

Reds, Occultism and Education

WHAT is civilization? What are the earmarks of its progression or decadence? Does the mass pressure for power indicate its virility, or is the quest for individual wisdom a sign of its break-up? Does rationalism, with its necessary divergence of opinion, its intellectual conflicts and its apparently futile search for truth, point to decline? Is the positivism of mass action the height to which the social order aspires? Does man find his finest development in uniformity of purpose or heterogeneity of expression?

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This age-old philosophical question, with all its ramifications, is clamoring for an answer; it is being asked on the battlefield, in legislative halls, in the public press, in the courts, in the privacy of one's study. And the answer evades us until we determine, by some objective technique, the aim of individual life.

To those who chose the viewpoint that the progress of civilization is in direct proportion to the degree of human happiness which it affords, and who measure that happiness in terms of freedom, the present world trend indicates a decided decline. The depth of that decline is now being measured by war, with its necessary condition of complete conformity to the mass will. But other manifestations of the civilization's downward path are not wanting.

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There is, for instance, mass intolerance of divergence, as expressed in the formula: "If you're not with us you're agin us." Non-conformity is being suppressed, not only by political power but also by the popular opinion which supports it. The witch-hunt is on. College professors who may or may not be Communists are being routed out of their positions and their livelihood on fact or suspicion; to be accused is to be convicted. Textbooks are being evaluated not on their factual worth, literary merit or soundness of conclusions, but by mass hysteria standards.

Peculiarly enough, the Communist who is thus victimized is an exponent of the same philosophy from which he suffers. Perhaps he deserves no sympathy even from those who espouse the primacy of individual freedom. The point is that civilization is on the decline when minds are being molded by force, when reason is superseded by hysteria.

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But the advocate of freedom finds in communism itself a sure sign of civilization's decay. He sees in it a form of escape from reality, a seeking for happiness in some sort of security in a mystic all-powerful State. Socialism, the pseudo-science of communism, is itself an opiate, and its general acceptance (even by those who disavow allegiance to the name) indicates a disintegration of the human fibre.

Another form of intellectual and moral stultification is the resort to spiritism and exotic cults for surcease from apparently insoluble problems of existence. "As the world crisis gets worse," says "Time" in a discussion of a movement to expose a growing trade in ghostly fakery, "more and more folk have fled to seance rooms, as they have to astrologers' parlors."

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Meantime, the falling off of enrollment in our colleges and schools may have a simple economic explanation: The lure of wages. But free adult educational institutions also report lack of students, and cultural forums show a marked drop in attendance. The call in our libraries is for fiction and biography—escapism—while books on economics or social philosophy gather dust on the shelves.

When people abandon fact for fiction, when reality is sought in action rather than in reflection, when reason becomes a bore and the non-conformist an object of repression, in what direction is civilization headed? After all, what is civilization?