

Books: Anti-Fascist Strategy

By Grace Isabel Colbron

Those who feel they understand the economic mechanics of social reform cannot ignore the political background of the world around them; it is the stage-setting in which they must work. The governmental machinery of older days still persists and influences social change. In other eras the political issue was between absolute or limited monarchy, while tentative steps toward a republic were being taken in the New World. Now Europe struggles under brave attempts at democracy or pioneers in the dictatorships that, under the false slogans of democracy, republicanism, have easily dropped into the power left vacant by the defeat of absolute monarchy.

Two recent books give vivid pictures of the European backgrounds of today, with their menace or hope for the New World. "We or They: Two Worlds in Conflict," by Hamilton Fish Armstrong (The Macmillan Company, \$1.50), and "Dictators and Democracies," by Calvin B. Hoover (The Macmillan Company, \$1.50), both deal with governmental contrasts in Europe today. Both are of value to the student of economics and certainly to the student of contemporary history.

Mr. Armstrong is a journalist of many years experience and writes with the vigor of his craft. He knows Europe well and he can see beneath surface manifestations to conditions that make them. His description of the contrast between the "two worlds in conflict," democracy and the totalitarian state, is incisive:

"The gulf between the two conceptions of life is deep and wide. Here, not absolute freedom certainly but great and precious freedom . . . freedom to think, to believe, to speak, to will, to choose. There, not some freedom, but none . . . nothing but obedience, body, mind and soul before the iron will and upstretched arm of a restless infallible master. . . . The lines are drawn in terms both general and specific. On the one side are nations which assume that human beings have individual minds, wills and aspirations, that they have capacities for self-improvement even if very slowly; that they should be allowed to use their minds, exercise their wills and manage their own affairs as a means of learning how to do all these things better. Obviously the governments of these democratic nations are not ideal. They shelter plenty of narrow and selfish in-

dividuals who mistrust popular education and fear the power of the masses. But to the extent that these influence policy they must circumvent law and enlightened public opinion. . . . On the other side are nations that have never fully accepted the democratic conception of human progress, or which have discarded it because that sort of progress is annoyingly slow and undramatic."

Mr. Armstrong knows that what is happening today is not a new phenomenon, merely a modernization of ancient despotism. And he is just and well-informed about the causes of the rise of Europe's modern dictatorships. But most interesting of all are Mr. Armstrong's conclusions about the best way to combat the growing menace. It must be done, he says,

"in collaboration with other like-minded (democratic) peoples, by economic and social reform at home. . . . The call is not for an attack on the dictators but for a general mobilization against all their conceptions and practices; for an increase in the sense of interdependence between free peoples; and for energetic efforts at home to broaden the social and economic bases that sustain a solid political union."

Throughout his book, Mr. Armstrong urges that economic liberty is best defense against the menace of dictatorship. . . . "by rescinding monopolies and privileges that already exist. . . ." He goes no further, but shows through his book that he realizes the great importance to the modern world of true economic liberty and justice.

Professor Hoover does not seem to have as clear a sense of the importance of, and necessity for economic liberty as does Mr. Armstrong, and he seems imbued with the certainty of impending catastrophic war. But he has a clear understanding of the similarity and yet the wide difference between the authoritarian state in Russia, and that which evolved in Germany and Italy. He shows, as does Mr. Armstrong, how the "Extreme Right and the Extreme Left approach and touch." And yet

he shows the difference in their approach to private property. He does not emphasize that Russia does not allow the quasi-legal institution of private property in land to impede exploitation while the other two nations, while curtailing liberty in every other way, still leave land, and its income value in private hands.