

## The Book Mail

SIDNEY J. ABELSON

Norman Thomas is, to the best of my knowledge, a man of deep sincerity and earnest devotion to the cause of social betterment. Yet like the rest of us, he apparently enjoys his little joke once in a while, though one would hardly expect him to be jocular about so serious a question as war. It is a grim sort of joke he tells, too, perhaps unconsciously, but joke it is nevertheless.

In an introduction to his **Keep America Out of War: A Program** (Stokes, \$1.50), written in collaboration with Bertram D. Wolfe, the authors write: "The Governing Committee of the Keep America Out of War Congress includes men of every religious faith, Catholics, Protestants and Jews; men of every political tendency (except Stalinist and Trotskyist Communists and Nazi Bundists); men, in short, of every creed, color, condition and philosophy of life. Yet we have all found it possible to work together in this common cause." (Emphasis mine—S. J. A.)

This, I submit, is grotesque and macabre humor. Mr. Thomas glories in the fact that peace loving people have banded together to promote peace, certainly a worthy enough cause in itself; but he fails to explain how in the name of logic peace can be obtained through negotiation if those who are resolved on making war are not included in the negotiations. Precisely those elements pledged in word and deed to obtain their demands by might are the ones excluded from the Conference. Even peace societies cannot induce footpads, thugs, burglars and cheats to sit down to counsel with their victims.

Now all—and more—of what Messrs. Thomas and Wolfe have to say about the bloodstained history of The British Empire is true, yet this history does not explain the facts of the present situation. England, it will be recalled by those whose memories are not too short, was zealous in the desire to settle international problems by negotiation, as witness the Munich Pact, a deal generally considered shameful, not because England refused to negotiate but because she did negotiate in order to avoid war.

As far as American sentiment

goes, it is overwhelmingly against war, and this preponderance would be sufficient to keep us out of the struggle if that choice were left entirely to our desires. But on the international scene there is no such guarantee.

It would be enlightening to have the authors of **Keep America Out of War** explain the connecting logic of these three passages: They endorse the proposition that "we move toward a planned collective economy with as little violence and as much democracy as the circumstances permit." Later on they write: "We forget that means and end are inextricably one; that the road followed is determined not solely by the goal announced, but by the actual steps taken in the effort to reach that goal; that the means chosen tend in large measure to determine what end will actually be achieved," and then that "the Russian Revolution must have taught all those who are capable of learning at all that a socialist society is inconceivable without freedom and democracy, which are integral to the socialist goal."

How much is "as little violence and as much democracy as the circumstances permit"? Obviously, only as much as is exigently permissible, and "quick transitions" being what they are, this is not likely to be a full measure. But if means and end are "inextricably one" it would seem that by the authors' own logic the socialist goal embodying freedom and democracy is doomed to failure, for the means which condition the end are, in their own words, to be limited by what the "circumstances permit."