Democracy

versus

Dictatorship

By NORMAN THOMAS

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

AT the request of the L.I.D. I have written this pamphlet on one of the great *either or's* of our time. I do not want it to be thought that I think it the one, all inclusive issue, or even the most vital of the issues before us. That, I think, for reasons which I urged over and over in the last Presidential campaign, is the issue of socialism versus capitalism. It is not "democracy versus fascism." There is not now any such emergency in America as should force socialists into a popular front as a defense for our present imperfect democracy.

Of course true socialism must be democratic. Indeed one could define socialism and democracy so as to make them almost synonymous. But socialism is a word more distinctive and less mishandled than democracy. It is more descriptive of our economic goals; hence to my mind its greater importance.

We tend to use democracy in two senses: (1) an ideal end ultimately to be achieved, (2) an immediate method or process which we identify with the imperfect political democracy now practiced by nations like Britain, France and the United States. Hence confusion. Some men who believe in democracy as the ideal of government are skeptical about it, in any of its present forms, as a method. I believe in it, as against distatorship, not only as an ultimate ideal but an immediately useful method of government.

There are those, of whom Hamilton Fish Armstrong is among the most eloquent and persuasive, who hold that the issue of democracy versus dictatorship is the great issue in international politics; that the democratic and fascist nations face irreconcilable conflict. This pamphlet does not deal with that phase of the problem of democracy or dictatorship. Here we are concerned with the advantages or disadvantages of each of them as a method of government.

But, in line with what I have already said, I should like to put it on record that I do not think that a new world war will arise *primarily* out of the issue: democracy vs. dictatorship. It will arise out of conflicting national interests; out of the struggle between the Houses of Have and Have Not. It is not as a true

crusader of "democracy" that imperial Britain will enter the lists. Her international politics have never been democratic. Neither will the United States more truly fight a second war to make the world safe for democracy than it fought the first. True democracy must be established by the workers of the world; what we have will scarcely be saved and certainly it will not be perfected by the armed forces of capitalist nations.

Norman Thomas.

DEMOCRACY *vs.* DICTATORSHIP

A CHART of the popularity of the word democracy since 1914 would be a zigzag line with many a hill and valley. In 1917, the choicest youth of the world were dying to make the world safe for democracy. The governments for which they fought won the war, but they imposed on the vanquished a peace which made democracy sound like hypocrisy. The World War was followed by a widespread revulsion against democracy. It was denounced as hypocritical, ineffective, undesirable, not only by the rising fascist movement and by advocates of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," but also by a host of the disillusioned who found in it no great faith by which to live in the post--war world. Following the triumph of Hitler, another change began. Democracy is again a potent word, and men with very different conceptions of it have taken its praise upon their lips. The Communist Party professes devotion to democracy, even the "bourgeois democracy" which it once denounced. And in all the Western world it stridently proclaims that the issue of the hour is not socialism versus capitalism, but democracy versus fascism.

Even the fascist dictators and parties speak with new respect of democracy. Both Hitler and Mussolini have recently asserted that their systems rightly understood, are democratic. The fascist party in Brazil avoided the name and proclaims its loyalty to "integral democracy." (But when Vargas became dictator he dissolved that party along with the others!) Ten years ago, here in the United States, I heard one of Mussolini's leading propagandists declare in a grandiloquent peroration that it was the historic mission of fascism "to counteract the crimes of the French Revolution. For liberty it gives you discipline; for equality it gives you hierarchy; for fraternity it gives you loyalty." Last winter I heard an abler exponent of Italian fascism, Signora Olivia Agresti, praise

Mussolini as a true democrat. She defined democracy as "government of the people and for the people," significantly omitting *by* the people.

Now it is obvious that a word which has been so praised and so damned must have different meanings. If the United States, the British Empire, Russia, Italy and Germany, all enjoy democracy then the word itself has lost any definiteness of meaning. Even within the limited area of the United States, it is to be observed that the friends and foes of Roosevelt's policies fight in the name of democracy and each denounces the reactionary or fascist tendencies of the other group!

At best, absolute definitions of human ideals are difficult, if not impossible, to give. This is especially true of a generalized notion like democracy. Nevertheless, if we are to discuss the issue of democracy versus dictatorship with any intelligence, we shall have to begin with some sort of definition. Probably no formula could win wider acceptance than to say in Lincoln's words that democracy is "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." We shall start with this as a tentative definition, pointing out that it is by no means self-explanatory. Does government of the people, by the people, and for the people boil down to that "rule of the majority" to which President Roosevelt has recently reaffirmed his own and the American people's devotion? If so, no government anywhere in the world, and certainly not in America, is unqualifiedly democratic, because under no governmental system is there stark majority rule, and the attempt to establish such rule might easily reduce government to a tyranny of the mob. It is certain that Mr. Roosevelt himself does not advocate an unqualified rule of the majority. He has, for instance, never criticized the constitutional arrangements under which Nevada with approximately 100,000 inhabitants has exactly the same representation in the powerful Senate of the United States as New York with upwards of 13,000,000.

Or, to take a different sort of illustration, Mr. Roosevelt would certainly not advocate the repeal of the Bill of Rights and the surrender of civil liberties to the absolute rule of the majority. One could wish that he would use his enormous prestige more effectively for the defense of civil liberties in America, but his worst enemies

could not accuse him of not wanting to protect minorities, even single individuals, in their rights to fair trial, to free speech, free assemblage, and free association in political parties and churches. Indeed, the President would agree that the guarantee of these minority rights is essential to good government by a majority. But to say that is to admit that there are certain things which must be defended, at least against the temporary caprice of a majority, for the sake of whatever is good in human relations.

It is unnecessary to multiply illustrations to show that democracy is a relative term, and that as an ideal it is not equivalent to a mere mechanical or mathematical process of nose counting in order to determine what the majority wants. The best that can be said for such a process is that it is better to accustom men to settling differences by counting noses than by breaking heads. Neither method guarantees wisdom, but nose counting is less messy. It is axiomatic, however, that majorities can be wrong! Indeed, they are almost always wrong when new ideas are under consideration. But in the end the practical test of a new idea, especially in government, is that it does win consent, or at least acquiescence from the governed.

Before we push any farther our inquiry into the respective rights of majorities and minorities there is another and different approach to the problem of democracy which we must examine. Government at its best, in the last analysis, implies coercion. The modern state, like the earliest tribal organization, rests on force. Its tendency is to arrogate to itself the exclusive right to use force. Especially in its relations to other states the modern national state frankly assumes that actual or potential military might lies at the base of its power, if not of its existence.

There have been many theories of the origin and nature of the state. To the socialist, everything that we can learn of human history supports the Marxist doctrine that in the last analysis the loyalties and institutions of the state are now, as they always have been since its early beginnings, the means by which a dominant economic class maintains its power. Government is, or tends to be, the executive committee of that dominant class. There never has been and never can be a pure and true democracy in government while society is divided into economic classes: at the top the

exploiters, at the bottom the exploited. And this is true whether the form of society is patriarchal, tribal, feudal or capitalist. History invariably supports the logical inference that those who own will rule. The formulas by which they rule may vary and the concessions which they may have to make to the exploited have greatly changed from time to time, but, whatever the outward forms, the vital power of government remains in the hands of those who control the means of life—the natural resources, the machinery, the jobs, and hence the means of education and communication.

But in the field of government as everywhere else there is a difference between more and less. The governing classes can be larger or smaller. The concessions that they make to preserve their power against foreign enemies or domestic revolt may be more or less valuable to the exploited. From the earliest times there has been an interesting, often illogical, but very strong "consciousness of kind" which has made members of one tribe, inhabitants of one city, citizens of one geographical area, feel a sense of solidarity despite class division, against the members of another tribe, or nation.

In its struggle for power against feudalism the bourgeoisie broadened the base of government in the modern state, and in the winning and holding of power they were compelled to make important concessions to the wage workers. Hence the kind of democracy which we have in capitalist nations. Moreover, the growth of machinery and the consequent artificiality and complexity of society, have made men turn to the state increasingly as an agency for fulfilling such important functions as controlling traffic, preserving health and administering some sort of relief to the unfortunate.

The proper administration of these functions in the present stage of evolution, however well it is performed, involves some elements of coercion. These elements would not—as certain anarchists have argued—disappear with the disappearance of what we call the state. Even today there are plenty of politics and a constant threat of dictatorial bureaucracy within labor unions. These evils would not disappear if the syndicalist dream were fulfilled and labor unions should now take over the functions performed by the state.

This summary statement of a doctrine of the state is, of course, inadequate, but it may serve as the basis for a necessary approach to the problem of democracy. What we have called democracy in modern nations has always suffered from inevitable elements of hypocrisy because of the class division of society. Men who have glibly proclaimed their affection for government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," in politics, have preached and practiced government of the workers, by the owners, for profit, in economic life. There has been a dangerous dualism between economic oligarchy and political democracy, and this dualism has been rooted less in the theory of democracy than in the nature of our society and the relation of the state to it.

Lenin had an exceedingly logical case in support of his contention that the condition of true democracy was the end of the class society. To end the coercion of the capitalist state over the workers he would have the workers take over the apparatus of the state and establish their own dictatorship over their class enemies. This was, he held, a necessity for the transitional period. With the disappearance of economic classes and the establishment of socialized forms of production and distribution, the necessity for any sort of dictatorship would end.*

At first Lenin's theory seemed to find great support in the amazing achievements of his followers in carrying through a social revolution in Russia. These achievements were emphasized by the complete failure of the German Social Democrats to turn a political revolution into a social revolution, or even to maintain their own existence as an organized body against the fascist reaction. In practice democracy in Germany seemed to mean a self-defeating tolerance of the enemies of democracy in positions of power in the economic and political life of the country.

Later on we shall examine these generalizations somewhat critically. They are sound enough to warrant the conclusion that democracy cannot be appraised as an abstraction without direct reference to the general nature of our society and the adequacy of democratic processes for overcoming the social injustice and economic oligarchy which frustrate true democracy and tend to make it a sham and a fraud.

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* See Lenin's own statement of the case in his famous essay, *The State and Revolution.*

II.

But before we continue our examination of democracy and its adequacy in our time of democratic institutions, we shall have to look at its logical alternative—some form of dictatorship. Here again we are dealing with a word which does not permit too absolute and precise definition. No government, not even the most tyrannical, can long exist without some degree of acquiescence of the governed. No dictator can rest his rule for any long period on naked force. He must appear in some guise as the representative of heaven or the champion of his race, his nation or his class. In our day and generation there are all too many similarities between dictatorships. Yet the avowed purposes which they serve and the formulas under which they win support, are very different.

There are still in both the eastern and western hemispheres many examples of rather crude and primitive military dictatorships. The truly fascist dictatorships do not fall under this head. They preach a nationalism whose benefits, spiritual or material, to some degree are for all the people. They profess a positive and paternal concern for the masses. If they rule them sternly it is for their own good. In both Italy and Germany the dictators came to power in the name of what we Americans would call a "radical" program of economic rights for the people, and even though they have not carried out these programs they have never been able utterly to forget that in origin their parties were opposed to "capitalism," especially the capitalism of "international bankers," as well as to the proletariat organized on Marxist lines.

In the U.S.S.R. the dictatorship has been the dictatorship of the Communist Party, but all of its professions and all of its performance has been in the name of the entire working class, and the Communist Party still gives lip-service to a final withering away of all dictatorship, even the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There lies before me as I write one of Westbrook Pegler's popular columns which begins thus: "The easiest way to annoy a communist or a fascist is to say that one is as bad as the other and that they have so many identical vices as to be generally alike." He proceeds to examine those "identical vices" and concludes: "You don't have to take any outsider's word as to the communists. Just listen to the Trotsky communists working out on the Moscow

communists and Joe Stalin, and then listen to the Moscow communists on the subject of the Trotsky type communists. Then add them up, divide by two, and see if fascism, nazism and communism don't give the same result."

Recent events have given all too much support to Mr. Pegler's conclusion, but it is still true that between the fascist and communist types of dictatorship there are important differences. Both accept in practice the doctrine of the totalitarian state, under the dictatorship of one party which alone is legal, but fascism regards this as a final form of government, and communism as an instrument for achieving the final communist society in which the coercive state will have become unnecessary. The fascist dictatorship is bent upon preserving in a large measure the profit system and the class divisions of society. The communist dictatorship has already practically abolished the profit system and the older class divisions of society. Neither Italian fascism or German nazism has any such record of social achievement in the education and industrialization of a backward people as the U.S.S.R. since 1917. If there is danger in Russia of a new type of class-riven society, at least communism, like Christianity, carries along in its own sacred books the dynamite for the overthrow of the hierarchies it may develop.

Nevertheless, the resemblances between communism today in action in Russia, German nazism and Italian fascism, are uncomfortably close. Those resemblances arise primarily, not as the Trotskyists claim, from the individual crimes and blunders of Stalin, but from the acceptance of dictatorship* and the monstrous doctrine and practice of the totalitarian state. The type of dictatorship which both communism and fascism accept rests upon the exclusive right of one party to political power and even to existence. Both dictatorships, because they are dictatorial, practice in its most extreme form the doctrine that the end justifies the means—however cruel those means may be. The end, in cold fact, is the preservation of their own power. Both types of dictatorship are under the same compulsion to popularize their rule and both do it in the name of the mass which is everything while the individual is nothing. In the fascist countries the mass which is holy is the nation

* For the Trotskyist criticism see Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*; James, *World Revolution*; Victor Serge, *Twenty Years of Soviet Russia.*

—in Germany the "Aryan" part of the nation. In the U.S.S.R., although in practice nationalism has become very strong, in theory the mass which is holy is the working class irrespective of national and racial lines. This is at least a finer, more humane and inclusive conception than Hitler's tribal nationalism.

There is an important fact about dictatorship which its communist apologists too often forget. It is that there are psychological as well as purely economic laws which apply in the affairs of men. Dictatorship, whatever its avowed object, concentrates power in the hands of the few, and "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." In a world where there must be some power of social control and some leadership in the hands of individuals there will always be the problem of preventing or lessening the corruption which power entails upon its possessors. The last way to solve it is to surrender to the principle of dictatorship. In practice, as recent history has abundantly proved, while dictatorship may be administered in the name of a party, the inevitable tendency is to the concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands.

The thing which our outstanding modern dictators want is quite obviously power for themselves rather than great material wealth. Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin do not practice the austerities of a St. Francis or the simplicities of a Lenin in material things. But neither do they emulate the wild luxuries of oriental despots or Roman Emperors or the more vulgar of the plutocrats in the modern capitalist world. (Consider the case of Tommy Manville!) Power is their god, but almost certainly all three of the great dictators have succeeded in convincing themselves that the maintenance of their power is essential to the establishment or preservation of the kind of world they want to see.

They have been aided in keeping their power because of their skill in manipulating mass psychology for the human herd. No study of human society can be anything but misleading which assumes that it is composed of "economic men" who always know and seek their own material interest. On the contrary, man is prone to act under certain conditions in a mob or crowd with scarcely more individuality than a sheep in a frightened flock, or a steer in a stampede. It is a legitimate criticism of democracy that under it the demagogue can and does take advantage of this crowd

psychology. But what the critics of democracy too often forget is the plain fact that no modern democracy offers such an example of sustained demogoguery as Mussolini and Hitler have presented both in obtaining and maintaining their power. Dictatorship by its very nature must emphasize the mass or the crowd, or that evil thing the totalitarian state, while democracy in theory does take account of men as individuals, guarantees their rights as individuals, and reaches its decisions by discussion among individuals and groups.

These generalizations are amply supported by the history of fascism in Austria and Italy, nazism in Germany, and communism in the U.S.S.R. To readers of this pamphlet it will scarcely prove necessary to recapitulate the crimes and blunders of the dictatorships in the fascist countries. Their principles are similar but not in all respects identical. The dictatorship of Austria is clerical, and piously holds that the power of government is derived from God. It is only covertly anti-Semitic. The dictatorship of Germany is brutally anti-Semitic and is anti-clerical to the extent of striving at all points to subordinate every sort of church to the totalitarian state. The dictatorship of Italy has not been anti-Semitic (except to some extent in Tripoli, and more recently in its overtures to the Arabs) and that once violent anti-clerical, Mussolini, has made a clever peace with the Vatican.

It follows that the objects of the dictators' suppressive activities are not the same in all fascist countries, nor the technique of repression quite the same, but in all of them there is only one legal party, that of which the dictator is the leader. There is absolute control of the press and the radio. Voluntary societies and associations are either banned or regulated to the *nth* degree by a suspicious state. Intolerance is exalted to a virtue. War has been hailed by both Mussolini and Hitler as the condition under which the national state is at its greatest and best, and the nationalism which is the psychological prop of their strength is, above all, militaristic. The fascist dictators keep their jails and concentration camps filled with the bravest and best of their people, and they have never hesitated to supplement the violence which they have made legal by the violence of assassination. Italian fascists celebrated the anniversary of the murder of Matteotti by assassinating the Roselli

brothers in France. Dictators and dictatorships may become outwardly more respectable with time but they do not change their essential dependence upon violence.

In none of the fascist countries has there been any economic gain for the masses to compensate them for their loss of liberty. The great reduction in unemployment of which Hitler boasts is primarily the result of his rearmament program. It is part of the war boom which has brought a dreadful kind of prosperity to a capitalist world which can prepare for war of nation against nation, but not for a war against bad housing and other forms of poverty. Real wages are lower, not higher in both Italy and Germany than in the days before the dictators stepped in to remedy the "confusions" of democracy.

There are those, and they are not all members of the Communist Party, who will admit and amplify this indictment of fascist dictatorships, and yet attempt to explain away or justify similar denials of liberty in the U.S.S.R. Some of them will go so far as to insist that today the U.S.S.R. is democratic because Stalin and the new Constitution say so. In practice the only new element of democracy introduced by the new Constitution was the secret ballot. That has some potential significance as a weapon for dealing with minor bureaucrats in local elections; it cannot have any further meaning as long as only one party is legal and that party is dominated by the bureaucracy which controls the army.

Let us recite the inescapable facts which make the Russian claims of democracy a fantastic misuse of words.

Every Russian citizen is kept track of by the most rigorous system of internal passports in the world. He may belong to a church but it is rigorously supervised and denied many rights which historically churches have claimed. If he is a worker he must belong to his union which in important ways serves his interests, but is nevertheless far more completely subordinated to the state apparatus than the health of a socialist society requires. There is no right to strike under any circumstances. Aside from his union, the excellent workers' club of his factory and some admirable scientific societies, there is no club or association to which a Russian may belong. No political party is legal except the communist. More and more the Communist Party is bureaucratically controlled. The

Politburo, headed by Stalin, controls the party today, and the party absolutely controls the army and the government. So great is the fear of offending the dominant hierarchy or making a wrong guess as to its decisions that wise men, even in the Communist Party, seek to evade political responsibility. When I was in Moscow I was told of a communist unit in a very important factory where out of three thousand worker-members not a single one would stand as representative of that unit on a communist central committee. They chose small bureaucrats to represent them who had formerly worked in the factory. The old keenness of political discussion in the party has almost died, at least in so far as policy is concerned. (Criticism of administration is still allowed.) A quotation from Stalin is a final answer to all argument. He receives the same sort of exaggerated veneration in public appearances, in the display of his picture, and in written references to him that is accorded to a Mussolini or a Hitler.

Schools, the radio, the press are absolutely controlled by the government. The Communist Party, to be sure, has its own press distinct from the government press, and it is significant that *Pravda* is more powerful than *Izvestia,* the government organ. The newspapers are compelled to agree on every important issue.

Even those few Russians who might obtain foreign language publications and be able to read them are, with few exceptions, denied that right. When I was in Moscow a Russian woman had been held for three weeks incommunicado in some jail, the exact place unknown to her family, for no discoverable reason except that she had been the messenger of an American newspaper correspondent for delivering a package of English-language papers to another American who roomed with her at her home in Gorki. Episodes like this have produced an extraordinary fear among the politically articulate of any dealings whatsoever with foreign visitors.

It must be remembered, moreover, that while Russian justice in criminal cases is enlightened, in cases which we westerners would call political, the secret police and the secret tribunals are dominant. The great public works in Russia have been built in the main by convicts under armed guard, most of whom have never had what we should regard as a fair trial of any sort. Many of them are

probably kulaks, or alleged kulaks, supposedly guilty of resisting compulsory collectivization of agriculture. Only the other day the Russian Attorney General denounced the drastic sentences of certain judges against peasants accused of taking a few apples or a little wheat from collective property in the days of the agricultural struggle. Those sentences, he said, were the work of "Trotskyists" trying to make the law intolerable! It was a discovery followed by no pardons and by no assurance that some future bureaucrat might not make a similar discovery concerning some of his predecessors.

Perhaps the thing that brought home to me most vividly the complete lack of liberty or justice for those who on any suspicion fall foul of the Stalin regime was my utter inability in Russia to ascertain the fate of Bukharin, one of the fathers of the revolution and among the most respected of its leaders. He has never been publicly tried because, as rumor has it, no pressure could make him confess as did Zinovieff and others of the old bolsheviks. The best that I could learn was that Bukharin was in some jail, probably totally paralyzed.

It is not necessary for our present indictment of dictatorship to try to pass authoritatively on the degree of truth or falsity in the amazing charges of Trotskyist plots which have resulted in more bloody and more extensive purges in the U.S.S.R. than in any fascist country. It is almost as damning to the regime to believe that at this late date in its history its citizens, including the leaders of the revolution, can find no way to express their opposition except plotting, as to believe that the regime has been guilty of some of the most ghastly frame-ups in history. Leon Trotsky is a very able man, but it is hard to believe that in exile he has a malign power greater and more ubiquitous than orthodox Christians attribute to the devil. It is easier to believe that it suits Stalin's convenience to have a devil on whom to blame whatever goes wrong and to whom to divert public attention which otherwise might become more vocal and effective against the pure speed-up system called Stakhanovism and the emergence of new social classes under the bureaucracy. Perhaps part of the story is that Stalin himself, like some of the ancient Roman Emperors, has fallen prey to that psychopathic suspicion which dictatorship engenders.

Here I am not trying to appraise the entire achievement of communism in the U.S.S.R. That lies outside our present discussion. The government can point to many things to support its contention that it is a government *for* the workers. It may even add peasants to the workers, for it seems clear that, after a narrow escape from disaster, Stalin put the agricultural collectives or kohlhozes on a basis which has opened new doors to a better life for the peasants. But less and less is government in Russia *by* the workers, outside of the party bureaucracy. The peasants, thanks to the new secret ballot and the new system of representation, have gained something in participation in government, but it is a notable fact that recently all power over the government's requisition of grain was taken from the village soviets. The extraordinarily important and difficult business of apportioning the national income in a country which is still exceedingly poor and under a tremendous burden of military expenditures is being carried out today without any truly democratic discussion or effective democratic control, under conditions which tend to establish new social classes.

The hope that friends of Russia once had that this situation would inevitably be changed for the better by the education of the rising generation is dimmed as one learns how bureaucratic is control over that education. For example, Moscow despatches just announce that the prize for the best school history of Russia has been won by a volume which denies anything except a dishonorable role to Trotsky at any time, and accuses him, Rykoff, and Bukharin of the murder of Kiroff. Any criticism of this book in Russia will be at the peril of one's liberty if not one's life. Whatever this system is it is not democracy, and what is even more important, it is not a fulfillment of the socialist dream of plenty, peace and freedom.

In explanation of the Russian tyranny, voices are raised which assert that such tyranny is the necessary accompaniment of a planned economy; that there can be no industrial or other democracy in a system such as Russia has established for planned production for use. This statement rests on vociferous assertion rather than on logical proof, and it ignores the fact that planned economy got under good headway in Russia when there was a little more, not less democracy in action; or at least less oppressive bureaucracy

within the Communist Party than there is now that the anti-Trotsky hysteria is at its height.

The Trotskyist criticism of Stalin is weightier and better documented than that of the opponents of all social planning. It makes a good case that the communism of Stalin in the year 1937 is a far cry from the communism of Lenin. Nevertheless, neither Trotsky nor his supporters make a convincing case that his victory over Stalin would have altered the denials of liberty inherent in dictatorship. Trotsky now claims that in the days of his power he was opposed to a monolithic party, that is, a party in which differences of opinion were not tolerated. He certainly was not opposed in those days to the identification of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the Communist Party. He was one of the chief apologists and practitioners of terrorism—not, however, by individual assassination—as a revolutionary weapon. First it was to be used against the enemies of the working class, but in practice that soon extended to its use against political opponents of the Communist Party within the working class. However much Trotsky today may deplore the attempt of communists in Spain to "liquidate" the anarchists he did not hesitate to do the same thing to Russian anarchists. Remember, moreover, his role in the ruthless suppression of the Kronstadt sailors. All the probabilities are that if Trotsky had won he would have been compelled by the logic of dictatorship to practice against his opponents what Stalin has practiced against him. Once more the end would have justified the means. Dictatorship is dictatorship, and he who accepts it is molded by it in its own image.

One can say this and at the same time admit that Russia in 1917 was in no condition for the practice of a conventional democracy. In a very important sense Lenin in 1917 was more of a democrat than Kerensky because he was willing to heed the bitter popular opposition to Russian continuance in the World War on which Kerensky's determination was as autocratic as it was stupid. To me it seems that the great opportunity for the communists to illustrate the theory of the withering away of dictatorship was lost when they found no way of keeping two of their great leaders, Trotsky and Stalin, in the same country, with some machinery,

except plots and counter-plots, whereby they might appeal to the workers for the decision between their policies.

It is precisely because there was originally so much sincerity in the Russian revolution that the present developments of its dictatorship are so tragic. One would expect nothing else of fascism. It was inevitable that with the passing of time there should be a subsidence of revolutionary idealism in the U.S.S.R. It was inevitable that there should be some emergence of bureaucracy. The more reason, then, to develop an atmosphere and a technique of democracy.

As I have said, I do not agree with Mr. Pegler's conclusion concerning the identity of communism and fascism. It is, however, a lamentable fact that such a moral identity may develop despite the bitter hostility of Stalin and Hitler. This would happen if the socialist totalitarian state in Russia should move more and more to the right, with an increasing stratification of social groups, and at the same time the nazi totalitarian state in Germany, should turn somewhat to the left, with a still further reduction of the powers of an owning class. This fate can be avoided in Russia, but only by a reversal of the present trend of bureaucracy in the direction of a more genuine democracy than the curious travesty of it which Stalin acclaims.

III.

It does not follow from what I have said in criticism of dictatorship that therefore democracy will triumph because it has none of these faults. In the forms in which men are familiar with it, it has other faults of its own. Moreover, by no means the only alternative which absorbs our generation is the alternative between democracy and dictatorship. Probably today more men are interested in personal and national security than in the kind of freedom which, to a greater or a less extent, democracy embodies. The communist effort to make the great issue, outside of Russia, democracy versus fascism, is no proof at all that communists have genuine concern for democracy.

There are two reasons for the communist change of line on the subject of democracy and both of them are connected with the

winning of power for communism. In the first place, communists were intelligent enough to know that in the western world they were playing a losing game by fighting the existing labor unions and by continued denunciation of all their opponents, indiscriminately, as "social fascists." Until considerably after the triumph of Hitler the official communist position was that their real enemies in Germany were the social democrats whom they called "social fascists!" The communists were ready at times to join the nazis in throwing monkey wrenches into the creaking democratic governmental machinery of the Second Reich. They believed that when the German people turned away from bourgeois democracy it would be towards communism. They were profoundly disillusioned. Out of Hitler's triumph they began to learn the lesson of the need of working class unity against fascism.

But they would not have finished that lesson, much less gone on to the advocacy of a democratic "popular front" including the middle class, were it not for their interpretation of the national interests of the U.S.S.R. So great was Russian fear of an attack upon her by Germany and Japan, with some possible support from Italy, that she began looking about for allies. To this end she joined the League of Nations and suddenly discovered a virtue in the capitalist democracies of Great Britain and France such as Lenin had never been able to see. The communist espousal of "democracy versus fascism" and the aggressive communist effort to hold back social revolution in Spain in favor of "democracy"—but a democracy which denies civil liberty to its critics of the left—are derived almost solely from Stalin's eagerness to make Russia secure by winning for her mighty allies against the attack which she considers inevitable.

This subordination of democracy to some other interest is by no means peculiar to the communists. Great Britain's government is democratic, in the capitalist sense, and not fascist. Her conservative rulers are avowedly anti-fascist, but their love for democracy did not impel them to give active diplomatic support to the democratically elected government of Spain in the summer of 1936. On the contrary, they adopted a non-intervention policy really favorable to Franco. Apparently they were more afraid of the repercussions of social revolution in Spain than of fascist victory. Really

they were playing, however foolishly, for a stalemate in the Iberian Peninsula under which, not democracy, but the British Empire, would be the gainer.

In short, most men, the ruled as well as the rulers, however much they may talk about democracy, have a more passionate concern for prosperity, security, the greatness of their nation, than for the particular form of government known as democracy. Here in America many a business man or financier will denounce Stalin as a dictator, deplore the regimentation of Italy and Germany, discover dangerous fascist tendencies in Roosevelt, and yet cheerfully betray every democratic ideal if thereby he may the better maintain his own power and profit. We shall never understand the modern social conflict if we persist in thinking that the issue which is basic is abstract love for either democracy or dictatorship or expect an owning class to subordinate in a crisis its love of property to its professions of democracy.

Nevertheless, it is extraordinarily important that men should put liberty among their fundamental desires. The recent growth of a new respect for democracy as against dictatorship is one of the factors on which we have a right to depend in our struggle for a better world.

But it will take more than a regard for liberty and much more than a condemnation of the oppression inherent in dictatorship to make democracy prevail in our troubled world. If man can find no end of war or no substitute for war in the struggle for what he calls justice he must make up his mind to abandon his dream of democracy. All that he can do is somewhat to mitigate the rigors of dictatorship. For modern war is incompatible with democracy.

What passed for democracy in both Italy and Germany proved itself unequal to the strains which economic crisis and frustrated national pride put upon it. Fascism itself was the child of nationalism and capitalism which were the guiding principles of bourgeois democracy. There is no explanation of the triumph of fascism in Italy and Germany which does not compel us to admit that fact and to examine the reason for it. Even in our own more fortunate country our brand of democracy has met the tests put upon it with indifferent success.

Perhaps the wonder is that what we call democracy in a capitalist society has not done worse. The emphasis of that democracy is upon mechanical majorities in political elections. It is not upon the ideals which democracy supposedly incarnates and serves: mutual tolerance, the effort to arrive at truth through discussion, the responsibility of government to its citizens, and equality of right and opportunity for all men.

It is, nevertheless, true that democracy has a quantitative aspect and that the rule of the majority, however it may be qualified in practice, is basic to democracy in theory and in action. It is precisely this which draws some of the sharpest criticism of democracy. The business of conducting the modern state, it is argued, is highly complex. It depends upon information which great numbers of human beings do not have and do not want and upon a kind of wisdom which they lack altogether. You cannot, these critics argue, multiply ignorance, indifference, stupidity, or unenlightened self-interest by several million and get wisdom. At its best, democracy is the rule of mediocrity. At its worst, it may be the rule of the mob. The man who thus argues is likely to clinch his argument by repeating the ill-grounded and misleading statement that psychological tests in the army during the World War showed that the average soldier's mentality was that of a 13-year-old child.

Now it is impossible to answer these criticisms of democracy by flat denial. If the voice of the people is the voice of God, God says some very queer things. Ignorance on public affairs is often abysmal, and that ignorance is not confined to individuals of any one class. Worse even than ignorance is the prejudice which is so often the substitute for thought in the appraisal of public issues. A collection of essays by free Americans with high school and college diplomas on the history of the New Deal since 1933 would be as funny and more appalling than the excerpts from letters contained in that entertaining little volume, "Dear Mr. President."

Back in the lush days of the Coolidge boom a successful Republican Congressman of long political experience was asked what rating he would give to an intelligent presentation of public issues in determining the result of an election. "Not over 5 per cent," was his answer, and he went on to emphasize the importance of organization, traditional party prejudice, etc. Even when the political

machine was upset or forced to change its position, it was, he felt, not so much by a general interest in public issues as by a shrewd use of pressure politics by well organized minority groups; the veterans, the Chamber of Commerce, the farm bureaus, the labor unions, or some other minority.

The realistic Congressman in the twenties did not have to take much account of those whom he would regard as quacks and demagogues. In the thirties he would have had to consider more seriously the significance of a Huey Long or even of a more amiable and less forceful clowner like the Honorable Vic Meyers, the present Lieutenant-Governor of Washington. This gentleman, a band leader and once proprietor of one of Seattle's hottest spots, began his political career by making himself a parody of Gandhi. His stock in trade was his frank contempt for serious discussion of issues. He once was a Townsend Plan convert but usually he has jocosely evaded any commitments. Running for re-election, his great appeal to the electorate was achieved when, fully clad, he jumped into a watering trough and splashed around at a visit to the Whitman exposition in Walla Walla. He has made the Washington Senate one of the favorite entertainments of the Northwest. Yet he is said to have learned to be an able presiding officer and his friends claim that if he should ever become Governor he would show friendship for the farmers and workers. (The popularity of the New Deal in Washington has doubtless suggested to him the political wisdom of such a course.)

The picture of the democracy of an indifferent, ill-educated and prejudiced public, swayed now and again by the demagogue, and ruled by a combination of the political machine and the pressure politics of minority groups, contains all too much truth. But not all the truth. The montebank and demagogue have not been controlling factors in American politics. Usually their day has been brief. It is worth repeating that the fascist dictators have illustrated a far more dangerous demagoguery than American politicians. Our political machines in places where they seemed most firmly established have proved far more vulnerable than the grim fascist machines of Germany and Italy. Our imperfect democracy can turn the light on the corruption of its machines; it has some

latent conscience about graft. The record of municipal government shows steady improvement.

But the inner circle of a dictatorship is a law unto itself. There is no machinery of discussion or informed criticism. If today dictatorship is relatively honest in Germany and Italy—which many observers say is far from the truth—the historic record of despotism is a record of a corruption which would make even Tammany blush. English political morality improved immensely with the coming of democracy into increasing power and the end of the power of the rotten boroughs. If today, as some have charged, it shows signs of a let-down, not only must the fact be proved but also the insinuation that it is "democracy" and not some other characteristic of the times which is responsible.

As for pressure politics, that is inescapable at a time when what government does or does not do is so potent a factor in economic success or failure for this group or that.. No dictator can be altogether immune from it. The evils of it in America arise partly from our failure to give formal recognition to men's interests as members of this occupational group or that. The lobby is in part an inevitable substitute, often a bad one, for a more functional representation. In part it is a legitimate way of presenting a point of view. In part it is an unscrupulous agency of group self-interest. It is the nature of the underlying economic order, with its lack of planned production for the use of all, which makes these rival minority pressures dangerous rather than our democratic politics. Which is not to deny the price which the voters pay for their indifference to an intelligent understanding of public issues.

Yet their interest in a serious situation surely exceeds five per cent, or how would the Congressman whom I quoted explain the change in American political philosophy and the voters' estimate of his own party!

Democracy has always depended upon a certain minimum of public interest and understanding. That can be increased. The voters are educable. In America many of them have learned something, at least, since the World War or since the days when Calvin Coolidge was President. They could learn more were it not to the interest of powerful groups which largely control education and the means of communication—the press, movies and radio—to

check or twist the processes of their education. At the worst there is always the possibility that voters in a democracy will learn something, a possibility reduced almost to a vanishing point in the case of the subjects or soldiers of a dictator.

Another fact too often forgotten by the pessimist concerning democracy is the comparatively modest requirement for reasonable success in the democratic process. In a well-run democracy it is by no means necessary that every voter should be an authority on more or less technical questions or the details of administration. More and more these problems must be left to the experts, to those who do care, and who do understand the problems.

In many aspects of their work, we must judge public officials of all sorts as we now judge plumbers by the satisfactory nature of the job they do. To be sure, it is easier to discover bad plumbing than bad policing or bad financing. But the underlying principle of trust in the expert must stand. What is required in democracy is a reasonable capacity of the electorate to judge between broad lines of opposing principle or policy and to decide between rival aspirants for leadership. These decisions do not require the proverbial wisdom of a Solomon or the expert knowledge of an Einstein. They can be made by men and women of good sense and goodwill. Where society has gone wrong in war and in peace its trouble has arisen primarily from the self-interest of classes, not from the ignorance of the masses. From the World War on, our great blunders have been in making the wrong choice when confronted with comparatively simple alternatives, such as a peace of vengeance or a peace of goodwill; social responsibility or social neglect of victims of our economic maladjustment; race and national hatred or cooperation.

The cure of democracy, it has sometimes been said, is more democracy. This is not true if by it is meant that the cure of democracy is a great multiplication of elections on all sorts of issues. Popular referenda can, as a rule, deal effectively with only such broad and basic issues as war or peace, constitutional revision, confidence or lack of confidence in an administration. But it is true that the cure for democracy is better democracy.

IV.

Some of the elements of better democracy are not open to much dispute. Others are more controversial. To any one who really believes in democracy it is plain that the preservation, or rather the increase of civil liberty, is vital to it. There are some rights which are so essential both to the good life of the individual and to the security and progress of society that they must be protected against the temporary majority as well as against the individual dictator. One of the great failures of our political democracy in times of stress has been its failure thus to protect "the right to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience." It is a failure in which both Congress and the Supreme Court have shared. True democracy, as against the control of the radio, the movies and the press by either the totalitarian state or an owning class under capitalism must positively provide opportunity for the discussion of issues on the basis of a dissemination of factually correct information.

It will also be agreed by most thoughtful students that better democracy means functional representation for which, as we have seen, the lobby is not an adequate or satisfactory substitute. No one vote at a general election can obtain adequate representation of the interests of a man or woman as a citizen in a particular community, a consumer of certain products necessary to his life and welfare, and a producer of some one type of goods or service. Democracy must be industrial as well as political. How this principle shall be worked out requires a discussion beyond the scope of this pamphlet, but in appraising democracy, we must at least recognize the need for the functional representation of men and women.*

Another requirement of better democracy is a fairer system of representation, simply on the numerical basis, than now exists. There is something to be said for protecting the country in general, and certain comparatively sparsely settled regions in particular, against the overwhelming numerical superiority of congested areas. But that principle has been carried to ridiculous extremes in some of our American states in which at least one House of the Legislature is completely dominated by rural counties with a minority

* I have dealt at more length with this subject in *"The Choice Before Us"* (Macmillan).

of the population. So far are we in America from having an equality of voting power between individuals that in 1936 one vote for Roosevelt in Nevada was worth almost 7 in New York; one vote in Mississippi was worth almost 4 in Pennsylvania.

The advocates of proportional representation would carry this indictment of the misrepresentative nature of our government even farther, and logically their case would be sound. I have been convinced, however, by the history of proportional representation in Europe, and especially in Germany prior to the triumph of Hitler, that it tends to too great disintegration for effective government in national affairs. What we need to develop in a modern world, where governments are called upon to act, is definite responsibility. Political parties can develop such responsibility far better than coalitions or blocs of representatives of an indefinite number of groups chosen under the proportional system. That system, I think, can be made to work effectively and fairly in cities, and probably in our American states, but not in the national legislature.

There is another and even more controversial matter which requires at least passing mention in our discussion of better democracy. It concerns the choice of competent men. We have had a fair degree of success in working out Civil Service tests for large numbers of public employees. Can we also work out tests, through written examinations and records of achievement, by which party nominees for responsible office must be chosen from panels of those who are qualified, just as we now choose lawyers and doctors from those who have passed qualifying examinations? I confess that I was at one time rather more hopeful for the working out of some plan of this sort than I am today. I am not sure that we can get a modern equivalent of Plato's government by the wise by any form of examination. I am quite sure that we shall not get government by philosophers under any form of civil service or qualifying tests as long as society itself is organized by loyalty not to wisdom but to profit.

And that remark leads straight to what is for most socialists the heart of our problem: how can we who believe in true democracy as the ideal use a very imperfect democracy to change the economic system which frustrates true democracy?

But before we turn to a brief examination of the value and limitation of democracy as a method of struggle for a non-predatory society, there is one point about democracy in general which must be stressed. Imperfect and disappointing as government by the people often proves itself, nothing that we have learned from psychology or history warrants any hope at all that over any period of time a select group, not subject to control by the government, can govern wisely and faithfully, in the interest of the government. Much has been said in favor of government "by the elite," but there has never been any sure test by which the elite can be generally recognized or can be kept elite. We want government in the sense of leadership and administration by the best. With all the faults of historic democracies there is more hope under the ideals and institutions of democracy that men will use what they know or are slowly learning about biology and psychology and history and economics to establish a government by the best than that the best fitted will gain power under a dictatorship and keep it. The history of dictatorship today emphasizes that fact which we should have known from the history of every sort of oligarchy or hierarchy in the past. The "elite" who control it are glorified gangsters. "Self-government," someone has said, "is better than good government." It might be more accurate to say that in the long run there can be no good government which is not in a vital sense self-government; and democracy in our time is the formulation of self-government.

"All this," I can hear some critics say, "is very fine sounding, but does not explain how our present imperfect democracy can be used as a method for ending the class divisions of the class society and the domination of the many by the few who use the government as their executive committee."

My critic can fortify himself by an analysis of that failure of the German social democracy in a time of revolutionary crisis to which I have already referred. He may add some further evidence from the rather disappointing records of genuine social achievement by the British Labor Party when it was in office. Even in small homogeneous countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark and New Zealand where social democracy has made its best record, it has not yet ended human exploitation under the profit system. Are we then driven to the melancholy conclusion (1) that there can be

no successful *democratic* social revolution, and (2) that the party dictatorship which may make a successful revolution by its very nature defeats the ideal ends of that revolution? This might seem to be the conclusion to be reached from the data presented in German and Russian experience. It would be a sound conclusion if there were nothing else to do in any country but to copy slavishly the policy of the German social democrats or the Russian communists.

As a matter of fact, it was not devotion to democracy which made democrats in the months following the flight of the Kaiser, so lacking in social purpose and plan. Because they had a commendable appreciation for civil liberty they did not have to leave their sworn enemies in so many places of power in the army, in the courts, and, above all, in the citadels of economic power, as they did.

It is true that ordinarily democracy means tolerance and a tendency to settle questions by some measure of compromise. In normal times that sort of compromise is usually a good thing. It is a bad thing in time of revolutionary crisis. Then the occasion calls for an operation that must be seen through, not left half-finished. The democratic idealism which can function in such a crisis must be determined in its purpose. If that purpose is as it should be, a truly democratic desire to end the long exploitation of the many by the few, an exploitation which has tortured and twisted men's highest ideals and relationships, then, of course, that democracy is justified in seeing to it that the exploiter is deprived of his power to hurt. The main preoccupation of workers' intent upon building a new world cannot be with the mechanics of nose-counting in the bedlam to which war or fascism or a combination of both is likely to reduce society.

Therefore a strong case can be made that in the revolutionary crisis, and the transition period which must follow it, the dictatorship of the proletariat which seemed so necessary to Lenin is not only preferable to its probable alternative, a fascist dictatorship, but really equivalent to a democracy of the workers, a use by the exploited of the machinery of the state to end once and for all their exploitation. Today, however, the dictatorship of the proletariat has acquired a meaning inconsistent with any sort of democracy. In the U.S.S.R. the party which has preached it has established and

maintained, long after the revolutionary crisis was passed, not a dictatorship or rule *by* all the workers, but a dictatorship *over* the workers *by* a party, and in recent years a dictatorship over the party by a bureaucracy. Meanwhile, man's experience with dictatorship has made the very word a stench in his nostrils. The psychological associations and suggestions of dictatorship today are hurtful.

Hence, my own conviction that whatever emergency measures the revolutionary crisis arising from war or fascism may force upon revolutionists, the transitional society should be conceived as a democracy of workers with strong leadership but not any sort of dictatorship. That means at the least that in respect to a program of socialization and the prevention of counter-revolutionary acts there must be far more determination than was shown in Germany after the flight of the Kaiser or in Spain after the flight of Alfonso. Even so there should be a preservation of civil liberty, the right of discussion and a rapid provision of some machinery of political action open to all those who are not counter-revolutionists.

I have been talking of a sharp and violent revolutionary crisis. This we can be sure would not be the deliberate creation of the workers. It would arise out of the breakdown of our capitalist-nationalist structure. The aggressive in flouting and overthrowing such democratic institutions as we have will be taken by the fascist and the war-makers. It will be the business of the workers with hand and brain, the lovers of true peace and true democracy, to make the wars and confusions of a bankrupt society the occasion of the establishment of socialism, of a classless society, of a federation of cooperative commonwealths.

That cannot be done simply by the ballot in a world gone mad. Indeed, under no circumstances can the working class put its trust simply in the political democracy of which the ballot is a symbol. That is a most inadequate democracy. At no time is the equation true: "democracy equals pure parliamentarianism." Always labor must organize its own unions and consumers cooperatives as well as its own political party as instruments in its struggle for the good life. The labor unions in Spain in the hour of Franco's revolt played a part not only in resisting him but in the beginnings of socialization which has been insufficiently appreciated, and the lessons of which have been as yet inadequately considered by those of

us who are interested in the method of achieving social revolution without establishing dictatorship.

In America, today, we face no revolutionary crisis comparable to those which we have been discussing. Our immediate concern is to prevent war, for there is no certainty at all that out of the desperate calamity of war the noblest efforts can achieve a social revolution. The masses will scarcely believe in the good faith of our desire for freedom, peace, and plenty except as we try to keep the nation out of war which would of necessity be a negation of democracy.

To prevent war and preserve and increase liberty there are things which can be done and better done by those who are loyal to democratic ideals than by those who pessimistically deny them or with tongues in cheeks use democracy as a convenient bit of tactics. We have admitted the Marxist contention that the loyalty of an owning class is to its property and not to democratic idealism. Nevertheless, individuals even in that class may accept the consequences of democratic idealism, to the great gain of the workers. And the whole owning class is put on the defensive and therefore weakened, when both the idealism and the machinery of our present democracy can be used against it.

At all events, the believer in the democratic appeal even as a matter of method of socialist purpose may correctly point out that the workers with hand and brain in the most inclusive sense of the word, are unquestionably a great majority of the people. The better they are organized industrially and politically, the more difficult will it be for the exploiting classes to use force against them. It is a sober fact that it is never the dominant class which by itself wages a war of repression or even breaks a strike of the workers. It is the sons and brothers of the workers who are cajoled and coerced into fighting for the continued exploitation of their own class. The first and most important task before the man who understands that true democracy must be economic as well as political is the task of agitation, education, and organization among the workers. Assuredly that task can best be performed by men who accept the imperfect ideals of our "bourgeois democracy" and try to make them better rather than by those who reject those ideals or who boast that they will now claim for themselves human rights that

they will deny to others as soon as they are powerful. This imperfect democracy that we have was not a gift granted to the masses to bribe or to fool them. It was something won. The rising capitalist class from the days of the French Revolution on granted what it had to grant and much that it granted was of great value to the workers. They realize this as they have shown in all democratic countries. Even the communists have learned no longer to do nothing but sneer at what the workers have under "bourgeois democracy." If the workers gained these rights without war, so much the better for them and for mankind. If today, in any way, the democratic ideal can help men to find substitutes in their struggle for the terrible destruction of war, it will be a boon of incalculable worth to mankind.

To sum up: In our modern world in which broadly speaking there is no alternative to democracy except some form of dictatorship, obviously democracy, and only democracy, is consistent with respect for liberty, justice, and every right which gives dignity to human life. Democracy, and only democracy, gives the basis for successful struggle against war and militarism so dear to the heart of dictators. Even in the realm of material prosperity there is far more to be hoped from an intelligent democracy than from dictatorships which by their very nature tend with each advancing year to stifle human initiative, energy and judgment.

Democracy is not a mechanical formula guaranteed to work any time, anywhere. The democracy that we have is not safe in a society which is half politically democratic and half economically autocratic or oligarchic. A house thus divided against itself cannot stand. It is imperative to the life of true democracy that it end economic exploitation and establish a society free from the constant menace of war and militarism.

Democracy to succeed requires a society which prizes it and is intelligent in using it. As the record shows, there is no guarantee that the mere adoption of democratic forms or slogans by a people will enable it intelligently to organize its social life. Nevertheless, the assumption of responsibility by the masses, which democracy requires, is in itself educational and stimulates the desire for continuing education. The faults of democracy, as democracy has been practiced, can be analyzed in the atmosphere of freedom which

democracy affords. These faults admit definite and specific cures both in the structure of government and in the training of citizens. Some of these cures we have briefly indicated.

Triumphant democracy must be democracy with vision and purpose and understanding of its own needs and significance. It was the weakness of the German social democracy that it dared too little in its hopes and plans. Hitler at least had audacity. Democracy cannot win simply in a defensive war against fascist aggression. Its victory requires its continual and rapid extension on the economic as well as on the political front. The world will not be safe for democracy until democracy makes it safe by its success in winning plenty, peace and freedom for all mankind.

But in that great victory the people must be their own hero.

"In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march.

In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for keeps,
the people march:
'Where to? What next?'"

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BOOK REVIEW

by McAlister Coleman

THE FINAL CHOICE, by Stephen and Joan Rauschenbush, a John Day book, published by Reynal and Hitchcock, Inc., New York. Price $2.50.

* * *

IT has been the lot of Stephen Rauschenbush to see important things that have gone on here and abroad for the past two decades and to have taken an important part in many of them.

Before the United States was well in the last war, he had left Amherst to serve with an ambulance unit in France. Then he was in Central America observing the liquidation of revolution by foreign investors. Back home again, he worked with a pick and shovel in the Anthracite fields of Pennsylvania. As Secretary of the militant Committee on Coal and Giant Power he won the undying enmity of the apologists for the Power Trust. Governor Pinchot made him his economic advisor for awhile and then he enlisted in the war against the depression, organizing the unemployed in Pennsylvania. When Senator Nye looked into the skullduggery of the munitions makers, he made Rauschenbush his chief investigator. On that job, with his wife, the co-author of this book, as assistant, Rauschenbush had a rare close-up of the inside workings of the war-mongers. No one in these United States is better equipped to write about war and its makers than the Rauschenbushes.

The blurb writer describes "The Final Choice" as "hard-boiled." William James's "tough-minded" would be a better adjective. For we have long since learned how softly sentimental the professional hard-boiled writer can become when he is pressing a cause.

The Rauschenbushes happen to be realists in an unreal world seeing clearly and whole matters that have vitally to do with all that we hold dear.

Take this business of "collective security"—a phrase that is so much in the mouths of the Communists these days. Many honest liberals are bemused by these fair-sounding words. Enraged by the atrocities committed by the dictator nations, they are half inclined to abandon their pacifism and throw in their lot with the groups who would "fight for peace" with force of arms. "The Final Choice" shows just what they are in for, if the collective security crowd wins the argument.

This argument, as advanced by the Communists and their strange bedfellows the international bankers and their fellow jingoes, runs to the effect that the Western democratic nations should ride out in a holy crusade against the totalitarians. The chief objective of the United States would be, of course, Japan. England and France would handle Germany and Italy. With Japan subjugated, its people rising in Communist revolution,

Stalin would then be free to continue his internal war against Bolshevism and carry on his wonted democratic methods of unanimous elections and the liquidation of the opposition by firing-squads. Of course, the rank and file of the workers in the democratic countries are not to be consulted about this riding out. They are just to ride. Their role is described by Clarence Day in his charming ditty,

"Farewell my friends—farewell and hail!
I'm off to seek the Holy Grail.
I cannot tell you why.
Remember please when I am gone,
'Twas aspiration led me on.
Tiddlely, widdely, tootle-oo.
All I want is to stay with you,
But here I go. Goodbye."

As the Rauschenbushes are at pains to point out, this "collective security" is just the old slogan, "To make the world safe for democracy" in modern dress. The American Communists who are now cheering for Paul Revere and Betsy Ross as "revolutionary heroes," would of course be delighted to have us pull the Moscow chestnuts out of the Far East fire. The bankers, as usual, see quick money. An armament program for this country on a European scale would keep the "recession" at bay. To be sure, we would more likely turn out Fascist than Communist at the end of it all, but nowadays we are all living in the present tense, so "tiddlely, widdely, tootle-oo."

Many other subjects as current and pressing as the headlines in this morning's papers are dealt with competently by the authors and they give you something to put your mental and spiritual teeth in throughout the course of this provocative book. It should be compulsory reading for genuine democrats, real lovers of peace. The bankers won't read it, naturally. And it is presumably already on the index of the Stalinists who will undoubtedly tell you that the Rauschenbushes are "Trotskyists gangsters" on the secret payroll of Hirohito.

McAlister Coleman.

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