

BOOK REVIEWS

What Is Ahead of Us? By G. D. H. Cole, Sir Arthur Salter, Wickham Steed, Sidney Webb, P. M. S. Blackett, Lancelot Hogben. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937. Pp. 192. \$2.00.

The Future of Liberty. By George Soule. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936. Pp. 187. \$2.00.

Periods of adversity and despair are prolific in prophecy. Predictions of disaster to come have been dispensed by many vendors since 1929, with the prophets of doom becoming each year gloomier and more numerous. The technique of the prophets is necessarily that of soothsayers and astrologers, not that of scientists or mathematicians. Scientists predict natural phenomena with accuracy when they have isolated the variables and mastered the uniformities of their behavior. Lawyers endeavor with somewhat less success to forecast the probable action of courts from a perusal of principles and precedents. Social scientists and journalists, who are concerned with nothing less than the whole future of civilization, experience least success in their efforts at forecasting because the determinants are not isolated and the variables are so complex as to defy classification. Knowledge is therefore replaced by hope, despair, belief or desire as a foundation for guessing the shape of things to come.

Despite these obstacles, honest efforts at historical analysis and social interpretation do occasionally lead to suggestive hypotheses regarding the future. The authors whose guesses are here exposed to public view are honest observers whose experience entitles them to a respectful hearing. All of them opine that much is rotten with the world. All of them are pessimistic regarding the prospects of liberal capitalism, of international peace and of the democratic ideology. All of them assume that some form of economic "collectivism" or "socialism" is inevitable, and all hope that the new dispensation may be the means of preserving liberal civilization rather than a means of destroying it. Since these fears and hopes are all but universal in democratic societies, and since most available signs and portents tend to substantiate them, the value of these books lies less in the conclusions set forth than in the reasoning behind the conclusions.

George Soule, well-known liberal collectivist of *New Republic* fame, eloquently restates the presuppositions of the American democratic tradition and neatly poses the problem of redefining "liberty" in a complex and changing society. In view of the fact that law as a device of social control and adjustment is conservative and static whereas politics is fluid and dynamic, the problem may appear to be of less concern to lawyers and jurists than to politicians and common citizens. But in America at least the peculiar institution of judicial review and the current efforts of the lawyers to envisage the law not as a series of empty abstractions but as a tissue of living social realities confront the custodians of the law with an imperative obligation to face the issue which Mr. Soule presents.

He points out that liberty, when defined simply as freedom from restraint, is antithetical to equality in an age of huge combinations in the world of business. In so far as it promotes monopoly and economic oligarchy, it is also antithetical to democracy.

In his chapter on "Liberty League Liberty" he reviews the findings of the Black Committee to Investigate Lobbying Activities, with emphasis upon the strange manipulations of utility interests and upon the relationship between Big Business and professional patriotic organizations. Mr. Soule has scant respect for Walter Lippmann's panacea of a "compensated economy" in which free enterprise survives by virtue of regulated *laissez-faire*. He pleads for "socialized liberty"—*i.e.*, "planned abundance" or socialism, based not upon revolution and dictatorship but upon the democratic tradition.

Mr. Soule is obviously a Fabian, as are the authors of *What Is Ahead of Us?* These essays by G. D. H. Cole, Sir Arthur Salter, Wickham Steed, Sidney Webb, P. M. S. Blackett and Lancelot Hogben were originally presented as lectures before the Fabian Society. They are polished, incisive and persuasive, with the possible exception of Sidney Webb's contribution which is merely an uncritical rehash of his *Soviet Communism*. Mr. Cole contends that capitalism can survive, but only at the cost of war, Fascism and a general lowering of living standards everywhere. Sir Arthur gropes for a "way out" which will mitigate economic nationalism and the drive toward autarchy. Mr. Steed brilliantly reviews the rise of dictatorship. Mr. Blackett deals with the next war, and Mr. Hogben with the impending decline of the western populations. All are agreed that the immediate prospect is for a catastrophic and civilization-shattering conflict between nations, precipitated by Fascist aggression. They see no way of escaping this dismal destiny save through a powerful and effective united front of the forces of liberalism against the totalitarian sabre-rattlers.

The nature of the world's political dilemma is reasonably clear. The only possible basis for resolving it in the present crisis *i.e.*, an international system of collective security to enforce peace against aggressors, is equally clear. The nature of the economic dilemma is more confused. No easy solution is at hand. The dreary prospects and the probable futility of Fabian socialism are more apparent to the British Fabians than to Mr. Soule. Even in the western democracies it seems unlikely that any genuine socialism can be achieved without revolution and dictatorship. If this threat became serious, the outcome would be not socialism but Fascism. Despite Mr. Soule's eloquence, liberals who have not yet despaired utterly must continue to hope for, and work toward, a modified property-and-profit economy within the framework of democratic institutions and the liberal ideology.

The gravest threat of the moment, however, is one which Britishers are of necessity more keenly aware of than Americans. It is the menace of the Second World War. This disaster, which may well close all avenues of escape from the economic dilemma, could still be averted by co-operative action on the part of the British Empire, the United States, France, the Little Entente and the Soviet Union to checkmate the new Triple Alliance of Fascism. In the community of nations, as in other communities, anarchy and chaos are the ineluctible consequences of non-enforcement of law and of the cowardice and paralysis of those intrusted with law-enforcement in the face of organized criminality. The powers of peace, order and liberalism have thus far been unwilling to run risks or assume responsibilities. Under these circumstances no great gift of prophecy is required to forecast the gradual spread of lawless violence over the world. If liberal civilization cannot face this challenge and act vigorously to save itself from doom, it will deserve the disastrous destiny which looms before it.

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