

Letters to The Editor

In Defense of the State

Much as I feel disinclined to criticize The Freeman, I protest that your May, 1940, editorial entitled "The Power of the State" is an expression to the degree of great excessiveness of one who can conceive only ideas founded on the eternal necessity of class divisions in society.

I quote from Matthew Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy": "Well, then, what if we tried to rise above the idea of class to the idea of the whole community, the State, and to find our centre of light and authority there? Every one of us has the idea of country, as a sentiment, hardly any of us has the idea of the State as a working power. And why? Because we habitually live in our ordinary selves, which do not carry us beyond the ideas

and wishes of the class to which we happen to belong. And we are all afraid of giving to the State too much power, because we only conceive of the State as something equivalent to the class in occupation of the executive government, and are afraid of that class abusing power to its own purposes . . . By our everyday selves . . . we are separate, personal, at war; we are only safe from one another's tyranny, when no one has any power; and this safety, in its turn cannot save us from anarchy . . . But by our best self we are united, impersonal, at harmony. We are in no peril from giving authority to this, because it is the truest friend we all of us can have; and when anarchy is a danger to us, to this authority we may turn with sure trust . . . We want an authority, and we find nothing but jealous classes, checks and a deadlock; culture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for a firm state—power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best self!" (Emphasis mine).

I submit the foregoing, not only as a protest against your editorial attitude, but also as an answer to your question in that editorial. You say: "The State is power. Every attempt to define this political concept in other terms falls flat . . . Its only reality consists in the power—political, military, and, basically, economic power—which it manifests. How else can the idea of State be defined?" . . .
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