

# Gumplowicz on the State

By JAMES S. GREEN

IN *Our Enemy the State*, the late Albert Jay Nock makes reference to the studies of Ludwig Gumplowicz on the nature of the State. So, you look up the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the most recent edition, to learn something about that man. Not a word. In the *Encyclopaedia Americana*, however, a short entry on Gumplowicz informs you that he was an Austro-Polish sociologist, born at Cracow in 1838, and professor at the University of Graz from 1882 until his death by suicide in 1909. His ten books ascribe the origin of the State to the struggle for power between unlike social groups, delve into the nature of State law and politics, and explain the general deterministic character of all group behavior.

Mr. Nock called attention to the highly damaging implications which these revelations have for the reputation the State has built up for itself. That may explain the lack of attention given him by English and American "political scientists"; only Ward, Giddings, Hayes and aBrnes mention him. It would hardly do to trace the thing called democracy to its predatory origin. Only one of his books has been translated into English, under the title *The Outline of Sociology*, by Frederick W. Moore; it was issued as a publication of the American Academy of Political Science, for June 13, 1899. Copies are extremely rare.

Gumplowicz is bound to be unpalatable to the socialist-democratic apologists of State virtue, for he demonstrates that in its origin and its operations this institution can lay claim to little in the way of moral attributes. Always and everywhere the State originates in conquest, for the exploitation of a weaker by a stronger group; the practice of politics consists in the pursuit of this original purpose; all the activities of politicians are essentially predatory.

That is rough fodder for both the politician and his prey. Yet, Gumplowicz serves it coolly and objectively, without moral condemnation; it is a natural process and quite outside the field of ethics. Take, for instance, his law of social exploitation:

"Each more powerful ethnical or social group strives to utilize for its own purposes the weaker group which comes, or exists, within its sphere of power. This formula of the relationship of unlike ethnical and social groups to one another, with all its resulting consequences, contains the key to the solution of the whole riddle of the natural process of human history. . . . The well-known fact need here only be mentioned that this law of the exploitation of others for one's own life-purposes penetrates all nature. The plant world exploits the inorganic world in the same way that the animal world exploits the plant world. And it is well-known that the various illnesses of mankind are caused by microscopical plant and animal organisms (against which man can hardly defend himself) using him for their life-purposes." (*Der Rassenkampf*, p. 161.)

Morality, therefore, is no more operative in the interaction of social groups than in the rush of a horde of wild beasts on their prey, or in an avalanche or an earthquake. Morality is a trait of human individuals who to some degree renounce their natural propensities; the mass is incapable of such renunciation. This idea does violence to the Puritanism of the Anglo-Saxon conscience, which finds it necessary to moralize obviously immoral group action. That holier-than-thou attitude of Americans during the late war with Germany and Japan, or in the present "cold war" with the USSR, assumes that in their relations with other peoples the Anglo-Saxon is in some esoteric way exempt from what Gumplowicz calls "the natural process of human history." The attitude is hypocritical and absurd, but does not rid Anglo-Saxon mass behavior

of the same amoral force which impels all social groups in their predatory purposes. The ruthless appropriation of the continent to the detriment of the Indians, the unprovoked attack on Mexico a century ago, the lust for other peoples' land which characterizes our history is entirely in line with the behavior of groups everywhere and at any time; but, because of our Puritanic heritage, we had to cover up the fact with phrases, like "manifest destiny" and "saving the world for democracy." Surely, Gumplowicz does not go well with the obscene buffoonery of Nuremberg.

"Nothing impresses thinking men so seriously,"—this is from *Grundriss der Soziologie*, pp. 150-51—"as the contemplation of the social struggle. For its immorality profoundly offends their moral feelings. Only individuals can consider ethical requirements—societies irresistibly fall on their prey with destroying power, like avalanches. Only with individuals can there be a question of conscience—social collectivities have no conscience. Any means is good which leads to the goal. In this relation, all societies have preserved the character of wild hordes, and that holds as true of the social struggle within the State as of the struggle of States among themselves. . . . The saddest of all is that no one can foresee when it will be otherwise. Even when the noblest of men are in charge of the State, even when they have the most honorable intentions—oh, what disillusionment is in store for those who believe that (such) monarchs rule as free agents in the world of human societies! . . . It is generally recognized that States stand opposite one another like wild hordes, that they follow only blind natural laws, that no moral law or sense of duty restrains them, only the fear of the stronger, and that the stronger recognizes no right, no law, no treaty and no alliance when he can otherwise further his interest."

Goethe condenses the same idea in one sentence: "The man of action is always without conscience; no one has a conscience but the observer."

This, of course, is inappropriate material for war propaganda and campaign speeches. In the long run, however, it is a matter of small importance whether we like it or not. Only those with no political axes to grind, and who have no interest in the mass-mind, can take it without annoyance or revulsion. Since the human being is only the agent of natural law he is incapable of altering it and the best he can do is to live according to its dictates; if he does not, he does not live. Millenarian socialists, human perfectionists and democratic optimists can beat their tom-toms, but they cannot affect the innate character of human history.

Asceticism of all kinds and degrees is unfashionable in such a worldly civilization as ours, yet it at least deserves the credit for fully recognizing the horror implicit in the operation of this natural law, and the rewards of resignation and living apart from it, so far as may be, in accordance with what Thoreau calls "higher laws."

THESE Americans who stole from State Department files, be it noted, were all on the public payroll. Not one was a worker or even an "economic royalist." The Russian fellows who presumably paid out good money for these documents were also non-producers; no decent mujik or slave-worker was involved. That Messrs. Truman and Clark would like to dispose of the matter as an unimportant incident—a "red herring"—is understandable, for they too are politicians, and it hurts their business to have the public know just how filthy it is.