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Review

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more on the various attempts Australia has made recently to expand her power potential, such as the Snowy River project in the south-eastern section.

However, we owe profound thanks to Professor Knaplund for writing this book. The subject matter is complex and complicated, and we have been led with the confident hand of an assured and mature scholar. The dependent Empire is given sound and extensive treatment, and in the light of recent events in the Middle East and in Africa, Professor Knaplund's account has provided a very useful background. More important, he has given us a fresh treatment of the entire material on the Empire and Commonwealth, which is no mean achievement.

Rutgers, the State University
of New Jersey.

Samuel Clyde McCulloch.

The Breakdown of Nations. By Leopold Kohr. Rinehart, New York, 1957, 244 p. \$6.00.

First readers of Stephen Leacock, Northcote Parkinson, Bertrand Russell, or Bernard Shaw are often struck by the absurdity of the picture these authors paint of the world. The same effect is produced by Leopold Kohr in a new book bearing the Spenglerian title *The Breakdown of Nations*. Moreover, the impression of absurdity is heightened by the author's consistent use of an unserious *style*. In an age that all too readily confuses satire with fun-making, this gives the idea that he speaks of unserious *things*. But once you have entered into the spirit of his ways, the impression will slowly prevail upon you that it is less the author's picture of the world that is absurd than the world of man that he depicts. What at first sight seemed an exercise in wrecking, ends actually in the formulation of a charmingly presented and yet tightly argued and highly provocative new social philosophy.

The central theme of the book is the idea that the chief cause of social problems is not bad ideology, education, economic system, evil leadership, or Marx's famous mode of production, but the size of society. At "critical size", a term used in analogy to the principle underlying atomic fission, states will make wars irrespective of whether they are capitalist or socialist, aggressive or peace-loving. Pointing to India as an example, Kohr shows that her acquisition of "critical size" as a result of her liberation turned gentle Nehru into as lusty an aggressor as vicious Hitler. In a single year, he invaded Hyderabad and Kashmir, following it up by overthrowing the Government of Nepal, pushing out the French, threatening the Portuguese through hymn-singing processions, and talking about Pakistan as the Nazis talked about Poland. And as wars, so most other social problems, from traffic accidents to mass atrocities, intellectual decay, or the philosophy of individualism, are shown, at the hand of an array of data and highly entertaining juxtapositions, as a function of social size rather than of the mode of production or other primary causes used in historic interpretation.

This being the case, the author proposes solutions diametrically opposite to those now fashionable. The nations of the world, he says, must not be united but split up; their size reduced to sub-critical dimensions where problems are solved by the reduction of their magnitude. Unification, on the other hand, not only fails to offer a solution; making social units still larger, it magnifies the one problem man cannot handle in his limited stature: the problem of excessive size. His ideal world is therefore not a united world but, along lines envisioned by Aristotle and Saint Augustine, a world of small states.

The main interest for economists lies in Chapter 8 of the book in which the author, himself an economist, applies his general theory to a number of specific economic problems such as declining living standards, economic unification, and business cycles. As in the case of his general propositions, it is irrelevant whether one does or does not agree with him. The point is that he throws new light on old things. Explaining the apparent paradox of declining luxury consumption experienced by most of us in the midst of rising output and productivity, he formulates a sort of Malthusian doctrine of living standards. As societies exceed a certain (*critical*) size — size being measured by population, density, velocity of movement, technological advance, and administrative integration — the social apparatus needed to keep it functioning begins to grow at a faster rate than economic output, so that an increasingly smaller proportion of the national product can be diverted for personal luxury consumption, while a disproportionately larger must be consumed for social maintenance. As a result, living standards can rise only so long as social size is kept to sub-critical dimensions.

While his living standard analysis, supported by numerous historic data and philosophic propositions, makes for paradoxical and fascinating reading, Kohr's main economic contribution is a new business cycle theory which, like most things in this remarkable volume, is developed philosophically rather than politically, economically, or mathematically. He separates business cycles, which are due to capitalism but which he regards as not more of a problem than breathing is to a man, from size cycles which, in contrast to business cycles, take their amplitude not from the economic system but from the size of the economic unit through which they transmit themselves. And it is size cycles rather than business cycles which constitute the problem of our time, the more so as they affect a socialist system as much as a capitalist system, as Kohr shows by analyzing the nature of Russian economic fluctuations. Whether Keynesian or Marxian, controls are therefore useful only in smaller societies — where they are not really needed. In larger societies they are ineffective, since their central difficulty is precisely the fact that they have outgrown all human control.

Like Henry C. Simons in his *Economic Policy for a Free Society*, Kohr therefore comes to the conclusion, also from an economic point of view, that the world's ills must be solved not through further unification but through

the breakdown of its overgrown blocks. Had he finished the book at a later date, he would undoubtedly have used an unexpected witness in support of his theory of small economic entities – Nikita Khrushchev. Having cultivated the ideal of “One State – One Factory” for more than thirty years, the Russian leader surprised the world not a little when he suddenly proposed the revolutionary breakdown of the Soviet monolith into no fewer than 105 semi-autonomous economic regions – at the very moment when the rest of Europe, not having gone through the experience of Russia, signed an agreement for the establishment of an economic union.

Satire and lightness of style notwithstanding, Kohr has formulated, with his living standard analysis, his business cycle theory, and his size interpretation of history, a set of theories which economists would be unwise to dismiss. After one has read the book, one may not be convinced. But there is little in the social universe that will not look a little different from what it seemed before. As Boulding would say, Kohr has produced a new “image”. There have been quite a few of late who have warned against the consequence of growing social size. But never before has the condition been given this central position in social analysis, and been brought to the surface with such precision and humour.

University of Puerto Rico.

Pamí Hernández.

Los Monumentos Arquitectónicos de la Española con una Introducción a América. By Edwin Walter Palm. Publicaciones de la Universidad de Santo Domingo, Ciudad Trujillo, República Dominicana, 1955, Tomo I xxxii + 209 pp. Tomo II 217 pp.

Santo Domingo was the first important European settlement in the New World. Its present capital is the oldest example in our hemisphere of a town exhibiting a grid pattern plan. It can boast possession of the oldest University, the first Naval Arsenal. It had three stone-built churches before 1520. Soon afterwards the construction of a substantial cathedral was begun, to take the place of a rather poor provisional building. At the same time Diego Colón started erecting the vice-royal palace. Of every type of religious and secular architecture, convents, private houses, fortifications, the former Hispaniola has preserved prototypes.

For us in the British West Indies the study of these buildings and constructions has a two-fold interest: they concern us as historical documents and they have at the same time a great aesthetic significance. Mr. E. W. Palm's volumes will be regarded for a long time to come as the standard work giving the most complete and critical answers to historical questions, and will also make us look with nostalgic and envious eyes at the numerous excellent illustrations putting before us the Latin sense for decorum and decoration, for poise and ornament.

To write his two volumes the author had to combine the gifts of the archaeologist, the archivist, the historian and the writer. Mr. Palm has all these