

Realpolitik

THE Germans always have a prefix for it. In terms of experience, **Realpolitik** is merely an etymological dress suit for the gangsterism: "Get while the getting is good."

Grab-politics, a more descriptive term, is political action based upon immediacy rather than on principle. Present advantage is its own justification and moral standard. To gain such advantage, it is right to lie, to steal, to kill. Any ethical inhibition is indicative of decadence.

This rationalization of unprincipled social action is not indigenous to the Nazis. It is necessary to the doctrine of Statism, even in the embryonic form characteristic of "democracies." Moral standards are applicable to individuals only. A community cannot be good or bad.

The State is an impersonal idea, and as such it is as devoid of scruples as a robot. When the reality of this impersonal thing is accepted, all standards which are associated with persons must be dropped. A robot cannot be brought to trial; it has neither free will nor responsibility.

The State, then, being a product of power and having for its purpose the extension of its power, establishes the only guide by which this purpose can be achieved. And that must be to take advantage of any opportunity which the exigency of the day presents. If in the exercise of that purpose it tramples upon the liberties which men have wrested from it, there is no recourse to such assumed absolutes as human rights because that would be endowing an impersonal thing with personal attributes.

When people create the State-idea in their minds they do so because it seems to them to be an instrument for their personal betterment. They wish into it a moral purpose. In the internal affairs of the nation, therefore, the villainies of the State are clothed with a compounded ethical standard: the ultimate good of the whole community.

In international affairs even that semblance of morality disappears, and **Realpolitik** comes into its own. For here is the field in which State meets State and no holds are barred. The standard of action is expediency, to which even the restrictions of signed contractual obligations must give way. Diplomacy is the art of duplicity.

Realpolitik is as old as gangsterism, from which the world has never been free. But this term has been embroidered in recent years with a rationalization which has its roots in the cyni-

cism of prevalent social and economic thinking. In this view there are no absolutes, no basic principles, no natural laws, no guide posts to direct thought or action. History is construed as a sequence of accidents which are the weather vanes that reveal the direction of the winds of our desire, not the test tubes from which eternal verities may be learned. Indeed, it is asserted that there are no such verities.

This off-hand denial of the possibility of principle, in spite of the air of pontifical wisdom with which it is pronounced, is merely an evidence of defeatism. Its logic is this: since in the past so many guide posts of social thinking have led us up blind alleys none can be dependable.

How far would we have come in the physical sciences if investigators had been as cowardly and had sought refuge in a similar vacuum? Indeed, their progress has been the result of seeking principle in accident, of seeking new principle when accident proved the former one undependable. Explaining accident by accident never occurred to them.

The dictum of no absolutes has wrought particular havoc with the science of political economy, reducing it, in the way it is taught, to a mere hodge-podge of words. And yet, because this science deals with the very human problem of getting a living, the motivation accounting for this confused state should be apparent.

It should be obvious that the getting of a living by the political means must be distinguished from the getting of a living by the economic means. Also, that the one is at the expense of the other, and persistence in it must result in social maladjustment.

But that reasoning brings us to principles which are obnoxious to those who, through the mechanism of the State, get their living vicariously. It is to their interest that honest investigation be discouraged.

As a result of such suasion the science of political economy has become a conglomerate mass of nothingness, from which it cannot emerge because its oracles brazenly declare it must be so.

Therefore, everything and anything goes, and the only measure of the desirability of any course of social action is attainment of an immediate objective. Immediacy is the order of the day in our internal economy, and **Realpolitik** is its expression in international affairs.