

Guessing About After the War

THE DETAILS of history are an agglomeration of politics and politicians, wars and warriors. But the overall pattern is a series of social movements motivated by the desire of people to find a more comfortable adjustment.

Thus we look upon the general period known as the French Revolution as the final episode in the struggle of Europe with an absolutist economy. The military events are of interest to students of the art of war, the political events to those whose enthusiasm is for legal matters. Only of story-book importance are the personages who strutted the stage; though in their day they seemed to be the writers, actors and producers of the play, from the perspective of time they appear more like marionettes attached to the strings of Fate.

The performance now is evaluated as an incident in the social readjustment from feudalism to the laissez-faire economy, accompanied by the political change from absolutism to constitutional government. The movement started long before 1789.

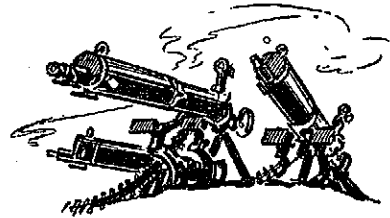
It is only in the meandering of peoples for a better life that the mosaic of history makes sense. The Israelite migration after the escape from bondage, the flight of Europe's dispossessed to the wilds of America, the cavalcade of covered wagons to the Western plains—all such movements were motivated by the desire for a better life. Or, in other words, they were efforts to escape poverty.

When populations shift freely in this escapist process there are no historical incidents, such as war. But when opposition is met, either from restraining influences at home or from other peoples whose adjustment is threatened, conflicts arise and these are internal or external wars. It is the absence of an easy or known avenue of escape from a poverty economy that results in the spontaneous combustion known as revolution.

There may be psychological explanations for the incidence of war. But, viewing the social pictures preceding all wars, a common characteristic is an economy of poverty, and it tends to support a cause and effect theory. Society seems always on the move for a better economic adjustment; war is an incident in its path.

Always the economic readjustment is associated with a political readjustment. Somehow the fiction has always prevailed that a different political scheme will make for a better life. The known schemes are limited in number, and vary only in the degree of power wielded by one group or another within the body politic.

Thus we have run the gamut from the divine kings to the divine majorities, back and forth in a quixotic search for what no political scheme has yet achieved—economic justice. That is the adjustment which society has always sought.



Reading that lesson of history and taking into account the general profound ignorance of how economic justice may be attained, we might venture a prognostication of the politico-economic readjustment which society will fall into as a result of the present world war. Such a prognostication is warranted by the failure—as evidenced by depression after depression, and a gradual intensification of poverty throughout the world—of the so-called laissez-faire economy and constitutional democracy during the last century and a half to bring society to the goal it always seeks.

The increasing encroachment of government on the affairs of the people gives an inkling of what may be expected unless society, by a miracle of widespread understanding, hits upon the fundamental condition of economic justice before the readjustment becomes fixed in law and tradition.

With the aid, then, of the historical pattern and our knowledge of the past century's trend, we may prognosticate an oligarchy of self-appointed planners in our polity and a regulated market place as our means of making a living. This will apparently be society's resting place after it has been exhausted by the present conflict.

The particular form will vary from country to country, depending on the influences of tradition and geography. A large political entity, with a tradition of democracy, may wallow around in the confining mechanism of a Chinese civil service system. Perhaps some variation of Plato's government of trained wise men will be evolved after much trial and tribulation; or privileged groups will round out a *modus vivendi*. In smaller countries, or countries where environmental conditions make for greater subservience, a single imperatorship, supported by a powerful vested group, will do the planning.

How long will it last? An answer would be in the realm of prophecy. The Pharaohs ruled for a long time, and the Romans endured a sort of regulated economy for about four centuries. But because it won't work, because the goal of economic justice will immediately seem to be further away than ever, society, when it catches its breath after the war, will begin to move about again and seek another change. The condition of war will be inherent in the system itself.

It may be that the conflict within the new adjustment will break out sooner than it has in former adjustments simply because of the prevalence of more widespread knowledge and the better means of communication now available. Society can and will find the adjustment it has been seeking for ages once it understands the economic principles of it. It is in education in these principles, not in war nor in political formulae, that the hope of civilization lies.