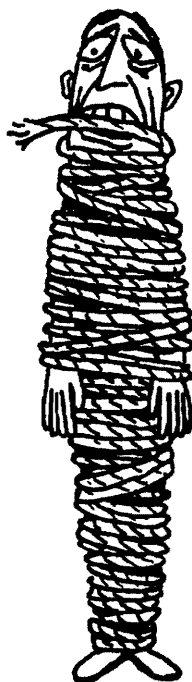
I say: *Only you yourself can be your liberator!*

At this point I hesitate. I claim to be a fighter for purity and truth. But now, after resolving to tell you the truth about yourself, I hesitate for fear of you and your attitude toward the truth. Truth is dangerous when it concerns you. Truth can be salutary, but any mob can preempt it. If that were not so, you would not be where you are.

My reason says: Tell the truth at any cost. The little man in me says: It would be stupid to put yourself at the

## LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!

mercy of the little man. The little man doesn't want to hear the truth about himself. He doesn't want the great responsibility that has fallen to him, that is his whether he likes it or not. He wants to go on being a little man, or to become a little big man. He wants to get rich or become a party leader or head of the VFW or secretary of a society for moral uplift. But he does not want to assume responsibility for his work, for food supply, construction, mining, transportation, education, scientific research, administration, or what have you.



*Only you yourself can be your liberator*

The little man in me says:

"You have become a great man, known in Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, England, America, and Palestine. The Communists attack you. The 'saviors of cultural values' hate you. The sufferers from the emotional plague persecute you. You have written twelve books and 150 articles about the misery of life, the misery of the little man. Your work is taught at universities, other great, lonely men say you're a *very* great man. You are ranked among the giants of scientific thought. You have made the greatest discovery in centuries, for you have discovered cosmic life energy and the laws of living matter. You have provided an understanding of cancer. You told the truth. For that you have been hunted from country to country. You've earned a rest. Enjoy your success and your fame. In a few years your name will be on all lips. You've done enough. Take it easy. Devote yourself to your work on the functional law of nature."

That's what the little man in me says, because he's afraid of you, little man.

I was in close contact with you for many years, because I knew your life through my own and wanted to help you. I remained in contact with you, because I saw that I was indeed helping you and that you accepted my help willingly, often with tears in your eyes. Only very gradually did I come to see that you are capable of accepting help but not of defending it. I defended it and fought hard for you, in your stead. Then your leaders came and shattered my work. You followed them without a murmur. After that I remained in contact with you in the hope of finding a way to help you without being destroyed by you, either as your leader or as your victim. The little man in me

## LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!

wanted to win you over, to "save" you, to be regarded by you with the awe that you have of "higher mathematics" because you have *no* inkling of what it is. The less you understand, the greater your awe. You know Hitler better than Nietzsche, Napoleon better than Pestalozzi. A king means more to you than Sigmund Freud. The little man in me aspires to win you over, as you are ordinarily won over, with the tom-tom of leadership. I am afraid of you when the little man in me dreams of "leading you to freedom." You might discover yourself in me and me in yourself, take fright, and murder yourself in me. For this reason I am no longer willing to die for your freedom to be an indiscriminate slave.

You don't understand. I am aware that "freedom to be an indiscriminate slave" is anything but a simple idea.

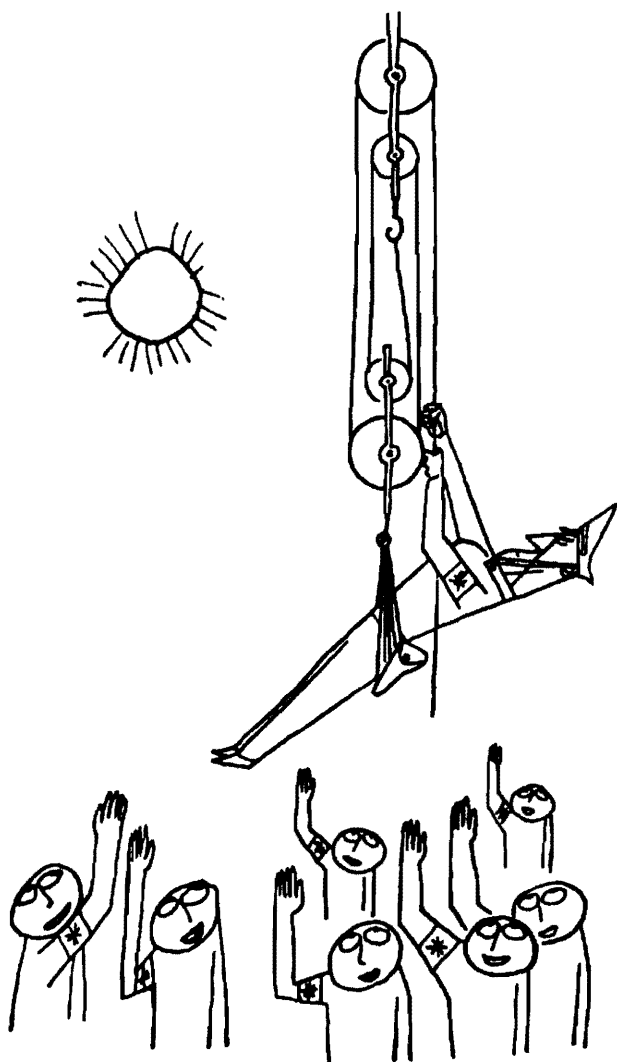
In order to progress from the status of faithful slave to



*An indiscriminate slave*



a *single* master and become an *indiscriminate* slave, you must first kill the individual oppressor, the tsar for instance. You cannot commit such a political murder without revolutionary motives and a lofty ideal of freedom. Accordingly, you found a revolutionary freedom party under the leadership of a truly great man, let's say Jesus, Marx, Lincoln, or Lenin. This truly great man is dead serious about your freedom. If he wants practical results, he has to surround himself with little men, with helpers and executants, because the task is enormous and he can't handle it all by himself. Besides, you wouldn't understand him, you'd ignore him if he didn't gather little big men around him. Surrounded by little big men, he gains power for you, or a bit of truth, or a new and better faith. He writes testaments, issues laws to ensure freedom, counting on your help and serious willingness to help. He lifts you out of the social muck you had sunk into. In order to keep all the little big men together and not to forfeit your confidence, the truly great man is compelled, little by little, to sacrifice the greatness he had achieved in profound spiritual solitude, far from you and your daily tumult, yet in close contact with your life. In order to lead you, he must let you worship him as an unapproachable god. You would have no confidence in him if he went on being the simple man he was, if, for instance, he lived with a woman out of wedlock. Thus it is *you* who create your *new* master. Exalted to the rank of the new master, the great man loses his greatness, which consisted in integrity, simplicity, courage, and closeness to the realities of life. The little big men, who derive their prestige from the great man, take over the leading positions in finance, diplomacy, government, the arts and sciences—and you stay where you have



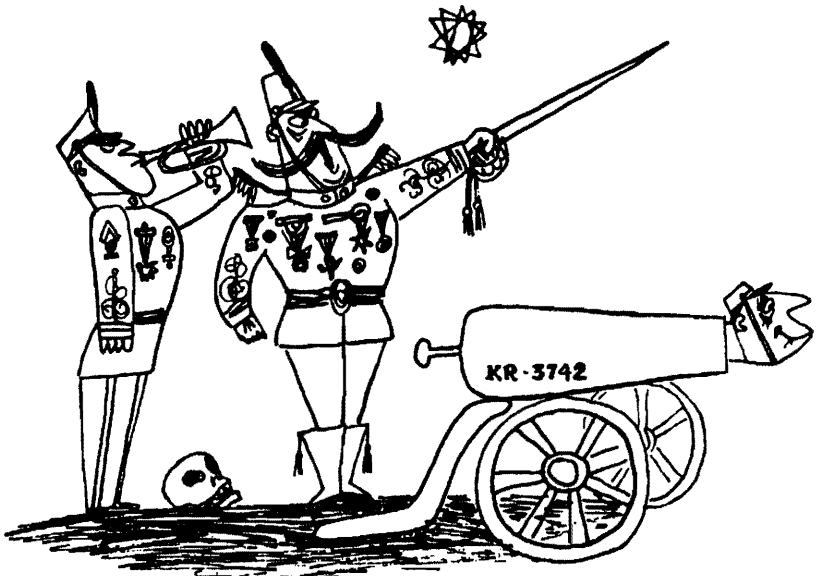
*Little big man*

been all along, *in the muck!* You continue to go about in rags for the sake of the “socialist future” or the “Third Reich.” You continue to live in mud huts daubed with cow dung. But you’re proud of your Palace of People’s Culture. You’re satisfied with the *illusion* that you hold power . . . Until the *next* war and the downfall of the *new* masters.

In far countries little men have closely studied your longing to be an indiscriminate slave. It has taught them how to become little big men with very little mental effort. These little men were not born in mansions, they rose from *your* ranks. They have gone hungry like you, suffered like you. And they have found a quicker way of changing masters. For a hundred years truly great thinkers made unstinting sacrifices, devoting their minds and lives to your freedom and well-being. The little men from your own ranks have found out that no such effort is needed. What truly great thinkers had achieved in a century of hardship and earnest thought they have managed to destroy in less than five years. Yes, the little men from your own ranks have found a shortcut—their method is more blatant and brutal. They tell you in so many words that you and your life, your children and family, count for nothing; that you are a feeble-minded flunky to be treated as it suits them. They promise you not individual but *national* freedom. They say nothing of self-respect but tell you to respect the state. They promise you not personal greatness but national greatness. Since “individual freedom” and “individual greatness” mean nothing to you, while “national freedom” and “national interest” stimulate your vocal cords in very much the same way as bones bring the water to a dog’s mouth, the sound of these words makes

LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!

you cheer. None of these little men pays the price that Giordano Bruno, Jesus, Karl Marx, or Lincoln had to pay for genuine freedom. They don't love you, little man, they despise you *because you despise yourself*. They know you through and through, much better than Rockefeller or the Tories know you. They know your worst weaknesses, as *you* ought to know them. They have sacrificed you to a symbol, and you have given them power over you. You yourself have raised up your masters and you go on supporting them although—or perhaps because—they have cast off all masks. They have told you plainly, "You are and always will be an inferior, incapable of responsibility." You call them guides or redeemers, and shout hurrah, hurrah.



*Guides and redeemers*

I'm afraid of you, little man, very much afraid, because the future of mankind depends on you. I'm afraid of you because your main aim in life is to escape—from yourself. You're sick, little man, very sick. It's not your fault; but it's your responsibility to get well. You'd have shaken off your oppressors long ago if you hadn't countenanced oppression and often given it your direct support. No police force in the world would have had the power to crush you if you had an ounce of self-respect in your daily life, if you were aware, really aware, that without you life could not go on for one hour. Has your liberator told you this? He called you "Workers of the World," but he didn't tell you that you and *you alone* are responsible for your life (and not for the honor of the fatherland).

You've got to realize that you have raised up your little men to be oppressors, and made martyrs of your truly great men; that you have crucified and stoned them, or let them starve; that you have never given a moment's thought to them or to what they have done for you; that you haven't the faintest idea who brought you the true benefits of your life.

"Before I trust you, I want to know where you stand."

When I tell you where I stand, you'll go running to the district attorney or the Committee on Un-American Activities or the FBI or the GPU or your favorite scandal sheet or the Ku Klux Klan or the various leaders of the world proletariat.

I am neither a white nor a black nor a red nor a yellow.

I am neither a Christian nor a Jew nor a Mohammedan nor a Mormon. I am neither a polygamist nor a homosexual nor an anarchist.