

DO WE WANT DEMOCRACY?

"American Unity and Asia," by Pearl S. Buck. The John Day Company, New York. 1942. 140 pp. \$1.25.

American Unity and Asia is a collection of addresses and magazine and newspaper articles by Pearl Buck, all concerned with the problems of the present war and especially with the race question. The author does not profess to offer "anything new in the way of solutions of deep human problems;" rather it is her aim to point out a few of the most dangerous spots in the present world situation and to encourage us to avoid them by the application of intelligence to human relations.

Sifting out the important things in Mrs. Buck's message, one finds that many of them have been said before; but most of us have paid so little attention that they

deserve saying again. Probably the most important essays in the book are the ones called "What Are We Fighting for in the Orient?" "Freedom for All," "China and Federal Union," and "American Unity." These contain the essentials of what she has to say. "This war," she reminds us, "is a dozen civil wars, an interracial war, and an international war on the widest possible scale. . . . The deepest loyalties today are not national." That is why it is peculiarly difficult for us to recognize who is our enemy—the old test of nationality no longer applies, for the enemy is just as likely to be at our side as miles away. The one reliable test, she says, is freedom for all; whoever believes in freedom and human equality is our friend, whoever does not is our enemy, wherever we may find him.

Mrs. Buck warns us that the present war is likely to be followed immediately by a still more horrible struggle for supremacy between the white and the colored races—a struggle in which the white peoples are by no means likely to dominate—unless we can cast out our prejudices against colored and non-English-speaking peoples and accept the Oriental societies on a basis of human equality. We cannot win the trust of our colored allies until we convince them that it is not our intention to go on asserting white superiority, demanding special privileges for ourselves in the Orient, and dividing humanity into ruler and subject races. The majority of our war aims in the Orient are inadequate; only freedom for all will suffice to bind the East to the West in any real unity. Prejudice and the arrogant assertion of white superiority spring from fear and ignorance; because we have all too often deliberately cultivated these vices while we were asserting our belief in democracy, we have given our enemies a sound basis for anti-white propaganda.

Mrs. Buck points out the folly of attempting to exclude China from any system of federal union. Such a policy, she says, is bound to drive the colored races to unite with Japan in an interracial struggle of terrible magnitude. China, according to her, is the most truly democratic of nations today and the stronghold of the liberal mind; China in her long history has passed through totalitarianism and come back to a recognition of the value of the individual as the only sound basis on which to found any society.

In the essay called "Women and Victory" Mrs. Buck reminds us that knitting sweaters and organizing dances for soldiers are not enough. After the war, she says, the proportion of women to men in this country will be greatly increased; unless women are prepared to sacrifice what is generally considered a normal life and to apply their peculiar talents to making the world better, their life will be reduced to an undignified scramble for the remaining men and a consequent exaltation of the male ego. The problems of human relations and world understanding demand the application of the feminine intelligence.

The last essay in the book, "American Unity," contains a warning that deserves to be heeded by every American. Here Mrs. Buck emphasizes the distinction between

Fascist unity—thinking and acting alike because of force—and democratic unity—similarity of action based on the will of the individual. In a democracy it is not necessary for individuals to think alike—indeed, it is important for them not to; and once we have surrendered the right to criticize, to examine, to speak our thoughts freely, we will have lost the war because we will have become totalitarian ourselves. In time of peace, says Mrs. Buck, our form of government "keeps the governor the servant of the governed, and that is real democracy." Concentration of power and suppression of criticism must not be allowed to go so far that this quality of American democracy is lost. "When a government or a man wants to suppress the voice that has cried out against it or him, it is time to examine that government or that man." Nothing is more important in our war effort than maintenance of the critical attitude. Distrust between individuals will not destroy our democracy; the dangerous kind of distrust is that existing between groups, racial, religious, political, or any other kind. Group loyalty is anti-democratic, since the individual and not the group is the unit in a democracy; any attempt to encourage hostility between groups is the work of the enemy.

It is impossible to deny the truth of much of what Mrs. Buck says in this book. The last essay in particular we would do well to consider carefully and to ask ourselves if we are relinquishing the right to criticize the aims of those in power. For unless Mrs. Buck's profound sincerity and her thorough knowledge of race problems can convince us that it is worth while to examine our own thoughts, cast out our prejudices, and give our hearts to freedom, her book will have failed in its purpose.

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