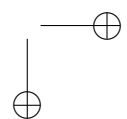
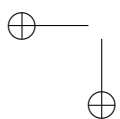
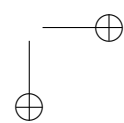
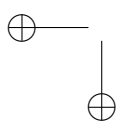
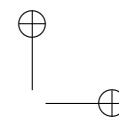
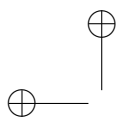


The State of the Union

The American Mercury
Essays of Albert Jay Nock





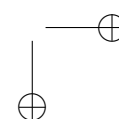
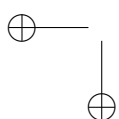


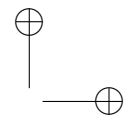
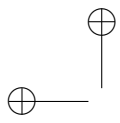
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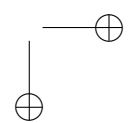
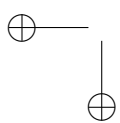
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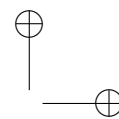
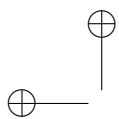
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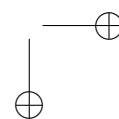
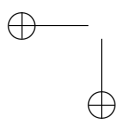


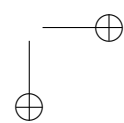
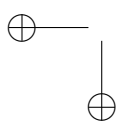


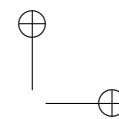
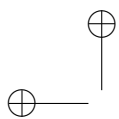
EDITOR'S NOTE

From February 1936 to September 1939, Albert Jay Nock wrote a regular column on current affairs, "The State of the Union," for *The American Mercury*. The complete series is gathered here for the first time.

Isaac Waisberg

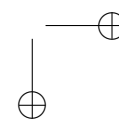
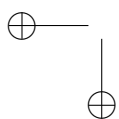


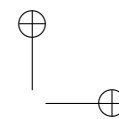
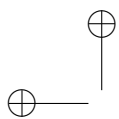




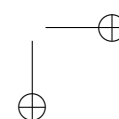
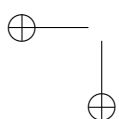
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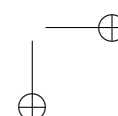
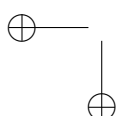


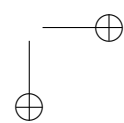
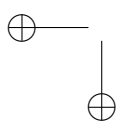
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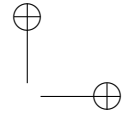
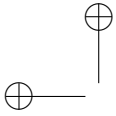
PROGRESS TOWARD COLLECTIVISM

February, 1936

In conversation with me not long ago, one of my friends was speculating on what might have happened in 1932 if the government had taken a stand directly opposite to the one it did take. "Suppose, for instance," he said, "that in his inaugural address, Mr. Roosevelt had said: 'The banks are closed, and you are all looking to the government to open them again and get them going. You will look in vain. You think it is the first duty of a government to help business. It is not. The only concern that government has with banking or any other business is to see that it is run honestly, to punish any and every form of fraud, and to enforce the obligations of contract. This government has no concern with the present plight of the banks, except to see that any banker who acts dishonestly goes to jail – and to jail he shall go.'"

My friend thought that a good many people in the business world would have drawn a long breath of relief at the announcement of such a policy. They would



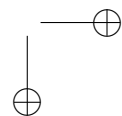
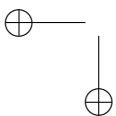


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cheerfully have said good-bye to their dollars that had been impounded or embezzled, for the sake of hearing that the government proposed thenceforth to keep hands strictly off business, except to see that it was run honestly; or in other words, that as far as business was concerned the government would limit itself strictly to making justice costless, accessible, sure, swift, and impartial. Aside from this it would leave business free to hoe its own row and get itself out of its own messes as best it might.

I did not agree. My belief was, and is, that the business world would have acted like a herd of drug-addicts whose rations had been suddenly cut off, for in its relations with the government that is precisely what the representative business world of America has always been and is now – a herd of addicts. It has always believed that the one governmental function which dwarfs all others to insignificance is to “help business.” Let any kind of industry get itself into any kind of clutter, and it is the government’s duty to intervene and straighten out the mess. This belief has prevailed from the beginning; it has seeped down from the business world and pervaded the general population so thoroughly that I doubt whether there are five hundred people in the country who have any other view of what government is really for. It seems to me, therefore, as I said, that the abrupt announcement of a change of policy would have merely thrown the people *en masse* into the imbecile hysteria of hopheads who are bereft of their supplies.

This belief being as deeply rooted as it is – the belief that the one end and aim of government is to help business – the history of government in America is a history





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of ever-multiplying, ever-progressive interventions upon the range of individual action. First in one situation, then in another, first on this pretext, then on that, the government has kept continually stepping in on the individual with some mode of coercive mandate, until we all have come to think that invoking governmental intervention is as much the regular and commonplace thing as turning on water at a tap or throwing an electric-light switch. Professor Ortega y Gasset gives a good description of the American attitude towards the State. The ordinary man, he says, “sees it, admires it, knows that *there it is*. . . . Furthermore, the mass-man sees in the State an anonymous power, and feeling himself, like it, anonymous, he believes that the State is something of his own. Suppose that in the public life of a country some difficulty, conflict, or problem, presents itself, the mass-man will tend to demand that the State intervene immediately, and undertake a solution directly, with its immense and unassailable resources.” This is what America has always done. Moreover, apart from any public difficulty or problem, when the mass-man wants something very much, when he wants to get an advantage over somebody, or wants to swindle somebody, or wants an education, or a job, or hospital treatment, or even a handout, his impulse is to run to the State with a demand for intervention.

The thing to be noticed about this is that State intervention in business is of two kinds, negative and positive. If I forge a check, break a contract, misrepresent my assets, bilk my shareholders, or sophisticate my product, the State intervenes and punishes me. This is a negative intervention. When the State sets up a business of its





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own in competition with mine, when it waters down the currency, kills pigs, plows under cotton, labels potatoes; when it goes in for a Planned Economy or when it uses its taxing power to redistribute wealth instead of for revenue – that is, when it takes money out of other people’s pockets merely to put it into mine, as in the case of the processing taxes, for example – that is a positive intervention. These two kinds of intervention answer to two entirely different ideas of what government is, and what it is for. Negative intervention answers to the idea expressed in the Declaration of Independence, that government is instituted to secure certain natural rights to the individual, and after that must let him strictly alone. It is exactly the idea attributed to the legendary King Pausole, who had only two laws for his kingdom, the first one being, *Hurt no man*, and the second, *Then do as you please*.

Positive intervention does not answer to this idea of government at all. It answers to the idea that government is a machine for distributing economic advantage, a machine for you to use, if you can get hold of it, for the purpose of helping your own business and hurting somebody else’s. Pursuant to this idea of government, the machine is manned by a sort of praetorian guard, a crew of extremely low and approachable persons who are not there for their health, but because they are beset by the demons of need, greed, and vainglory. Then when I want an economic advantage of some kind, I join with others who have the same interest, and thus accumulate enough influence to induce the machine-crew to start the wheels going and grind out a positive intervention – a





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subsidy, land-grant, concession, franchise, or whatever it is that I and my group desire.

This latter idea of what government is for is the only one that ever existed in this country. The idea expressed by Mr. Jefferson in the Declaration, expressed in the clearest and most explicit language by Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin, did not last as long in the consciousness of America as a pint of whisky in a lumber camp. When Cornwallis disappeared from public view after the surrender at Yorktown, this idea also disappeared, never to return. Before the new government took its seat in 1789, the industrial interests were fully organized, ready, and waiting with a demand for positive intervention; and from that day to this, the demand for this, that, or the other positive intervention has gone on incessantly. This is what is actually meant by “helping business.” None of the groups which dickers with the machine-crew for an intervention to help business really cares two straws about helping business. What they want is an intervention to help *their* business; and since positive State intervention cannot help them without hurting somebody else – for obviously no positive intervention can be good for everyone – it follows that they want that also.

Thus it has come to be accepted on all sides that government exists mainly for just this purpose. The securing of human rights, the cheap, prompt, and effective administration of justice – all this is regarded as secondary. In fact, we now see governments everywhere notoriously disregarding justice and human rights. Napoleon on St. Helena said that in fifty years all Europe would be either republican or cossack – well, here you have it. They show





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no concern with justice, but only with law – law which they themselves manufacture, mostly by irresponsible decree, or what in this country is called “executive order,” to suit their own purposes. The American government has always been conspicuous for its indifference to justice, its disreputable subservience to expediency, its devotion to a corrupt and corrupting legalism. It started out that way, and with its steady progress in centralization, its steady accumulation of coercive power over more and more of the individual citizen’s activities, its steady entrenchment of a larger and larger bureaucracy, it became steadily more indifferent, subservient, and corrupt, until it developed into the moral monstrosity that it now is. One hundred and thirty-five years ago, Mr. Jefferson said that if the American government ever became completely centralized, it would be the most corrupt on earth; and the single instance of the Maine campaign in 1934 is probably enough to show that it is now entitled to that distinction.

The perversion of the idea that government exists to help business is responsible for this. All a government can properly and safely do to help business is what the Declaration says it is supposed to do – maintain individual rights, punish any trespass on those rights, and otherwise let the individual alone. This would be a real help to business, and a great help. But this is not the idea and never has been. The idea, as I have said, is that the government should help some special business to the detriment of others, according as one or another person or group is able to influence the machine-gang to work the State machine for a positive intervention.





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It is easy to see how serious collisions of interest are thus provoked. First, say, the steelmakers want an intervention. They run to the government about it. Then the textile people want one, then the glass makers, then this-and-that type of industrialist follows suit. Then the shipping concerns and the railroads want interventions. They run to the government. Then the farmers want one, organized labor wants one, the ex-soldiers want one, the unemployed want one, the hoboese want one, and when each of these interests thinks it can muster force enough – force of numbers or of money or of political influence – to make an impression on the machine-crew, it runs to the government.

The technique of procedure is always the same. The machine-crew is a purely professional organization; it is interested in helping no business but its own. It does not care to listen to considerations of the general welfare of business or of anything else. Dealing with it is a pure matter of *quid pro quo*. It is interested in votes, in campaign funds, and in patronage. It is governed mainly by fear; therefore it is especially interested in colorable threats of opposition – in other words, blackmail. It is easy to recall how horribly it was harried by the lash of the Anti-Saloon League, and we are now seeing it kept awake nights by dread of the Townsendites, Sinclairites, Olsonites, La Folletteites, share-the-wealthers, and other irreconcilables. Therefore the seekers after State intervention must propose satisfactory terms of brokerage in one or another of the foregoing ways, and if they are able to do so, the intervention is forthcoming.

The employment of this technique brings about a condition that invites unscrupulous exploitation. Conse-





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quently, whenever the State makes a positive intervention, it is at once urged to make another one to regulate or supervise this exploitation in behalf of persons or groups which are unfavorably affected. This second intervention is found in turn to be exploitable, interested persons proceed to exploit it, and the State makes another intervention at the request of influential groups who are being squeezed. Then further exploitation, another intervention, then another and so on indefinitely, pyramiding set after set of exploitable complications, until the whole structure falls to pieces at a touch, as our banking structure did three years ago. I was interested to see that the new banking bill proposed last summer by the Senate covered almost four pages of the *Wall Street Journal*! If the State had never made any positive interventions upon the banking business or any other business, a perfectly competent banking law could be set up in ten lines, nonpareil. The action of the State in trying to check exploitation of one positive intervention by making another and another in a series of ever-increasing particularity, is like the action of a horse that has stepped in quicksand – each succeeding step only sinks him deeper.

The State, however, is always glad to take advantage of these collisions of interest, because each positive intervention widens the scope of its own jurisdiction, enhances its prestige, and adds to its accumulation of power. It cuts down the individual's margin of action, and pushes up the State's margin. These gains are all made at the expense of society, so it may be said that, in the social view, the State's positive interventions are a mechanism for converting social power into State power; the reason being that there is no other source from which State





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power can be drawn. All the power the State has is what society gives it, or what under one pretext or another it confiscates from society; and all the power thus transferred which is spent on expanding and maintaining the State's structure is just so much out of what society can apply to its own purposes.

This can be illustrated in terms of money. There seems to be an impression in some quarters that the State has money of its own. It has none. All the money it has is what it takes from society, and society gets money by the production of wealth; that is, by applying labor and capital to natural resources. There is no other way to produce wealth than this, and hence there is no source but production from which money can be got. All the money that the State takes by way of taxes, therefore, must come out of production, for there is no other place for it to come from. All it takes, then, leaves society with that much less to go on with.

The same thing is true with regard to the rest of society's resources. We all know that certain virtues and integrities are the root of stability. Wealth has relatively little to do with keeping society's head above water; the character and spirit of the people is what does it. Every positive intervention of the State tends to reduce the margin of existence which the individual is free to regulate for himself; and to the extent to which it does reduce it, it is a levy on character. Independence of mind, self-respect, dignity, self-reliance – such virtues are the real and great resources of society, and every confiscation of them by the State leaves society just so much poorer. For instance, in 1932, when Mr. Roosevelt announced the doctrine that the State owes every citizen a living, the





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State, under his direction, took advantage of an unusual contingency to bring about a wholesale conversion of social power into State power. As we all know, it made a prodigious levy on social money-power, but that is relatively a small matter. Society will never get it back – the machine-crew, operating under whatever political label, will see to that – but further levies may for a time be somewhat checked, though probably very little. What America does not realize is that the intervention of 1932 put a levy on the character of the people which is beyond any estimate and beyond any possible hope of recovery. There are millions of people in the country today who not only believe that the State owes them a living, but who are convinced that they will never get a living unless the State gives it to them. They are so despoiled of the moral resources that alone keep society in vigor that one may say they look to the State to validate every breath they draw.

II

In the foregoing I have tried to show a few of the signs and roadmarks on the way to collectivism, and to give an idea of the distance America has already gone along that way, and also to show what the stimulus is that is driving us continually further. Collectivism means the absorption of all social power by the State; it means that the individual lives *for* the State. As an individual, he ceases to exist; he can think of himself, as so many millions of our people now do, as only a creature of the State. The free, intelligent exercise of those virtues and





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integrities which are the capital resources of society is replaced by a wholly irrational and canine obedience to the minutiae of coercive State control.

Collectivism is the orderly and inevitable upshot of the course we have taken from the beginning. The country is committed to collectivism, not by circumstances, not by accident, not by anything but a progressive degeneration in the spirit and character of a whole people under the corrupting influence of a dominant idea – the idea that government exists to help business. I have already several times said publicly – and I have been much blamed for saying it, when I have not been merely ridiculed – not only that I firmly believe America is headed for out-and-out collectivism, but that the momentum we have gained in a century and a half is now so strong that nothing can be done about it, and certainly nothing can be done about its consequences. In saying this I have been guided only by observing the dominance of this one idea throughout our history, by observing the marked degeneration in character and spirit which I speak of, and by perceiving the natural necessity whereby the one must follow upon the other. It strikes me that any thoughtful American may well and prayerfully take notice of where we have come out on the deal by which we got the thing symbolized by the stars and stripes and *E Pluribus Unum* in exchange for the thing symbolized by the rattlesnake flag of the horse-and-buggy days, with its legend, *Don't Tread On Me*.

An acquaintance said to me the other day that he did not believe the country could stand another four years under Mr. Roosevelt. I said I had no opinion about that; what I was sure of was that no country could stand



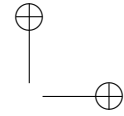
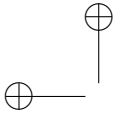


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indefinitely being ruled by the spirit and character of a people who would tolerate Mr. Roosevelt for fifteen minutes, let alone four years. I was of course speaking of the generic Roosevelt; the personal Roosevelt is a mere bit of the *Oberhefe* which specific gravity brings to the top of the Malebolge of politics. He does not count, and his rule does not count. What really counts is the spirit and character of a people willing under any circumstances whatever to accept the genus, whether the individual specimen who offers himself be named Roosevelt, Horthy, Hitler, Mussolini, or Richard Roe.

A republic is adjusted to function at the level of the lowest common denominator of its people. I take it that among many pretty clear indications of where that level stands in America, one is the fact, if it be a fact, that twelve million signatures have been subscribed to petitions for the Townsend Plan. I have only a press report as authority for this, so let us discount it fifty per cent for journalistic enterprise, and say six million. Here then, apparently, is a good share of the population which not only does not want the government to stop making positive interventions upon the individual, but is urging it to multiply them to an extent hitherto unheard of. Then on the other hand, there is what in the popular scale of speech is called the business world. I cannot imagine that there are a baker's dozen in that world who would regard a government that really kept its hands off business – which is what some of them pretend to want – as anything but an appalling calamity, worse than the earthquake of Lisbon. We can almost hear the yells of horror that would go up from every chamber of commerce, bankers' conference, and Rotarian lunch-table,



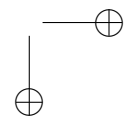
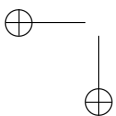


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if they were suddenly confronted with a governmental announcement that the policy of positive intervention was henceforth and forever in the discard. Suppose the next President, whoever he may be, should say in his inaugural address: "No more positive interventions of any kind. The Department of Commerce and the Department of Labor will shut up shop tomorrow. No more concern with any form of business except to see that it is run straight, and no more legalism about that, either. Beginning tomorrow, the Department of Justice will cease being a Department of Law, and become a real Department of Justice." Would the business world welcome a statement of policy like that? Hardly. Thus it would appear that the level of the lowest common denominator is in this respect pretty low. In other words, practically no one wants the uniform policy of positive State intervention changed for a uniform policy of purely negative intervention. Each would probably be willing enough to see that policy vacated in the case of all the others; but to see it vacated *for him* is simply something that will not bear thinking about.

Very well, then, the question is, how can America insist upon a policy of taking all the successive steps which lead directly to collectivism, and yet avoid collectivism? I do not see how it can be done. Nor do I see how it is possible to have collectivism and not incur the consequences of collectivism. The vestiges of many civilizations are witness that it has never yet been done, nor is it at all clear how the present civilization can make itself exempt.

Crossing the ocean last year, I struck up an acquaintance with a lawyer from New York. Our talk turned on public affairs, and he presently grew confidential. He





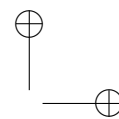
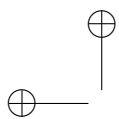
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said: “I could work five times as hard as I do, and make more than five times the money I do, but why should I? The government would take most of my money away, and the balance would not be enough to pay for the extra work.”

One can generalize from this incident, insignificant as it is. The cost of the State’s positive interventions has to be paid out of production, and thus they tend to retard production, according to the maxim that the power to tax is the power to destroy. The resulting stringencies, inconveniences, and complications bring about further interventions which still further depress production; and these sequences are repeated until production ceases entirely, as it did at Rome in the third century, when there was simply not enough production to pay the State’s bills.

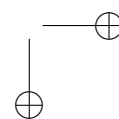
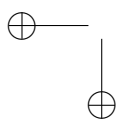
I repeat that I can see no better prospect than this as long as the tendency to collectivism goes on unchecked, and as I have shown, there seems to be no discoverable disposition to check it – the prevailing spirit and character of the people, on the contrary, seem all in its favor. Well then, I should say agreement must be made with the conclusion of Professor Ortega y Gasset, that “the result of this tendency will be fatal. Spontaneous social action will be broken up over and over again by State intervention; no new seed will be able to fructify. Society will have to live for the State, men for the governmental machine. And as after all it is only a machine, whose existence and maintenance depend on the vital supports around it, the State, after sucking out the very marrow of society, will be left bloodless, a skeleton, dead with the rusty death of machinery, more gruesome than the





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death of a living organism. Such was the lamentable fate of ancient civilization.”







THE NEW DEAL AND PROHIBITION

March, 1936

I believe that when the historian looks back on the last twenty years of American life, the thing that will puzzle him most is the amount of self-inflicted punishment that Americans seem able to stand. They take it squarely on the chin at the slightest provocation, and do not even wait for the count before they are back for more. True, they have always been good at it. For instance, once on a time they were comparatively a free people, regulating a large portion of their lives to suit themselves. They had a great deal of freedom, as compared with other peoples of the world. But apparently they could not rest until they threw their freedom away. They made a present of it to their own politicians, who have made them sweat for their gullibility ever since. They put their liberties in the hands of a prætorian guard made up exactly on the old Roman model, and not only never got them back, but as long as that prætorian guard of professional politicians lives and thrives – which will be





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quite a while if its numbers keep on increasing at the present rate – they never will.

But though Americans have always known how to make the old-time Flagellants look like amateurs at the business of scourging themselves, it is only in the last twenty years that they have really shown what they can do. The plagues of Egypt, the flies, frogs, hail, locusts, murrain, boils, and blains, are as nothing by comparison with the curses they have brought down on themselves in that time, all of their own free will and accord. They diddled themselves into a war to make the world safe for democracy – and look at democracy now! They took on the war debts, and financed the “reconstruction” of Europe – and now they are holding the bag. They fell for the “new economics” of blessed memory, and took a handsome fling at jazz-and-paper in the 'Twenties. They went in strong for Prohibition; and then, even before they came out from under that nightmare, they threw themselves body and soul into the fantastic imbecilities of the New Deal.

What a spectacle! There is no use, none in the world, of pretending that the prætorian guard dragooned, cajoled, or humbugged the people of this country into taking up with all this appalling nonsense, and at the same time pretending that the country is a republic in which the people are sovereign. You cannot have it both ways. If the professional politicians, who are known of all men to be pliant mountebanks when they are not time-serving scoundrels, and are usually both – if these have power to herd the people headlong into such bizarre rascalities and follies against their will and judgment, then the country is not a republic but an oligarchy built on an imperial





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model, and its people are not citizens, but subjects. If on the other hand it is a republic and the people are sovereign, then the misfeasances of the professional politicians run straight back to the people who elected them. When Golden Rule Jones was Mayor of Toledo, a man wrote him for help, saying that whisky had been his ruin. Jones answered his letter, saying: "I do not believe whisky has been your ruin. I believe it was the whisky that you drank."

The reader may take his choice between these alternatives. No matter which of the two is right, the fact remains that the individual citizen, or subject, has lost the best that was in him. Whether he surrendered it or whether he let it be confiscated is not what I am so much concerned with at the moment – although the question is important enough and ought to be ventilated – as I am with the fact that it is gone. Not only his liberty is gone, but something much more valuable, his belief in liberty and his love of it, his power of quick and effective resentment against any tampering with the principle of liberty by anybody. This is as much as to say that his self-respect, dignity, his sense of what is due to him as a human being, has gone, and that is exactly what I mean to say. It has gone into the keeping of persons most notoriously unworthy of such a trust, or of any trust; persons capable of deliberately conniving, and who do connive, at the temporary ruin of their country for political purposes. I say this with respect to no particular party or faction, for however many nominally there may be of these, there are never actually more than two. As Mr. Jefferson said, "The nest of office being too small for them all to cuddle into at once, the contest is eternal





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which shall crowd the other out. For this purpose they are divided into two parties, the Ins and the Outs.”

In the last conversation I had with the late Brand Whitlock, a few months before his death, we spoke of the remarkably rapid dwindling of the sense of self-respect in America, and he asked me if I remembered how thoroughly the country was worked up by a little incident that took place only twenty-five years before. I remembered it well, because we had happened to be together at the time, and we had commented on the wholesome general resentment that the outrage provoked. State prohibition was in force then, and somewhere down South a posse of state officials boarded a train and slashed open the suitcase of a through passenger who had stood on his rights and refused to unlock it. That incident went the length and breadth of the land, and was talked about in good plain language, not by a few doctrinaires, but by Tom, Dick, and Harry on the streets. Yet, as Mr. Whitlock said, in the America of twenty-five years later, such a thing would not even be news, and nowhere would there be a breath of indignation against it. Mr. Whitlock died, as an honorable man would wish to do, before he could see the upshot of most of the policies which the people of Prohibitionist and post-Prohibitionist America have inflicted on themselves in the name of good government. Many of us, indeed, appear or pretend not to see it even now.

I think, for instance, that no one has adequately remarked the ease and naturalness of the transition from Prohibition to the New Deal. Some one may have done it, but if so it has escaped me. There is a complete parallel between them. They are alike in their inception. They





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are alike in their professed intention. As for their fundamental principle, they are so far alike that the one is a mere expansion of the other. They are alike in respect of the quality of the people who support them, alike in respect of the kind of apologists they attract to their service; and finally, they are alike in their effect upon the spirit and character of the nation.

Alike in their origin, both were brought about by a *coup d'état*, the work of a determined minority at a time when the country was writhing in one of its recurrent spasms of discreditable and senseless funk – or, I should rather say, when it had passed beyond its norm of imbecile apathy and gone into the stage of vociferous idiocy. Not long ago I had a letter from a French friend who remarked that *quand les Américains se mettent à être nerveux, ils dépassent tout commentaire*, which is indeed true, so I imagine that what I have just said is perhaps the best one can do by way of describing the country's state of mind. Prohibition came when we were “making a business of being nervous” about the great cause of righteousness that we were defending against the furious Goth and fiery Hun. The New Deal came when we were making a business of being nervous about the depression; that is, nervous about having to pay collectively the due and just penalty of our collective ignorance, carelessness, and culpable greed.

Prohibition and the New Deal are alike in their professed intention, if one may put it so, to “do us for our own good.” Both assumed the guise of disinterested benevolence towards the body politic. In the one case we were adjudged incapable of setting up an adequate social defense against the seductions of vicious rum-sellers; in





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the other, of defending ourselves against injuries wrought by malefactors of great wealth; therefore the State would obligingly come forward and take the job off our hands. In the case of Prohibition we can now see what those professions amounted to, and we are beginning to see what they amount to in the case of the New Deal; and in either case we see nothing but what we might have seen at the outset – and what some of us did see – by a brief glance at the kind of people engaged in promoting both these nostrums, and a briefer glance at their record. We see now that the promotion of Prohibition was purely professional, and there is nothing to prevent our seeing that so was the promotion of the New Deal. In 1932 the local politicians and the political hangers-on who together make up the “machine” – and of whom there are more in America than there were lice in Egypt in Moses’ day – saw a great starving-time ahead of them, and when the New Deal was broached they fell upon it with yells of joy, as one who comes upon an oasis of date-palms in a trackless desert. Their dearth was miraculously turned into plenty. Faced with a dead stoppage of their machine from lack of money to keep it going, they suddenly found themselves with more money in their hands than they had ever imagined there was in the world.

Prohibition and the New Deal are alike in their fundamental principle, which is the principle of coercion. Prohibition proposed to make the nation sober by *force majeure*, and incidentally to charge a thundering brokerage for doing the job. It said to us, “This is all for your own good, and you ought to fall in line cheerfully, but if you do not fall in, we will make you.” The New Deal proposes a redistribution of wealth, and is charging a





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brokerage that makes the janizaries of the Anti-Saloon League look like pickpockets at a county fair. The national headquarters of the New Deal has a slush-fund of something over four billion dollars to blow in between now and next November, and about 700,000 devoted heelers on the job of seeing that it is spent where it will bring the best results. All this, we are told, is for our own good, and we ought to appreciate it, but whether we appreciate it or not, we must take it.

The two enterprises are alike also in respect of the quality of the people who support it. There are some statistics available on this. About four years ago – in November, 1931, to be exact – Mr. Henry L. Mencken published in this magazine the results of an elaborate statistical study which he had been making in collaboration with Mr. Charles Angoff in order to determine the relative cultural standing of the forty-eight states. He tabulated his findings in the form of a list of the states, arranged in the order of their approach to civilization, and he has stated publicly that his table has never been successfully challenged.

In 1932 Mr. Mencken compared his table with the returns of the *Literary Digest's* poll on Prohibition, and found that they fitted precisely. Nearly all the states that turned in heavy majorities against Prohibition stood high on his table, and nearly all that supported it stood low. In the Baltimore *Evening Sun* of January 13, 1936, he made a similar comparison with the *Digest's* poll on the New Deal, and got a similar result. The more nearly civilized states are against it, and the more uncivilized states are for it. He says:





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In the five most civilized of American states, according to the Angoff-Mencken table, the percentage of voters voting for the New Deal is but 32.32; in the five least civilized states it is 67.68, or more than double. . . . Of the states giving the New Deal less than 30%, of their votes (seven in number) all are among the first twenty-two; of those giving it more than 70% (two in number) both are among the last three. Of those giving it less than 35% (thirteen in number) all are among the first twenty-eight; of those giving it more than 65% (four in number) all are clumped together at the bottom. Finally, of those giving it less than 40%, (twenty-two in number) all are among the first thirty-three; and of those giving it more than 60% (eight in number) all are among the last eleven.

From this it may be seen that, precisely like Prohibition, the New Deal, as Mr. Mencken concludes, “makes its most powerful appeal, not to the intelligent and enlightened moiety of the American people, but to the ignorant and credulous. It is, in truth, demagoguery pure and simple, quackery undiluted. . . . The states that show a majority for it, including the anomalous Utah, are exactly the states that inflicted the Eighteenth Amendment on us, and most of them are still dry. Also they are the states whose people still believe by large majorities that William Jennings Bryan was a profounder scientist than Darwin, that any man who pays his debts is an enemy to society, and that a horsehair put into a bottle of water will turn into a snake.”

As for its moral effect upon the nation, the New Deal simply carries on Prohibition’s work of making corruption and hypocrisy respectable. Both enterprises are bureaucratic, both are coercive; and, as Mr. Jefferson said, the moral effect of coercion is “to make one-half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites; to sup-



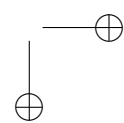
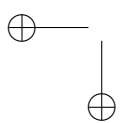
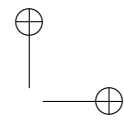
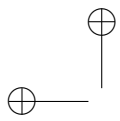


THE NEW DEAL AND PROHIBITION

port roguery and error all over the earth.” And what has Prohibition had to show by way of offset? Simply nothing. What has the New Deal to show, so far? Can anybody point to a single one of its policies that has really worked? I know of none. No recovery in business is due to it. It has as many unemployed on its hands as it ever had, and as many derelicts. Its agricultural policy is said to have worked, but, as the Supreme Court observed, that simply amounted to the expropriation of money from one group for the benefit of another; in other words, it amounted to larceny, and official larceny always works. The unofficial practitioners of that art who are now in Sing Sing were simply at a disadvantage.

Prohibition and the New Deal, in short, breed straight back to the incredible appetite of the American people for self-inflicted punishment. One wonders how long they can take it, and how hard; and above all, one wonders, when the New Deal has gone the way of Prohibition, what more dismal and depraving form of self-torture they will turn to next.







WHO WILL PAY THE BILL?

April, 1936

There are signs that our glorious political summer is over, and that the winter of our discontent is here. In other words, the bills are beginning to come in. The dance has lagged, and the piper is passing the hat. People have suddenly become aware of several things that they should have foreseen three years ago. First, that the lunatic gyrations of the New Deal have run into money, and must be paid for. Second, that there is nowhere for the money to come from but out of taxes. These are important lessons. We seem to have been going on the assumption that the wizardry at Washington and in our state capitals either costs nothing or can be paid for with some kind of stage money; but it now appears that this is not so.

Presently we shall discover another disconcerting fact, which is that just as there is nowhere for the money to come from but out of taxes, so there is nowhere for the taxes to come from but out of production. People get





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money to pay taxes by producing and exchanging goods or services; there is no other way. This process is what we describe by the general term “business.” People can get tax-money only by doing business. Now, obviously, there is a limit to the weight of taxation that business will stand, because if taxes eat up so much of the income of business as to make it not worth while to go on, production stops, and the economic structure of the nation breaks down, as it did at Rome in the third century. Therefore the fourth discovery which we are on our way to making is whether the load of American taxation has reached that point, and if not, how far off that point it is.

Facing these four facts is disagreeable, but there they are. The morning after the night before is always a bad time, but it always comes, and there is not much to be done about it; so let us look around a little and see if we can make out where we are. According to a report made to the Merchants’ Association of New York, the federal government collected sixty-seven different taxes last year, by 131 separate levies. The total sum came to \$3,299,435,572, of which nearly half represented indirect or concealed taxes – concealed not only in the price of commodities that can be classified as luxury products, like gasoline, tobacco, perfumes, and cosmetics, but also in the price of such necessities as sugar, cotton, wheat, pork, matches, soap, and certain drugs. The report observes that no one, not even the poorest of those now living on Relief funds, can escape the incidence of at least eight federal taxes; while more than thirty taxes are imposed on every wage-earner in the income-tax group. As an instance of multiple or cumulative taxation, where





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levies are piled on top of levies, the report states that the tax on spirits, wine, and beer is imposed in nineteen different forms. Yet notwithstanding all this, the federal government is running so far ahead of its income that Treasury figures forecast a deficit of five billion dollars in 1937, and an increase in the national debt which will bring it to a total of \$36,000,000,000.

So much for that. Turning now to the record of the State of New York, we find that the president of the State Economic Council has declared that although twenty-two different kinds of state taxes were in force last year, they came short by \$97,000,000 in meeting the state's expenditures. Since 1907, these expenditures have risen from \$32,000,000 to \$311,000,000; while in the same period the state debt has risen from \$12,000,000 to more than \$677,000,000. Meanwhile, the state's municipalities have acquired an aggregate debt of \$3,200,000,000, and some of them are in very bad financial shape. In one of these municipalities, the largest one, New York City, the politicians have actually got down to the level of filching pennies from its citizens by a niggling little sales tax. One would hardly have expected our grandchildren to live long enough to see anything like that.

These few figures give a suggestion of the weight which the aggregate of local, state, and federal debt puts on production – because, I repeat, all these debts must be met out of taxes, and taxes must come out of production. The question therefore arises whether production can carry the load. If it cannot, then clearly the United States is no longer a going concern. Some think it cannot. The New York State Chamber of Commerce, evidently impressed by the sight of banks stuffed full of federal





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bonds that no one will buy, gave warning two months ago that something has to be done very quickly to avert such an impairment of the national credit as will bring about a financial collapse; and as long ago as last October a lawyer of my acquaintance who manages large estates replied austerely to a suggestion that he should put some of a client's money into government bonds: "It has always been my fixed policy never to invest in the securities of an insolvent corporation."

Some, however, think the situation can be tided over by confiscatory taxation on large incomes and accumulations of wealth, a policy commonly known as Soaking the Rich. Those who have this idea base it on the theory that taxation should be measured by the ability to pay, which is the most unjust, unsound, and anti-social theory of taxation ever devised. But aside from this, as every collectivist is well and truly aware, soaking the rich is the surest way, under our present economic system, to knock production into a cocked hat. Moreover, the rich have not that much money – nowhere near that much. As the report to the New York State Chamber of Commerce observes, if the whole income of those who in 1934 earned a net of \$6000 or more were confiscated outright, it would not meet the federal deficit; and it must be remembered that it is the same persons who on this theory must also be soaked for state and local deficits.

Others, again, think that if these debts are safely passed on to posterity, production will take care of them in time. So it may; yet certain factors enter into the case which this view does not take into account – for instance, the voracity of politicians. There is no reason to suppose that any future batch of these gentry will be more eager





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to see good money go to pay debts than those who are with us now. They will prefer to apply it to their own purposes; otherwise why should they be politicians? The principle which ex-Senator Smoot formulated, and which has been ironically termed "Smoot's law of government," should not be lost sight of in this connection. It is that "the cost of government tends to increase annually, no matter which party is in power." A program of retrenchment sufficient to vacate this principle even temporarily is hardly to be counted upon. Nor is it certain that production will hold up to a degree necessary to carry our national credit over the interim; and it is still more uncertain that with an increasing perspective on the kind of conduct which has involved us in these obligations, posterity will regard them as casually as we do. It may; but the chance that it will is not so overwhelming as to amount to certainty, or anything like it, especially in view of the probability that incomes between \$1000 and \$5000, or less, will do the actual paying.

As a rule, hopeful persons who believe that we are still solvent, that things are not so black as they are painted, and that our public accounts will somehow get themselves straightened out in the long run – such persons, I say, as a rule take a rather shallow view of the causes at work in the situation. They think that now the only thing necessary, or at least the main thing, is to beat Roosevelt, just as four years ago the main thing was to beat Hoover. But this does not get us much. Beat Mr. Roosevelt, by all means, but what shall we get by it? When we beat Mr. Hoover, what we needed was a policy of strict economy, retrenchment, and reform, and did we get it? Not so that any one would notice it. More





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than ever we need that policy now, and shall we get it by beating Mr. Roosevelt? I believe some modern men of science do not flatly deny that miracles sometimes happen, but if this one happened it would settle that long-disputed question forever.

There are cogent reasons why it will not happen. Some of them will occur at once to anybody, and they are competent enough as far as they go, but they do not go far. Among those that reach nearer the root of the matter there is one that I wish to mention, both because it accounts for so much and because I believe it is seldom thought of. I refer to the utterly useless and preposterous overbuilding of our political structure.

Look at it. First we have a highly-centralized federal unit giving berths to an enormous number of employees, I do not know how many; the last statement I saw put the figure at 815,000, which is probably not far wrong. Then within the federal unit we have forty-eight subsidiary units, each with a full political apparatus and personnel, executive, legislative, and judicial. Then within each of these units we have any number of counties, each with a political apparatus of its own; and within each county we have a mess of townships, boroughs, school-districts, villages, municipalities, wards, each with some kind of political organization. Thus a citizen may live, and quite regularly does live, under six or seven overlapping political jurisdictions, most of which have power to tax him.

This seems stupid and useless enough, but what I wish to point out is the viciousness of the thing. This arrangement opens innumerable opportunities for people who are good for nothing else to go into politics for a





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livelihood. Under it, every country cross-road offers a chance for some worthless fellow to prey upon production, and, as we see, every one of these overlapping political units can show its quota of predatory local politicians. Moreover, in order to keep a grip on his job, whatever it is, or to get a better one – to boost himself from ward-leadership to a mayoralty, from the lower house of Congress to the upper, or from wherever he is to wherever he wants to go – he forms around him a sort of junta, made up chiefly of people as worthless as himself, but to some degree gifted, like himself, with the peculiar type of low sagacity, the instinct for the main chance, which is the principal element that makes for success in the politics of a modern republic. He is bound to this junta by various obligations of *quid pro quo*; he has to “look after the boys,” and accommodate himself to their interests and desires, and particularly to their several designs upon the public purse. For his purposes, too, the larger the junta the better, and therefore its tendency is to grow; and as it grows in size, it grows also in power, and as it grows in power, its field for the exercise of unscrupulousness becomes larger and richer. The patronage-junta of the White House is simply an enlarged replica of Tammany’s junta; and Tammany’s junta is an enlarged replica of the junta surrounding every congressman, sheriff, and alderman in the land.

Thus the overbuilding of our political structure invites unconscionable swarms of vermin to nest in it and eat out our substance. In view of this fact, my impression is that unless and until that overbuilding is reduced – and we all know that this is impossible – Smoot’s law will hold, and our public finances will be in little better shape than they





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are. Beating Roosevelt, while no doubt commendable, is not enough to encourage a great rise of hopefulness. It rather reminds one of our old-style crusades to drive streetwalkers out of town; they could be driven out, and were, but the trouble was always that their place was almost immediately taken by others precisely like them, and so in the end the crusade broke down. As long as our political accommodations are so exclusively and elaborately designed for one type of inhabitant, it seems vain to expect any other to occupy them.

Yet the uselessness of all this overbuilding must be as apparent as its viciousness. If we are to have a federal government as highly centralized as ours is now, why keep up a complete political apparatus in the forty-eight major components? I notice that some one has already proposed to do away with their political character, and merge them into ten “economic” provinces; but why not rather let their present boundaries remain as an agreeable concession to local sentiment, like the old French provinces, and also as a convenience in addressing letters? On the other hand, if we are to decentralize into an actual federation of sovereign states, why keep up such an expensive establishment at Washington when the Senate Office Building would amply house every legitimate activity of such a federation? We are bound to be either one thing or the other – we cannot be both – so why not cut the coat of our political apparatus by our actual cloth?

Again, what earthly use are counties, except to support job-holders? I know of none. I can understand the use of townships and city wards under a system like the one contemplated by Mr. Jefferson, which proposes to lodge





WHO WILL PAY THE BILL?

all sovereignty exclusively in these units; but under any other system they seem wholly useless except, again, for maintaining a set of beings who might well be cast adrift. Also, why keep up an apparatus of partisan political government in a municipality? Some of our cities have in fact already discarded it, and from all one hears no great benefits seem to have been lost to the non-job-holding public.

Probably it is not necessary to say that I am not offering these observations as serious proposals, or expecting that they will be taken as such by any one. Vermin do not evict themselves, but on the contrary, they dig in and breed; and the matters I have been discussing are in the hands of those whom the structural changes I have mentioned would dispossess, which is the best of reasons why these changes will not be effected, and why any serious discussion of them at all would be mere futility.

All I have been attempting to do is to assemble a certain amount of evidence – by no means complete, but I think enough – that the country's financial condition is not to be regarded superficially, and that those who count on its improvement by the usual course of superficial or symptomatic treatment stand a fair chance of being disappointed.







DEMOCRACY & DELUSION

May, 1936

A commentator on the state of the Union must sooner or later come to the conclusion that the Union would be in a great deal more healthy and promising state if every once in a while we all overhauled our stock of political ideas to see whether or not they would hold water. The human mind is somewhat like the old-fashioned family house that accumulated all sorts of unnoticed odds-and-ends from year to year, with nobody much knowing how most of them happened in; and there they stayed until housecleaning-time came round, when the missus raked them together and looked them over with a fishy eye. Some few of them turned out to be so valuable that the lady cursed herself for having overlooked them so long; I once saw a painting appraised at \$20,000 that had been sifted out of a family trash-pile. Some of them, on the other hand, were rubbish; and there was still another class of objects that were worthless as they stood, but were capable of being easily tinkered into good useful stuff.





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Unfortunately we are not so strong on housecleaning our minds as we are on housecleaning our premises. Americans are justly proud of being a clean people, but this pride, like beauty, is only skin-deep. If, when, and as we do occasionally hoe out our consciousness, however, we find that our political ideas can be separated into these three classes. We find some clear salvage, probably not much; and we find some junk; and usually also we find a fairly rich haul of ideas that are essentially sound, but that need reconditioning before they are put to use.

One of these is our idea of democracy. I have been hearing lately from correspondents who have a good deal to say about democracy in America, and it was their observations that set my mind going on this track. Some of them are impressed by the ease with which our so-called democracy slides off into despotism, and they say that democracy has failed, that it will not work, that they are frankly ready to give it up and take chances with some other system. Others, again, are troubled by the unconscionable corruption pervading our political system, and still more by the enormous and widespread corruption that it generates among the people at large. They are equally impressed by the extremely low and venal order of beings whom our so-called democracy attracts into its service; they look at our present national Administration, for example, and say with the late Earl Balfour that democracy runs to mediocrity as water to the gutter. Hence they too have made up their minds that democracy is a failure, and they are lukewarm about it. Some, on the other hand, say that our self-styled democracy is all right, but that we have to work out an entirely new formulation of it and a new technique of its





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practice, in order to make it conformable to what they rather vaguely call the conditions of modern life. I have spent some time this week over a sizable book, just off the press, written by a professor to expound this view, and when he gets through re-formulating democracy, its own mother would not know it.

There is an interesting mixture of truth and error in all these complaints. In themselves they are wholly right, but they are all directed against the wrong thing. It is an error of the first magnitude to say that democracy has failed and will not work. It will work, it is perfectly practicable; and not only will it work, but it is also the best mode of government ever devised – the cheapest, most flexible, easiest managed, most informal, tending to a minimum of corruption, and in general most satisfactory. Those who say democracy is a failure and unworkable merely assume that our mode of government, which for some reason has come to be commonly called democratic, is actually so; whereas it is nothing of the kind, nor has it ever been anything of the kind. Perhaps the reasoning behind this misapprehension is that since our government is not a monarchy it must therefore be a democracy; but this does not follow, for it might be something quite different from either, as in fact it is. Or it may be assumed that because everybody has a vote (except criminals, lunatics, and residents of the District of Columbia – what an interesting collocation that is, by the way!) our country is necessarily a democratic republic; but this also does not follow, for as we all know, the voter's scope of political self-expression is so egregiously limited, in respect both of men and issues, that it amounts practically to nothing.





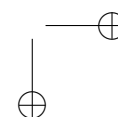
THE STATE OF THE UNION

Once this fundamental misapprehension is straightened up, the rest is pretty plain sailing, for in the matter of the complaints I have cited, the line between fact and error at once becomes clear. It is true that our political system is, from the citizen's point of view, a failure; true, that it easily slides off into a peculiarly unscrupulous and vicious form of tyranny; true, that it seminates corruption among a whole people; true, that it fosters a lush growth of bureaucracy and patronage, thereby attracting into its service the very worst set of men that can be found between the two oceans; but these complaints do not lie against democracy, for we are not a democracy. We ignorantly and falsely call our system democratic and our nation a democratic republic, and those who allege these complaints are thereby simply misled into believing that our system and our nation are actually what we call them.

What, then, is a democratic republic? Probably Mr. Jefferson would be an acceptable authority on the subject. In a letter to John Taylor, written in 1816, we find him saying that it means –

a government by its citizens *in mass, directly and personally*, according to rules established by the majority; and that every other government is more or less republican in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the *direct* action of its citizens.

He presently goes on, after some observations on the representative system, and on the system of checks and balances, to amplify this statement by saying that –





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the further the departure from *direct and constant control* by the citizens, the less has the government of the ingredient of republicanism; evidently none where the authorities are hereditary, as in France, Venice, etc., or *self-chosen*, as in Holland.

I have italicized certain words in these definitions, partly in order that they may not be overlooked in rapid reading, but mostly in the hope that the reader will pause upon them and study their significance.

Really, now, can anyone seriously pretend that our government answers in any respect whatever to these specifications? I think not. Is it exercised by our citizens in mass, directly and personally, under majority-rule? Hardly. Far from that, it is exercised by a partisan (or, from the point of view of public welfare, a bipartisan) political machine, manned by professional talent exclusively, and kept in working order by patronage and subsidy. We all know it is thus exercised; the fact is so open, so notorious, and of such long standing that one might doubt there being a man, woman, or child of sound mind in the whole country who does not know it. Is our government under direct and constant control by the citizens? The reader may answer that question for himself; in the light of common observation, it is too preposterous to discuss. Are our authorities “self-chosen, as in Holland”? Again, the reader may make up his own mind about that. If he needs assistance in a general way, he can get it by attending one of the forthcoming national conventions and considering their methods of establishing a platform and a candidacy. Or, if he does not care to do that, he may content himself with looking back no further than the newspaper-record of the last Presidential campaign,





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and studying the technique of “capturing a convention” as practiced by Mr. Roosevelt through the agency of Mr. Farley. If the present Administration is not a self-chosen authority, there never was one in the world. Technically and legally, it perhaps may not be so described; but actually it is just that, and we all know it is just that.

Democracy has fared no better in other countries that have established a nominally republican regime. The French Republic is no more nearly democratic than ours; its government has about as little of Mr. Jefferson’s “ingredient of republicanism” as ours has. The German Republic blew up under pressure, but while it lasted its republicanism was purely nominal. While we lament our own failure with democracy, we have at least the consolation, whatever it amounts to, of perceiving that other self-styled experiments on the grand scale have failed as miserably as ours. Nevertheless, the inference that democracy is impracticable is erroneous; it is perfectly practicable, but like everything else that is practicable, it is only conditionally practicable.

The history of all these experiments can be summed up in a simple illustration. Suppose you have a man seven feet tall and weighing three hundred pounds, with a score of people around him trying their best to get him into a suit of clothes that was made for the average twelve-year-old boy. It does not work. Some of the people say there is something wrong with the clothes. There is a division of opinion among them, some holding that the clothes ought to be strengthened and “re-formulated” in one way or another, and others maintaining that they are no good and will never be any good, and should be thrown away. Meanwhile another school of thought





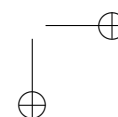
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holds that the clothes are all right, but that there is something wrong with the man; and here again there is a division of opinion on what should be done with him. While all this is going on a child happens in, throws a clear unprejudiced eye on the situation, sees it exactly as it is, and says that the man and the clothes are both quite all right, but they do not match, cannot possibly be made to match, and the people who are learnedly talking and writing to prove that somehow they can be made to match are a set of fools – born fools, probably, for which there is no help.

Early in the eighteenth century, when theories of democracy were first under discussion, Montesquieu said that a democratic republic was practicable only over a small territorial area and a small volume of population. Mr. Jefferson picked up this idea from Montesquieu, and in the early days when the country was operating under the Articles of Confederation, and even for a while afterward, he seems to have counted on “the great American experiment” to bust it. As late as 1795 he wrote a French correspondent as follows:

I suspect that the doctrine that small states alone are fitted to be republics will be exploded by experience, with some other brilliant fallacies accredited by Montesquieu and other political writers. . . . We have chanced to live in an age which will probably be distinguished in history for experiments in government on a larger scale than has yet taken place.

At this time it was but eight years since the constitutional convention had summarily thrown the Articles of Confederation into the wastebasket, converted the country from a confederacy into a nation, and set up a





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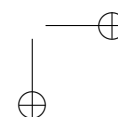
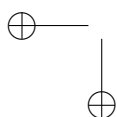
coercive centralized national government on the fine old tried and trusted plan. It was but six years since the Judiciary Act carried centralization still further. John Marshall's fateful decisions, which dissipated whatever faint residual atmosphere of democracy still lingered, were on their way. The great and good old man began to see the handwriting on the wall; his term in the State Department left no doubt about it; and in 1816 he wrote to John Taylor, in the letter from which I have already quoted:

Such a government is evidently restrained to very narrow limits of space and population. I doubt if it would be practicable beyond the extent of a New England township.

Precisely so. The subsequent century of fumbling experimentation with self-styled "democratic republics," in this country and elsewhere, has proved one thing and one only. It has proved the rather obvious and commonplace fact that you cannot get a suit of boy-size clothes on a seven-foot man.

The unfortunate thing about this experimentation, moreover, is that it must run its course, and the end of that course is general disaster, which we now see imminent throughout the Western world. In his letter to John Taylor, Mr. Jefferson wrote:

If, then, the control of the people over the organs of their government be the measure of its republicanism (and I confess I know no other measure) it must be agreed that our governments [*i.e.*, federal, state, municipal, etc.] have much less of republicanism than ought to have been expected; in other words, that the people have less regular control over their agents than their





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rights and their interests require. . . . Much I apprehend that the golden moment is past for reforming these heresies.

We may well reflect on the question, if this was the state of the Democratic Republic one hundred and twenty years ago, how much democracy might a sane person reasonably expect that Republic to assay in the year 1936? The answer is that he would expect it to assay quite what we now find it to assay, under any test that ingenuity can devise; it assays precisely none.

And nothing can be done about it; the caption of Mr. Webster's excellent cartoons fits the situation admirably. If the golden moment for reform had gone by a hundred and twenty years ago (and we now know it had) what is the use of deluding ourselves with the notion that any human effort can bring it back? In any case we must take what comes, and self-deception does not help. Mr. Jefferson's great contemporary, Bishop Butler, laid down a splendid lesson in intellectual honesty when he said: "Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?" If we must take what comes, we can at least take it standing up, in full knowledge of where we are, and why we are there, instead of demeaning ourselves to pretense and make-believe about the visibility of that which does not exist and cannot possibly exist.

You pays your money and you takes your choice. If you go in for high-pressure nationalism and coercive centralization, you must pay the price of doing without democracy. So far, so good. But doing without democracy also has its price. If you choose to do without democracy,





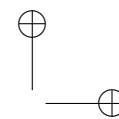
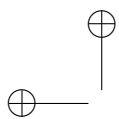
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you must be prepared to stand the gaff of recurrent dislocations and disablements in every relation of corporate life; recurrent collisions of international interest, ever increasing in magnitude and violence; progressive degeneration and decay in the spirit of the people; and, finally, dissolution. You cannot have it both ways. Democracy is the one and only form of government that answers to the nature of man, and therefore it is the only one that man will permanently put up with. Democracy, however, cannot be practiced “beyond the extent of a New England township,” and therefore it is ridiculously incompatible with all our present ideas of nationalism and national government – and there you are.

The state of the Union testifies eloquently to the same fact that the disordered state of Europe, of Asia, of the world in general, is attesting at a great rate. It testifies that the policy of trying to do without democracy is the most expensive luxury on earth. Perhaps in time, say ten or fifteen thousand years, if there be any people left over from the devastations wrought by this policy, they will have got this idea through their heads and will give up all thought of nationalism, imperialism, coercive centralization, and will reorganize their political life in terms of small communities over which democracy is actually practicable. But all that is too far off to be worth talking about now. Correspondents ask if anything can be done, if I can suggest any plan or scheme for improving the situation to which the policy of doing without democracy has given rise.

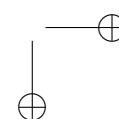
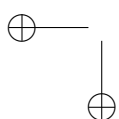
As they presumably understand the question, the answer is – no. The one thing we can do at the present time and for a long time to come is to see straight, think





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straight, and as Professor Huxley said, “to have done, once and forever, with lying” – lying about democracy by pretending that it exists where it does not exist, and under circumstances which make its existence absolutely impossible and unthinkable. This is all we can do, but it is a great deal, and for the present at least it is quite enough, if only we do it.







SEGREGATION FOR UTOPIANS

June, 1936

In Belgium lately I heard of a new way of dealing with certain types of lunacy. I was not enough interested to follow the matter up, so I can speak of it only by hearsay. I think the poet Maeterlinck has written something in praise of the plan, but if he did I have not read it. However, strict accuracy is not necessary for my purposes at present, so it will do well enough if I give the salient points of the system as they were reported to me.

My understanding is that the patients are not kept in asylums, but are allowed to range quite freely in the open, where they are encouraged to take up practically any and every kind of outdoor pursuit that strikes their fancy. They cultivate the soil, raise flowers and vegetables, and carry on various occupations and diversions, all in an almost complete absence of restraint. They are not kept away from one another; on the contrary, they fraternize freely, and their communal life seems to be much like





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that of so-called sane people, except that they have no responsibilities to speak of, and hence no worries.

According to my information, the plan works well. The patients do not stray off the reservation. Each one develops a set of interests of his own, which he follows avidly, thereby keeping himself busy, contented, and apparently happy. Freedom of social intercourse enables them to ride their several hobbies to their hearts' content, for one another's benefit. They discuss their various beliefs and persuasions, try to convert one another, and thus enjoy a social life which is satisfactory enough to keep their thoughts from straying to the world outside.

There is reason to think that this plan might work as well for the sane as the insane, and thereby be a great benefit to society at large. Anyone who considers the state of the Union must see that American society falls into two irreconcilable divisions. On the one hand we have those who feel no responsibility about the beliefs, tastes, and dispositions of other people, and who are resentful when their own are challenged. They are strong for letting their neighbors alone, at least until the commission of some overt act. If the neighbors see fit to believe in red licker, nudism, free silver, psychoanalysis, and the strangling of all girl babies at birth, they are in favor of letting them enjoy their beliefs in peace, as long as no actual injury or nuisance takes place. In return they ask no more than that the neighbors likewise refrain from barging in on any missionary enterprise directed against their own beliefs and persuasions. In short, they are very much of Mr. Jefferson's mind when he observed that "the opinions and belief of men depend not on their





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own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds.”

These appear to be considerably in the majority. On the other hand there exists among us a large and growing number of persons who apparently were born with a rabid rage for meddling and interference, and with a canine nose for political outlets through which their mania may harass and exasperate the majority. Our experience with Prohibition showed us something about the number and energy of this element, and we now see with dismay that they are largely having their own way with the present government. They devote their peculiar talent to playing into the hands of unscrupulous politicians, and in return the politicians connive at their passion for ruffling all people who are not of their own ilk, and making them as uncomfortable as they can. This reciprocal arrangement is the simplest thing in the world to carry on, because it costs nothing to either party, but is all paid for at public expense; which is to say, mostly at the expense of its victims.

We all know the several types of this genus: they are the uplifter, the snooping *censor morum* , the social-science inquisitor, the foundation-hound, the economic gospeler who periodically takes a hard fall out of Adam Smith, the professional red-baiter, and the alfalfa-fed Mokanna who thinks he has discovered some new shortcut to the More Abundant Life. Behind all these is a vociferous rank-and-file which they keep stirred up; and the total effect is to distract and bedevil the majority, and to keep the whole body politic in an unwholesome and distressing commotion.





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Under these circumstances it would seem sensible to separate these two divisions or classes, and segregate them; not forcibly, of course, but by stipulation and consent. Perhaps the best thing would be to lay off a large area of pleasant country where living is relatively easy and cheap, and then invite everybody who feels any kind of evangelistic urge to go there and settle, leaving the rest of the country free to the majority who wish only to live and let live. Naturally California occurs to the mind at once – Southern California – as the very thing; one would say it was made for the purpose. I have never been in Arizona or New Mexico, but I get such good reports about them from Witter Bynner and other connoisseurs that I am sure their attractions must fall right in line with California's. Well, then, why not devote the whole strip west of the Texas Panhandle to this excellent purpose, simply extending the northern line of Arizona and New Mexico straight westward to some point on the coast south of Monterey?

The only understanding necessary would be that both parties to the agreement must stay on the reservation, except in cases where the individual undergoes a change of disposition which puts him in the opposite category. On the one side, for example, if a person loses his itch for messing about in other people's business, and no longer yearns to convert or dragoon anybody, he should be promptly fired out as soon as it becomes clear that his lapse is permanent. On the other side, too, if a normal member of the majority begins taking an inflamed interest in affairs which are not his own, he should be bounced across the line at once.





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This would seem a fair arrangement, and there is good precedent for it, for are not other nations, most of them, segregating their more or less rambunctious minorities? We could improve on them, because they are doing it by force or social pressure, and also because they do it along racial lines; whereas we would do it by agreement and on the line of pure compatibility. We would separate one division of our population from the other, not because either were Jews, Turks, infidels, or heretics, but because each was a nuisance and a detriment to the other. This would be a noble example. If we segregated our two incompatible classes by peaceful and friendly stipulation, settling our troubles on a plan that was fair and generous all round and really co-operative, we would give the world a great moral lesson. We would put ourselves in the position of “moral leadership” which we are always talking about and apparently coveting, but somehow never attaining.

But would stipulation be possible? I think so. I am sure the majority party would stipulate. I believe they would cheerfully give up half the area of the United States if they were guaranteed permanent freedom from the hectorings of the minority. But how about the minority? Here again I believe that if proper representations were made, if the matter were put before them in the right light, they would make no difficulties whatever, because segregation is actually as much to their interest as it is to the interest of the majority, or even considerably more. The majority would be rid of a raft of dreadful bores and duodecimo Stalins, which of course is all to the good, but that is only a negative gain; whereas the minority’s gains would be positive. Think of the point I have just made –





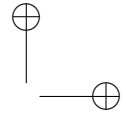
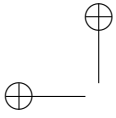
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the chance to give America the moral leadership of the world! This in itself would be an immense inducement, for from the way they talk about it, moral leadership seems to be the one ambition common to all sections of the minority. The Prohibitionists were tremendous fellows for moral leadership, and the Men of Vision who are now on the job seem quite as strong for it. The ultimate aim of all their nostrums, as I understand it, is to make America stand as a burning and a shining light to a world that flounders in ignorance and sin. Any politician will tell you so, especially as election day draws near. Well, if the minority were segregated, they could do the moral-leadership business for the whole country without all the time being wet-blanketed by the rest of us who are merely plugging along at our workaday jobs, and not indulging any such high ambitions.

I am sure the minority would agree that there is everything in this matter of a favorable spiritual atmosphere. The author of the *Imitation* says truly that “the fewer there be who follow the way to heaven, the harder that way is to find.” Blank indifference is the great enemy of any doctrine, social, political, or religious. A doctrine can thrive on opposition, it can thrive on anything, as long as people are thinking in the general terms that embrace it; but when they are not, it has hard sledding. For instance, a century ago when everybody was thinking more or less in terms of theology, any theological doctrine could get a hearing and make its way; but nowadays, since people have pretty well stopped thinking in those terms, no theological doctrine has a chance.

A segregated minority would enable each group to operate among people who were thinking habitually in



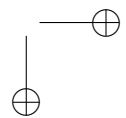
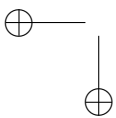


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the same general terms. It would no longer be enervated by the suffocating atmosphere of indifference by which it is now so heavily oppressed. Each group could be sure of getting its nostrum understood and sifted, which is the primary condition of acceptance, for obviously if a person is not willing to understand a doctrine and think about it, he will not accept it; and not only so, but in his ignorant repugnance he may even do it considerable damage. This point is so important that it should be made very clear; and since one may always take oneself as an example when such service might be invidious or unpleasant, I will bring forward my own case to illustrate what I mean.

II

I do not know anything about the Townsend Plan beyond a bare statement of its purpose set forth in a press report. On the strength of this I at once put Dr. Townsend in the category of circle-squarers and flat-earth fanatics, and have never since read a line about his plan. Yet I have sometimes spoken lightly of it in print, as an egregious economic humbug. Now, if Dr. Townsend should tell me that I am acting improperly, unjustly, in condemning his plan virtually unheard, I would have to agree with him; no doubt about that. But if he went on to explain his plan I am almost sure I would listen to him with only half an ear. In short, with regard to the Townsend Plan, I am in the state of what theologians call invincible ignorance.





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Now, turning the case around, I am a single-taxer, and I notice that the editor of this magazine, and my old and good friend Mr. Mencken, speak disparagingly of single-taxers. I understand that Mr. Mencken even goes so far as to say my being a single-taxer is the only thing he has against me. This being so, I would bet much more money than I can afford to lose that to save their souls neither Mr. Palmer nor Mr. Mencken can tell me what the single-tax is – exactly as I cannot tell them what the Townsend Plan is. Why, think of Mr. Butler, who is in my judgment far and away the ablest man in our public life; no one commands my respect as he does. Yet, in a very sympathetic commencement address two or three years ago, when he undertook to say what the single-tax is aimed at, he picked out the one very thing that it is expressly and deliberately so aimed at. Speaking plainly, he made a most dreadful howler; worst of all, it was just the one howler that a person who knew what he was talking about could no more make than Bishop Manning could miss fire on the Lord's Prayer. Moreover, I would lay another bet that there was not a person in all Mr. Butler's great audience, professor or student, who knew enough to catch him at it. But this is a small matter. My point is that if I were to go to Mr. Palmer and Mr. Mencken and Mr. Butler, and offer to tell them what the single-tax is, the most they would do is what I would do in the case of Mr. Townsend. They would be polite and pleasant, say it was all very clear, very good, and afterwards think no more about it. Like myself, they are *ad hoc* in the state of invincible ignorance.

It is only a Draconian sense of justice that would complain of this, because unfortunately that is the way





SEGREGATION FOR UTOPIANS

the human mind seems to work under the circumstances. Even the theologians, I believe, recognize this and make allowance for it; I am not sure, but I think they do not officially regard invincible ignorance as a bar to salvation. But because the mind works that way, the impatient prophet of a new idea usually does not get far. In my own case as a single-taxer, for example, it has been my sense of the prevalence and solidity of invincible ignorance that has kept me from crusading for my nostrum or doing much more for it than merely to put myself on record as occasion offered.

So the minority might well think what a fine time they could have if the obstacle of invincible ignorance were removed by segregation, and all hands were thinking in the same general terms. Certainly if I could get the single-tax out from under the killing blight of Mr. Palmer, Mr. Mencken, Mr. Butler, and thousands like them, and if I were not too old and decrepit by that time, I would join the minority and spend the rest of my life in spreading the Light. We would not all convert one another – nothing like that – but we would understand one another. We would perhaps continue to be inveterate opponents, but like Abélard and Bernard of Clairvaux, or like the Jansenists and Jesuits, our minds would all be tuned in on the same general wavelength. Dr. Townsend would probably not convert me to his plan, or Mr. Hopkins to the uplift, but I would at least “get them.” Doubtless I would not make a single-taxer of Mr. Upton Sinclair, but he would at least know what I was talking about. On the other hand, we might all come to see something valuable in one another’s stock of notions, and some modifications of opinion might ensue. The worst thing about invincible





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ignorance is that it precludes these modifications, for understanding is always more than halfway to sympathy. In time, perhaps – I am not sure, but possibly – I might even come to see that nudism and vegetarianism are not absolutely and sinfully inconsistent with belief in the single-tax.

So for these reasons, and for others that will suggest themselves more easily, I believe that the minority would take to the idea of segregation like a duck to water. I recommend it to our politicians. There are votes in it, no end. The majority would be for it at sight, and a little explanation would bring over the minority. Aside from vote-getting, segregation would make it much easier for politicians to work out their flagitious designs on the public. There is no need of showing them how this is so, for their peculiar sagacity will assure them of it at once. Here, then, is a real plank for an enterprising party's platform. Now that the conventions are upon us again, I suggest it to the Democrats. It would re-elect their ticket without a cent of expense for votes, and then all the balance of that five-billion-dollar slush fund would be theirs to steal and waste in ways more profitable to themselves. What could be better?





THE POLITICIANS TAKE OVER

July, 1936

Now that the conventions are over, the thoughtful citizen will have plenty of chance before November to observe our political party system in its most revolting aspect. If he has nothing else to do, and if his stomach is strong enough, he can put in a whole summer watching full-grown men mincing and strutting in a filthy little competition for jobs, like Mississippi darkeys at a cakewalk. As a way of entertaining oneself, there is little to recommend it over and above the lower grade of burlesque, which it essentially resembles. When all comes to all, the role of a candidate in a campaign is that of a "stripper," affecting an insouciant nudity, and presenting himself in inviting poses which everyone knows are not to be taken seriously, but are merely a meretricious counterfeit assumed for the occasion; while the accompanying patter and ballyhoo is furnished by the gigantic wind-machine of professional politicians, publicists, editors, and a miscellaneous chorus of hangers-on.





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For those who like that kind of show, and they seem to be many, it is probably about the kind of show they like. Others, however, are inclined to regard it as dull and indecent, and to complain about the price of admission, which we all have to pay whether we like the show or not, and which forsooth is scandalously high. In fact, many are seriously dissatisfied and sore about having to dig up for these obscenities, especially as their cost increases steadily, with every sign that it will keep on increasing as long as there is a single stray dollar left in sight. After all, these grumblers say, one snappy female shape is so much like another that when you have seen one you have pretty well seen them all, so why keep up the show? Moreover, since we all know that their bawdy allure is bogus and does not mean a thing, why should we be stung so frightfully for a colossal and rather disgusting humbug?

There is a good deal to be said for this view of our great quadrennial burlesque and the innumerable local shows of the same order which are put on all over the country between times. Some notable authorities have spoken out plainly on the matter, and what they say is worth examining for the sake of showing our disgruntled citizens that they have some highly respectable opinion on their side.

As we all know, these shows are organized and stage-managed by professional politicians. What, then, is a politician? Abraham Lincoln would probably be accepted as a star witness on this point, as being a politician himself and as having mixed with politicians long enough to learn the earmarks of the breed. We may recall that his birthday was celebrated throughout the land last





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February with the customary run of political dinners and the customary run of rhetorical drivel from hollow impostors seeking to make capital out of his memory in the customary way. Next day the Baltimore *Evening Sun*, which knows a hawk from a handsaw where politicians are concerned, remarked editorially that there is one saying of Lincoln's which for some reason was not cited on any of these occasions. Here it is:

Politicians are a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people, and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a mass, at least one long step removed from common honesty.

Lincoln was the ablest politician that the United States ever produced, and I think we make take it that he knew what he was talking about. The thing to be remarked is that he was not speaking of Democratic politicians or of Republican, Socialist, Farmer-Laborite, Communist, Fascist, or any other stripe of politician. He was speaking of the politician as a genus, wherever found and under whatever label. The characteristic mark of the politician is that he has interests aside from the interests of the people, and his departure from common honesty is in the fact that while he is in a position of trust for the interests of the people, he bends those interests to advance or maintain his own. The politician is interested in jobs, and in the advantages and emoluments which accrue from the holding or distributing of jobs; and whenever this interest collides with public interest, it is always the latter that must give way.



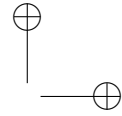
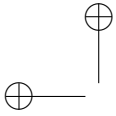


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This characteristic peculiarity is what caused another great politician, Lord Salisbury, at a period when British politics were at their best and cleanest, to say that “politics is a game, and a dirty game at that.” It is also what was in Mr. Jefferson’s mind when in 1799 he wrote Tench Coxe that “whenever a man has cast a longing eye on offices, a rottenness begins in his conduct.” The citizen would do well to post up these austere sayings side by side with Lincoln’s definition, and meditate on them prayerfully every day of this present campaign. He might in fact get a little diversion of a mild kind if he took these sayings and applied them to the behavior of every job-holder and job-seeker concerned in the campaign in any capacity from the highest to the lowest, and then decided for himself how well they fit. An honest newspaper would do an excellent public service by running them every day as a standing head for its political news. I suggest that the Baltimore *Evening Sun* should set the example.

So much for the individual politician; we may now take a brief glance at political parties and the “party system.” This campaign is launched and carried on under the name and auspices of various parties. What is a party? It is an aggregation formed around a nucleus of individual politicians; that is to say, a nucleus of men who are interested in jobs. They are interested in so-called issues or principles only so far as these may be made contributory to their interest in jobs. The only actual differentiation among them is that one is a party of job-holders, and the others are parties of job-seekers. One is in possession of the advantages accruing from the holding and distributing of jobs, and wants to keep them; the others are without those advantages, and want





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to get them. Mr. Jefferson described the party system accurately and fully in two sentences (and we notice that, like Lincoln's definition, they are never quoted by politicians):

The nest of office being too small for all of them to cuddle into at once, the contest is eternal which shall crowd the other out. For this purpose they are divided into two parties, the Ins and the Outs.

The practical outcome of the party system was described by Benjamin Franklin in a few notes that are characteristically brief and to the point. Benjamin may have had his little failings, but he has come down in history as an uncommonly sagacious and observant old boy, and it is interesting to see how exactly his view of the politician corresponds with Lincoln's.

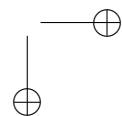
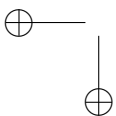
While a party is carrying on a general design, each man has his particular private interest in view.

As soon as a party has gained its general point, each member becomes intent upon his particular interest. . . .

Few in public affairs act from a mere view of the good of their country.

Fewer still in public affairs act with a view to the good of mankind.

The workings of the party system have not changed an iota since Franklin's day. While each of the parties engaged in this campaign "is carrying on a general design" to win the election, each man keeps his own interest more or less in abeyance, because if the general design fails (that is, if the party does not win), his interest fails with it. He is bound to the party by what Grover Cleveland so





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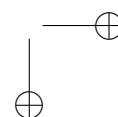
well called the cohesive power of public plunder. But he has his own interest constantly in mind, and as soon as the party “has gained its general point,” he immediately proceeds to cash in on his allegiance. This was the way the party system worked when Franklin commented on it. This is the way it has worked ever since, and the way it works now.

These matters cannot be too carefully studied. The conventions and the campaign this summer cannot be too strictly interpreted by the light which they throw on the kind of men concerned, and on the purposes which those men have in view. Just four years ago, on the eve of the convention that nominated Mr. Roosevelt, H. L. Mencken wrote in this magazine:

If I had a son, I should take him to both national conventions every four years, and let him see how his country is governed, and by what sort of men and women. . . . It is instructive to observe these great men at the solemn business of selecting a First Chief for the greatest free Republic ever seen on earth. One hears in their speeches such imbecilities as even a Methodist conference could not match. One sees them at close range, sweating, belching, munching peanuts, chasing fleas. They parade idiotically, carrying dingy flags, and macerating one another’s corns. They crowd the aisles, swapping gossip, most of it untrue. They devour hot dogs. They rush out to the saloons. They rush back to yell, fume, and vote.

II

Now let us look forward to the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. On that day one party, no matter which one, will have “gained its general point,” leaving each of its individual politicians free to become





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once more “intent upon his particular interest.” Just what does the citizen think will have been gained from all this, from the point of view of the country’s general good? What will the country at large be likely to get out of it, and in what way will it be better off, and to what extent?

Politicians having particular interests “aside from the interests of the people,” are precisely like anybody else who has particular interests. It is human nature to push those interests as far and as hard as they can be pushed without too great risks of coming a cropper. We all do that. Richard Croker, an astute politician and as frank about his vocation as Lincoln was, said that he was “working for my own pocket all the time, just like everybody else.” We may put it down then, I think, that the politician’s assiduity is limited only by what the traffic will bear.

Collectively, therefore, as the nucleus of a party, the politician behaves just as he does individually. Hence when a party “has gained its general point” and is seated in power, as one or another of our parties will be next November, it may be expected to levy on the public as heavily as it can without jeopardizing its chances of re-election. This may be seen at once to be the natural course of things, and it is what has always taken place. The former senator from Utah, Mr. Smoot, put this tendency in the form of an aphorism, which the unregenerate ironically speak of as “Smoot’s law of government.” He said that the cost of government tends steadily to rise from year to year, no matter which party is in power. This is quite true, and anyone who has gone through the foregoing analysis will see why it must be true. The





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tendency is to keep up a constant pressure on the limit of what the traffic will bear, and to push that limit steadily forward.

The prospect of popular dissatisfaction and revulsion, then, is the only check upon the politician's rapacity. Mr. Jefferson wrote austerely from Paris to Edward Carrington that "if once the people become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I and Congress and Assemblies, judges and governors, shall all become wolves. It seems to be the law of our general nature, in spite of individual exceptions." Thus sometimes, as in the period 1920-1929, politicians can profit hugely by a general spirit of careless freehandedness. Sometimes also it happens that an unusually pressing preoccupation of an adverse kind will frighten the people into a hysterical inattention which puts no limit whatever to the amount of depredation that the traffic will bear. This was the case in 1917, for example, when the people were preoccupied with war, and money was no object. It was the case also at the time of the Presidential election in 1932, when the disturbed state of the public mind opened an unexampled opportunity for raiding the citizen's pocket; and no sooner had the winning party "gained its general point" than its politicians all became wolves, precisely as Mr. Jefferson said, and went on the rampage with insatiable voracity.

This state of mind exists no longer, and the citizen may now expect a reluctant response to the demand for retrenchment. The response will be about the same, however, no matter whether the present Administration holds on or is succeeded by another, for the standard of economy will be popularly set by the record of the





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term ending in 1936 and not the term ending in 1932, or terms previous. Smoot's law will hold good, and any administration showing an economy over 1932–1936 will be acceptable, even though it shows a prodigious advance over 1928–1932 and any term before that.

So whichever way the cat may jump at the forthcoming election, the citizen stands to profit very little by any pretense or promise of economy that any party may make during the campaign, for he may put it down once for all that there is no such thing as a party of economy. Politicians of one party will steal and waste as much as those of another, since those of any and every party may be counted on to steal and waste as much as they dare; and the opportunities for stealings and wastage would obviously be no greater for one party than for another. The citizen may have the consolation, whatever it amounts to, of knowing that they are not what they were in 1932, but that is about all.

Therefore the outcome of the election would seem to make very little actual difference with the average citizen. It has long been notorious that the average American has only a sporting interest in politics. Foreign observers have remarked this and commented unfavorably on it, but it really shows the working of a sound instinct, for that is all they deserve. The pretenses of the party system have been worn so threadbare, the essential identity of all parties has become so manifest, their actual aims and objects are so clear, that it has long been impossible to regard their recurrent obscene exhibitionism with any kind of serious interest; and the instinct which leads so large a section of the public to appraise them at their true value is a sound one.





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In fact, the party system has been so far stripped of any semblance of reality that it has run clean out of plausible issues. Formerly there were some that would bear discussion, but rank betrayal ended their usefulness, and they exist no longer. The tariff was once supposed to divide Democrats from Republicans, but as an issue it has been dead as Tiberius Caesar ever since Cleveland's second term, when the Democrats sunk their knives in it. The Wilson Administration went through the motions of passing a tariff bill, but the present Administration, nominally Democratic, has not thought it worthwhile even to do that. The doctrine of State Rights was a pretty good stalking-horse for some time, but if post-Roosevelt Democrats trotted it out now they would be laughed off the face of the earth. The truth is that there is not ingenuity enough in either major party, from Brother Hoover up to Ham Fish and from Two-Job Jim Farley down to F. D. Roosevelt, to devise an issue that the veriest illiterate stevedore on the North River water-front, if he took it seriously, would not greet with a rousing Bronx cheer. Our parties have been in just that fix for years; and hence they have been reduced to putting out pitiful tattered scarecrows like free silver, Prohibition, and unemployment relief, which would not deceive a canary bird.

Hence the citizen need have but little trouble in forecasting what this election will bring him. If he takes the campaign and the election in the right spirit, he will get some education out of them, and that, after all, is the great thing where politics are concerned; but he will get little else that is worth getting.





THE SOCIAL SECURITY FAD

August, 1936

When I looked in at THE MERCURY's office the other day, the editor met me with what Artemus Ward called "a swinister expression onto his countenance," and asked if I would like to see just one single month's output of books on this fine new subject of Social Security. Well, I thought, since my job is to observe the state of the Union, I suppose I have to take the fat with the lean, so I said I would. There were thirteen of them, thirteen books on that one subject, all published in one month, and in that month there were twenty-six working days for printers, which means that one book on social security was published every forty-eight hours during that period. It looks like a record. I have heard lately that the publishing business is shot to rags, and the sight of that pile of books made me think that, if it is not, it ought to be.

One of the books is a satirical play, and three others deal with the subject in a more or less literary fashion,





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with no particular ax to grind, so we will count those out. The nine remaining are deadly serious. They are serious with all the dull, unimaginative, painstaking, statistical seriousness of the truly consecrated Uplifter, which makes the task of going through them a terrible business. The reader need not fear that I am setting out to review them, for I am not. Fortunately for me, all that sort of thing is in Mr. Stallings' department, and I have no notion of barging in on it. This avalanche of books, however, does show something significant about the state of the Union, and that is what I wish to point out.

All these writers assume, in the first place, that Social Security is a proper concern of government. In the second place, they assume that the State (by which they mean whatever crew of job-holders is in office at the moment) has something more than a purely electioneering interest in it. Third, they assume that the State (again meaning the crew of job-holders aforesaid) may be trusted to administer a program of Social Security honestly, efficiently, and at least as cheaply as it could be administered by some extra-political or non-political method. Fourth, every plan they propose contemplates a distinct reduction of individual liberty, and tends to make the individual still more the State's chattel than he now is. Moreover, they all take for granted, as Mr. Mussolini does, that this submergence of the individual is right and proper, because the State (*i.e.*, the crew of job-holders) is an enlightened and purely social institution which is out for the greatest good to the greatest number, and has no other interest or set of interests at stake in submerging him.





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The interesting thing about all these assumptions is the utterly naive and matter-of-fact way by which they are made to appear. They are not discussed or argued, not even stated in set terms. They merely pervade and color the whole texture of the work, as ink pervades blotting-paper. The authors seem actually not to know that they are even debatable. They treat them as the mathematician treats the axioms of geometry. Now, the point is that they would not do this if they had any doubt about their readers also accepting them in the same unquestioning way. When a mathematician tacitly assumes that the whole is equal to the sum of all its parts, he has no doubt that his assumption will be accepted without question as a self-evident truth; and that is the attitude of these authors in expounding their various doctrines of Social Security,

Here, then, is where we get a look at the state of the Union. If the people of this country really do agree with these assumptions and regard them as axiomatic, then the Union is in an extremely bad state, for each and all of them are thoroughly unsound. My impression is that the people do agree with them, and my earnest conviction is that if they do not wake up pretty promptly and see what sort of thing it is that they are agreeing with, they will land in as fine a mess as their European brethren are in, and for the same reason.

The legitimate concern of government is with two things only: freedom and justice. Its whole duty is summed up in safeguarding the liberties of the subject, and in making justice costless and easily accessible. The moment you go beyond this, the moment you make government responsible for Helping Business, for Redis-





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tributing Wealth, for Unemployment Relief, for Social Security, or for anything whatever but the discharge of those two functions, you change the basic character of government. That moment you convert it into an all-powerful machine for the distribution of economic advantage, an instrument which can be got hold of and used to help oneself and hurt somebody else. That moment, in short, government ceases to be a social institution and becomes an antisocial institution.

If government in America had attended strictly to its own business from the beginning, if it had concerned itself with freedom and justice and nothing else, we would not now be hearing a word about Social Security. All our present difficulties are due to its never having done that. On the contrary, it has progressively invaded and confiscated the liberties of the subject, and it has made its disregard of justice a byword throughout the world. From the beginning it has been a mere mechanism for the distribution of economic privilege through hiring out its taxing power for a political *quid pro quo* from whatsoever pressure-group bid highest. First, landholders got a privilege; then industrialists; then money-lenders, speculators, shavers; latterly farmers, bonus-seekers, and the like; while four years ago Mr. Roosevelt completed the circle of privileged classes and mobilized what will in time, no doubt, turn out to be the most powerful pressure-group of all, by bringing in the hoboes. All this has confirmed the people in a settled belief that government is something to be run to and leaned on for economic coddling; and it is this belief that colors every page of these writers on Social Security.





THE SOCIAL SECURITY FAD

II

It surely takes no great intelligence to perceive how this idea of the function of government would immediately bring forward a class of men who are nothing more nor less (and who regard themselves as nothing more nor less) than merchandisers of privilege. Such men naturally gravitate into politics, make themselves the nucleus of parties, and their recurrent party-contests, such as the one we are now witnessing, are merely contests for control and management of the huge taxing machine. Hence the second assumption that our authors make – the assumption that they disinterestedly care two straws for Social Security – is seen at once to be puerile. Not being in politics for their health, these men allocate privilege where it will do them the most good. They are out for votes, in order to hold their jobs; then as an anchor to windward, they are out for patronage and for whatever perquisites can be conveniently picked up. If, therefore, the issuance of a privilege gives promise of a satisfactory return in votes, patronage, and perquisites, they will issue it; but if not, then not.

Everyone knows that this is so. Any issue of any newspaper presents abundant evidence that it is so, and it also presents evidence that both the paper and its readers know it is so. But there is a strict convention against naming the fact in plain terms, like the Victorian convention against naming certain parts and functions of the human body. When we name it at all, we call it by some euphemism like Playing Politics, instead of calling it damned thieving, blackguardly scoundrelism, which is precisely what it is. Nevertheless, convention or no





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convention, there the fact stands, just as legs were legs in Victoria's day, and we all know it, and in the light of this knowledge the second assumption of our authors shows itself to be pure silliness. Can anyone imagine any of the professional politicians who are to the front this summer – say Mr. Farley, say Mr. Roosevelt – looking for one moment at Social Security with a non-professional eye? If anyone can do this, he should be advised to capitalize his imagination in the motion-picture business, for it would make his everlasting fortune.

These same considerations also destroy our authors' third assumption, which is that State-managed Social Security would be managed at least as honestly, efficiently, and cheaply as it would be under private management. Has anyone ever seen or heard of any State-managed enterprise which filled that bill? I doubt it. If the testimony of an unbroken record goes for anything, I think we may take it that State-managed Social Security would be made merely another snug nest for bureaucracy, favoritism, wastefulness, and graft; otherwise no politician could be got to touch it with a ten-foot pole – why should he? People who cherish any illusions on this point may be advised to compare the overhead on State-managed Relief with the overhead on privately-managed enterprises of the same kind. If they are still doubtful, and wish to press their investigation further, let them tackle the general question why a State-managed dollar never goes as far as a privately-managed dollar. Notoriously it never does, and there must be some reason why – well, what is the reason? Or, further, let them inquire into the circumstances that give rise to the formula known as Smoot's Law of Government, which is that the cost





THE SOCIAL SECURITY FAD

of government tends steadily to rise year by year, no matter which party is in power.

The fourth assumption is interesting because it marks our authors as simon-pure liberals. I have known many liberals, and I never yet knew one who was not keen for aggrandizing the power of the State, and for bringing the individual ever further and further under State control. It is instructive to compare the old-line Tory's respect for the liberties of the subject with that of the liberal. Was it the liberal Asquith, Grey, Lloyd-George and Co., who broke up the first draft of the Defense of the Realm Act? No, it was old Halsbury who got up and said that never as long as he lived would he stand by and see the fundamental rights of British subjects abrogated; and if the Realm had to be defended that way, the Realm might go to pot. The diehard Tory had his faults, but he also had the fixed idea that some things simply are not done, that some respect is due to a principle, and that one must speak up for a principle even if one has to hold one's nose meanwhile.

I never saw or heard of a liberal who had any such idea as that, or who seemed to have any trouble about persuading himself that a little matter like the liberties of the subject might properly be confiscated in behalf of the Larger Good. Taking our Supreme Court as it stands, which group of justices would be naturally in favor of giving the citizen the largest margin of existence to dispose of as he durned pleases? Would it be the liberal justices, Stone, Brandeis, Cardozo? I doubt it. If my own constitutional liberties were at stake, I would say, give me *McReynolds et al.* world without end. I have long thought that the professed liberal is the real





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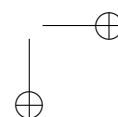
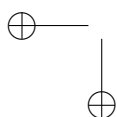
collectivist, and the four years of Mr. Roosevelt's regime seem to have smoked him out into the open as such.

The long and short of it is that all this pother about Social Security is one of those recurrent moral epidemics that our country is continually breeding. Apparently our people can never be contented unless a moral epidemic is running in double harness with a social epidemic like mahjong, midget golf, or bare legs. Hence at one time or another we get up a great furore about Abolitionism, Imperialism, Prohibition, the League of Nations – anything will do, and the sillier the better. Politicians appraise these outbreaks calmly for what they can get out of them, and trim their sails accordingly. Just now Social Security in its various forms, from Townsendism up and down, is heading the political best-seller list, and our politicians are promptly on hand to work it for all it is worth.

The mischief of such books as I have been describing is that they play straight into the politician's hand. A letter which I received this morning lays bare their root-vice very cleanly:

At present, all schemes seem bent on cajoling governments to ameliorate our predicament. Nowhere do men seem to understand that progress is made by those who go ahead with their views, with the aid of voluntary participants, rather in spite of governments than through them.

There you have it. If that is the case with our people, as these books show it undoubtedly is, I submit that the state of the Union is about as unpromising as imbecility can make it.





KEEPING OUR SHIRTS ON

September, 1936

The Germans have a good proverb about “throwing out the baby with the bath-water.” They use it to describe a person who is in such a sweat to make a clean sweep of something that he sweeps out a lot of good things with the bad. When we look over “the American way” of doing things, we have to admit that a little attention to this proverb would have come in uncommonly handy at any number of points in our history, especially when we had to deal with what we call a Crisis. When one of these disturbances comes up, the American way of dealing with it is by getting ourselves into a childish frame of mind, part panic and part tantrum, and then plunging at the thing like a herd of scared bulls. Nothing annoys an American more than the charge of infantilism, but if that is not precisely a child’s reaction to something he does not like and is afraid of, then there is no such thing as infantilism in the world.





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For example, see what we did with Negro slavery eighty years ago. Slavery was a great wrong, a great evil, not an unmixed evil by any means, but a great one, so great that what few sincere defenders it had were hard pressed for arguments that were even halfway plausible. It was on its way out. Time, patience, and economic pressure would have taken care of it in other parts of the country, as they had already taken care of it in the North, without cost or disturbance. No institution, as we all know, can long withstand the erosive action of economic self-interest. If we had left slavery to be taken care of in a natural way, by time, patience, and the operation of economic forces, there would not be a vestige of it left by now, and no bills to pay.

But no. Nothing would do but we must throw out the pickaninny with the bathwater, and out he went. We did not stop to remember that nature puts inexorable conditions on human activity, and that if you disregard them you come to grief. If you brought an automobile instantly from a state of rest to a speed of sixty miles an hour, you would not have any automobile; the heat generated would send it up in smoke. We did not solve any problem; we merely converted the slavery problem into the Negro problem, which is with us yet. As Mr. Dooley said, what we did was to turn the Negro out of the pantry into the cellar; and as for the new problems which we created collaterally, we did so well that we came pretty near not having any country left.

The simple fact was that we had a numerous race of agricultural specialists on our hands, and we did not have sense enough to see that reconditioning them to the requirements of an entirely new status was a most delicate





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business, demanding a great deal of time, patience, and intelligence; and no one knows when we shall get through paying the bill for that piece of destructive stupidity. Now that we are beginning to see that the true martyr of the Civil War was not Lincoln but Johnson, we may in time discover (I do not say we shall, but we may) that the nearest thing to a statesman in public office in that whole period was old Ten-Cent Jim Buchanan. It must be said for Lincoln that he followed Buchanan's policy as faithfully and as long as he could, until the combined pressure of hen-brained fanaticism and unscrupulous economic interest was too much for him.

That experience taught us nothing. Half a century later we did the same thing in the same large way in our approach to the liquor problem. To begin with, all there ever was to that problem was State-created, by making alcohol a source of revenue. Nature runs to alcohol so easily and freely that if it were produced and marketed tax-free, like onions, nobody would put up with bad liquor any more than one puts up with spoiled onions. Nobody would be driven to hard drinks – wine and beer would be too cheap – and nobody could afford to keep a saloon. The Prohibitionists have never known how right they are in blaming the State for a wholesale debauchery of its people.

Nevertheless, like slavery, that problem was well on its way out when our people suddenly went into one of their irrational hot fits about it. When the Eighteenth Amendment was passed, we were the nearest we ever were to being a temperate people. In spite of all the State could do to promote the abuse of liquor, social power was attending to the matter in a thoroughly com-





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petent way. A steadily growing force of repression and discouragement was being brought to bear from many different sources, and the problem, such as it was, could be seen approaching as near a solution as will ever be possible until the State withdraws its high premium on debauchery. But this would not do. Nothing would do but an insane policy of smashing and scatteration, the effects of which are too well known to need describing. All one need say is that we are not yet through paying the bill for that run of midsummer madness, nor shall we be through for another two or three generations, if not longer.

One might suppose that two such utter duds as we have staged within a century – and we have staged many more than those two – would show us that we had better try some other method of approach against whatever public enemy may be our especial pet of the moment. Yet here we are again, valiantly fronting up to another scarecrow in the good old traditional way. The course of American business after the Civil War brought serious evils in its wake, evils that again were chiefly State-created or State-fostered, but at all events such as were bound sooner or later to snarl things up in an extremely bad mess, and they did so. Might it not be supposed, I repeat, that a people who by the grace of Providence had come through such appalling spells of suicidal jack-assery would have learned enough to dodge the chance of another, and would decide to keep cool until they had weighed and measured the actual necessities of the situation? But no, once more nothing like that will do. Nothing will do but to knock all business in the head at once, and butcher it to make a hoodlum holiday for the





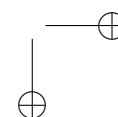
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very worst and most dangerous set of beings that can be found in the whole country.

That is our notion of the way to end our economic troubles. Mr. Roosevelt has made himself the public interpreter of that idea, which is what makes the chance of his reelection such a serious matter. The people dismissed Mr. Hoover four years ago in a sheer tantrum, and aside from the subsidized vote, it will be people in a tantrum who will re-elect Mr. Roosevelt, if he be re-elected – people in a tantrum which Mr. Roosevelt and his associates have most astutely encouraged and abetted. Only last night, for example, a man high in his profession, an engineer holding a position of great responsibility, told me that he was in favor of looking after the poor man and letting the Astors and Morgans look after themselves, so he meant to vote for Mr. Roosevelt. Obviously this was a mere childish echo of Mr. Roosevelt's speech of acceptance. I said nothing in reply, for there was nothing to say – at least, nothing polite – but I went away thinking how completely the American gives his own measure when he resents being told, as we were told in the public press five or six years ago by an artist of repute, now dead, that America is “a country of children and morons, governed by scoundrels.”

II

We are prone to laugh at the English and call them unprogressive because they do not like to change things unless they have to or to change them any more than they have to. When they put in modern plumbing,





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they clung to the old style and shape of washbowl, and when they first built railway cars, they made them as much like stagecoaches as they could. Around all their institutions they leave a fringe of things which seem pretty useless, but which have always been there, and since there seems no need of disturbing them they let them stay. Apparently they do it on the chance that there may be something in them which perhaps nobody can quite put his finger on, but yet might have value. As far as one can generalize about a whole people, the English seem to be the original Missourians. If you show them that it is necessary to change something, they will change it as far as necessary, but no farther.

They also take a good deal of showing. Showing them that a change is admissible or even desirable will not answer; you have to show them that it is necessary, for if it is not necessary, they will take that fact as a compelling reason for not changing. That sort of thing can be overdone, of course, as everybody knows, but my point is that it can also be underdone, and the state of the Union shows how little we are aware that we are underdoing it. There we have one good reason why, when the hated British get into a jam, they usually do so much better with it than we do. After centuries of tough experience they appear to have got two things pretty firmly fixed in their heads. First, that a bargain is never a bargain unless the other fellow gets something out of it; and second, as Lord Falkland put it, that “when it is not *necessary* to change, it is necessary *not* to change.” We have never learned either of these valuable truths, and until we do learn them the state of the Union will be reported periodically as much unsettled.





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I am writing this on the tenth of July. Perhaps some readers will remember the period. Reports from the West today might make one think the Lord had decided that if Mr. Wallace has gone in for an “economy of scarcity,” He will show him what one looks like when a real expert takes hold. It makes one wonder how much of that pig-killing, crop-restricting jamboree of last year was actually necessary. I wonder how Mr. Wallace’s policy will look to our housewives even as soon as when these words get into print. Women are said to be great realists, and I wonder what they will think of the economy of scarcity while they are trying to stretch their housekeeping money over scarcity-prices this autumn.

When contemplating changes, it is better to stick pretty close to the line of necessity, for you can never tell whether the forces of nature are on your side, and if it turns out that they are not, the smaller the mess you have made, the better. There is the trouble with so much of the planned-economy business. If you could put God in a Nazi uniform and order Him around, the thing might work, but for one reason or another that does not seem practicable. You can get a long way with some piece of planned economy, until you run aground on a natural law that you did not know was there and never counted on, like the law of diminishing returns, or the law of wages, or the law of exchange, or Gresham’s law – and there you are. One of the present Administration’s choicest novelties is now stuck hard and fast on the primary law of economics, that “man tends always to satisfy his needs and desires with the least possible exertion,” and probably no one in the Administration ever heard that such a law exists.





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We all remember Mr. Roosevelt's announcement that his policy would be to do something, and if it worked, do it some more; if not, to drop it and do something else. Our people were delighted with this because, as I have shown, it is hundred-per-cent American policy. But the trouble is that not all the results of a policy show right away. Some of them do not show for a long time, and these may be the ones that will send the whole enterprise into the red. The worst results of our anti-slavery policy were those that nobody foresaw, and they did not come out into the open for thirty years.

A little British caution towards unnecessary change would do us no harm; there is no danger that we shall ever overdo it. Our politico-economic practitioners and their policies remind one of the frontier doctor who told the mother of a sick child that "thish-yer boy has got the smallpox, and I ain't posted up on that. You must give the little cuss this medicine. That'll send him into fits, and then you call me in again, for I'm a stunner on fits." We took the medicine and we got the fits, but whether we are ahead on the original malady, and whether we are justified in calling in the same doctor again, may be regarded as doubtful. But whether we call in the same doctor, or another, or none at all, the Union will be in a state of chronic disorder until we ourselves get over our belief in the nostrum of change for change's sake.

The best advice Artemus Ward ever gave Lincoln was in regard to his Secretary of War:

Tell E. Stanton that his boldness, honesty, and vigger merits all praise, but to keep his undergarments on. E. Stanton has



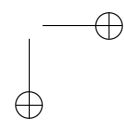


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apparently only one weakness, which it is he can't allers keep his undergarments from flyin up over his hed.

This advice should be impressed upon our public servants today. Nothing is more necessary. But we shall not get far with impressing it on them until we have impressed it upon ourselves. If under all circumstances and conditions we show them that we know how to keep our undergarments on, they will quickly take the cue from us. If, on the other hand, at the first sight of trouble or disturbance we do as we have always done and resolve ourselves into a rabble bent on seeing who can make his undergarments fly highest, they will merely try to outdo us in that repulsive rivalry.







VICTORY BY RETREAT

October, 1936

General de Caulaincourt's memoirs,* which have been published recently, give us a vivid sense of the strategy employed against Napoleon by Russia's great deliverer, Prince Mikhail Illarionovich Kutusov-Golenishchev. It was much like the classical strategy of the Scythians, and even more like that which won for the Roman general, Fabius, the surname of Cuncrator. The Russian policy was laid out on a grand scale. The French invaders were keen for battle, but "that devil Kutusov," as Napoleon called him, persistently refused to accommodate them. Once in a while, to satisfy his subordinates, he went through the motions of taking a stand, as at Tarutino and Krasnog, but always against his own judgment; and after Borodino, as Count Tolstoi remarks, "he alone did everything in his power to hold the Russian army back from useless fighting." Technically, Napoleon won the bat-

* *With Napoleon in Russia. The Memoirs of General de Caulaincourt.* Edited by Jean Hanoteau. William Morrow; New York.





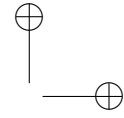
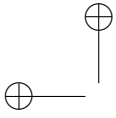
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tle of Borodino, and all Russia except Kutusov regarded it as a terrible defeat. He knew it was a great victory, and time proved that he was right. When Napoleon went forth to renew the battle next day, Kutusov was not there; nobody was there; the French found themselves standing in the middle of all outdoors with no one to tell them where Kutusov was, or even which way he had gone.

They pushed on past Mozhaisk to Moscow, and were disappointed again; no Kutusov, no army, nobody, a deserted city. Then the fire, then presently the Great Retreat, with Kutusov acting as a sort of escort or guard of honor, ushering Napoleon back over the border. There was little fighting, practically none except some occasional irregular warfare waged by roving bands of guerillas and Cossacks; the armies never actually met. Some authorities have criticized Kutusov for dealing so gently with the erring, but the severest critic can hardly help noticing that not more than one per cent of the Grand Army lived to cross the frontier.

My purpose in citing Caulaincourt's book is, first, to suggest that the strategy which Kutusov applied to his peculiar military problems is also applicable by society in a broad general way to civil and social problems. Indeed, in many instances it is so manifestly the soundest and wisest strategy for society to employ, that any alternative is mere rank foolishness. Then in the second place, I wish to remark the curious fact that in spite of all this, society never does employ it, but on the contrary seems unable even to understand it, as the French were. A few illustrations will make these two points clear, and I will





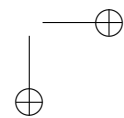
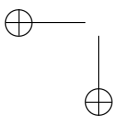
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begin with one that is supplied by another book which we have all been looking into lately.*

The thing about this book that perhaps most interests the reflective reader is Dr. Carrel's analysis of the physical, moral, and mental effect of our sudden transition to what we call an "arm-chair civilization." Science has flattened out most of the obstacles which nature puts in the pathway to an effortless life; it has largely reduced the routine of existence to a matter of throwing switches and pushing buttons. It now appears that the balance of loss and gain ensuing on this change is by no means what it should be, and that something should be done to redress it.

For instance, Dr. Carrel cites figures showing that in New York State one person out of every twenty-two, at some period of his life, does a turn in the lunatic asylum. In the country at large, new admissions to the asylums come to about 68,000 a year; and besides the insane, there are 500,000 feeble-minded, 400,000 children too unintelligent to follow the work of the elementary schools, and unregistered psycho-neurotics estimated in the hundred-thousands. Dr. Carrel observes that at the present rate, about 1,000,000 of the children and young people who are today attending schools and colleges will sooner or later be confined in asylums. Some corroboration of all this appears in the statement made recently before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, by a psychiatrist on the staff at Johns Hopkins Hospital, that whereas insanity had never increased more than ten per cent in any decade hitherto, it has increased

* *Man, the Unknown*, by Alexis Carrel. Harpers; New York.





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twenty per cent in the decade now ending. Not long ago, also, a physician who keeps tab on such matters and presumably should know, told me that taking the entire hospital-population of the country in a lump "as is," one patient out of every five is touched with *dementia precox*.

It does not take many such debit-items as these to bring down the general average of intelligence to a pretty low level. No wonder, one says at once, that our politics, our journalism, literature, drama, our commercial amusements, our views of life, and our demands on life, are so extremely discreditable. No wonder that the vagaries of the New Deal swept the country, and that the Townsend Plan commands signatures by the million. But that is beside the mark. The thing to be observed is that no one has any suggestion for meeting this state of things other than by frontal defense; by building more asylums, elaborating new systems of care and "re-education," perfecting new methods of treatment, and so on. But dearly, even supposing that this strategy worked perfectly in all cases and beat the enemy every time, like Napoleon, it yet does not get society anywhere. The general morale steadily lowers, a progressive debility sets in as it did in the French army, and all the enemy need do is to watch and wait.

But suppose society refused to meet the enemy on his own terms, or on any terms, and simply backed up. Suppose it perceived that a mechanized, push-button existence is enervating and disheveling, perceived that the obstacles and resistances which nature puts up as a bar to easy living are indispensable aids and accompaniments to a collective physical, mental, and moral soundness. Suppose, then, that instead of continually struggling to





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adapt the race to the fixed requirements of a suspect civilization, it should resolutely back up in its tracks and adapt civilization to the fixed requirements of the race – suppose, that is, that it ruthlessly de-mechanized and de-push-buttonized human existence, and re-erected the hurdles that science has broken down.

This method of dealing with a social enemy is slow and uninteresting. It is so dead against every accepted idea of “progress” that probably not ten persons in a million could get it through their heads. At first sight it also seems wantonly destructive and costly. On all these counts, therefore, society would reject it as utterly fantastic and preposterous; one can imagine the cries of dismay and resentment that would go up from all quarters if it were ever seriously proposed. Nevertheless one may remember that when Kutusov was through with Napoleon, believe me, he was through with him. Moreover, when he was through, Napoleon also was through, through for good and all. Waterloo was only a *coup de grâce*.

II

Let us shift the discussion to another field. It seems that what we call Big Business has for some time been growing unwieldy. Not only its size and spread, but also the complexity of its relations and the delicacy of adjustment which they entail, make it so sensitive and “kittle,” as the Scots say, that it puts a breaking strain on those who manage it. Recent happenings in business seem to suggest that this state of things is disadvantageous





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and that it ought to be improved; and so far, our efforts to improve it have not been so successful as we hoped they might be, chiefly because our strategy, as always, has been to meet the difficulty squarely with a frontal defense. At the very first skirmish, society encouraged the government to step in and offer a pitched battle, and it now seems certain that the last state of our campaign will be worse than the first. No social danger due to the original complications has been permanently disposed of, and the effect of the new complications has been merely to introduce new dangers which are far more serious than those which our strategy was designed to avert.

Suppose, however, that instead of trying to meet this situation face to face, society had deliberately backed up, and backed up far enough to be well in the clear of any debatable ground. Kutusov did not only back up on Moscow; he went straight through it and kept going for seventy miles. Suppose society made up its mind to shift its economic structure entirely away from the basis of big business to the basis of small business, and deliberately reverted to the local cracker-barrel stage of industry and commerce. We have all observed, I suppose, the extraordinary amount of pressure that the economic structure of France seems able to stand by comparison with ours. As I write, it shows signs of giving way under the terrific pressure of the last two years; yet it has shown these signs many times before and still managed to hold together. I have heard it said that this remarkable power of resistance is chiefly due to the fact that the French structure rests on a foundation of small business rather than on big business, as ours does; a foundation of 5,000,000 small-holding landed proprietors, and 800,000





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small independent business enterprises. I do not know enough about such matters to be entitled to an opinion on the soundness of this theory, but it looks plausible.

Again, shifting the discussion to the field of politics, we have lately come face to face with some extremely disturbing realities. Our steady progress in centralization, begun in 1789, has brought us to a pass where every American finds himself virtually living for the State. The governmental machine absorbs so much of his earnings that he may now be said to be working mainly for the State; and its inquisitions, coercions, supervisions, regulations, leave him so small a margin of existence to dispose of as he pleases that his status is hardly distinguishable from involuntary servitude. The worst of it is, moreover, that with a century and a half of acceleration behind it, this progress is likely to go on until such vestiges of economic and political self-determination as remain to the individual disappear bodily in a regime of collectivism.

In the face of this prospect, all the proposals for decentralization that I have so far heard of do not go beyond the old-established line of state sovereignty; they contemplate merely a repartition of power between the largest political unit and the next largest. This is a retreat, no doubt, but a very short one, too short to do any good. Suppose, however, that society should retreat the full distance and lodge the whole sovereign power (which includes the exclusive right to levy taxes) in the smallest political unit – the rural township and the urban ward – thus decomposing our present union of nominally sovereign states into a union of actually sovereign townships.





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Absurd as this suggestion appears, or would appear if it were made seriously, there is great interest in remarking that every polity which calls itself republican must finally come to just this, or else give up the republican system as impracticable. As far back as the beginning of the eighteenth century, Montesquieu perceived that a republican system is practicable only in a very small unit; and as we all know, Mr. Jefferson held to the same view – he says in a letter to John Taylor, written in 1816, that “such a government is evidently restrained to very narrow limits of space and population. I doubt if it would be practicable beyond the extent of a New England township.” Absurd as the idea of township-sovereignty may seem, it is not nearly so absurd as the notion that a republican system can possibly be stretched over an area as large and populous as France, Spain, the United States, or even Delaware or Rhode Island. Our self-styled modern republics are not republics, they are nothing like republics. They are merely the sort of thing, as the great Guizot contemptuously said, that “begins with Plato, and necessarily ends with a policeman.”

This discussion can be extended indefinitely. For example, suppose society should weary of its fruitless efforts to educate the ineducable, and should back up all the way to the severe and sensible selective system proposed by Mr. Jefferson in the plan that he drew up for public education in Virginia. It would mean the permanent closing of at least ninety per cent of our schools, colleges, and universities, and no doubt this would be regarded as a calamity worse than the burning of Moscow. Yet clearly the only alternative is dragging out a hopeless conflict with the unbeatable forces of nature. Today our





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educational system is a butt for the wit of paragraphs and cartoonists, and deservedly so, for it is based on the assumption that everybody is educable, while the fact before our eyes is that there are not enough educable persons in all New England to half-fill Harvard University; not enough between Baton Rouge and Baltimore to make any profitable use of ten per cent of the facilities available in that area. Doggedly fighting it out on the line of this appalling anomaly "if it takes all summer," can have but one end.

Yet in such circumstances, this is all that society ever has any idea of doing. Society never retreats or retrenches except under compulsion, usually of a severe type, such as is furnished by war, pestilence, or famine. Like the French in Russia, it does not understand such tactics, does not know anything about them, and bitterly resents the thought of applying them, even when they are most obviously the only ones that can show any chance whatever of relieving the situation that society confronts.

Well then, since this is so, since society never does and apparently never can apply this strategy, what is the use of talking about it? If the discussion is academic, why waste time over it? For no reason whatever, as far as the average person is concerned, and as far as society, which reflects the capacities of the average person, is concerned. Nothing could be more futile than expounding this strategy to such hearers, and no one in his right mind would attempt it. But though nowadays the average person is glorified beyond all conscience, though he dominates our present civilization and shapes it to his own measure, he is still not quite all there is in the world. The exceptional person does exist – in a sort of Robin Hood





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existence, perhaps, more or less outlawed, but he exists – and the exceptional person may find that this discussion has some value for him, because he is able to do what society cannot do. He has the *savoir se gêner*, which the average person, and the composite-average which we call society, have not. That is to say, he is capable of putting effective pressure on himself in a direction exactly opposite to his natural inclinations, for no reason in the world except a sense of the disciplinary value of so doing. He does it merely because he feels he cannot afford not to do it.

So possibly a discussion of Kutusov's strategy may encourage the exceptional person to be still more careful about taking up with many things which our civilization urges on him, and which fall in with his natural inclinations and desires. It may help him to turn a fishy eye on them, to sift them and shake them down, and take plenty of time to decide whether or not it would be better for him in the long run to back up, all things considered. A rising stock market, for instance, or this-and-that attractive gadget of an arm-chair existence, or the New Deal, or somebody's fine plausible prospectus of the More Abundant Life – well, what about it? Inclination and desire urge him to go in for it headlong, but this discussion may help him to take a long look forward and backward on all the offsets, physical, mental, moral, financial, and decide whether it is really worth the price. Nine times out of ten, probably, he will find that it would be money in his pocket, figuratively speaking, to back up.





THE STATE CAN DO NO WRONG

November, 1936

Now that the campaign is ending, our citizens are presumably deciding whether to vote for Tweedledee or Tweedledum, and speculating on what is likely to happen to the country if either ticket wins. It was clear from the first that the campaign would boil down to the one old familiar issue, which is whether we shall be blackmailed for the next four years to support a horde of deserving Democrats or a horde of deserving Republicans. This is the only real issue that has existed in American politics since the Civil War, and it is the only one that exists now. Hence those who hold no material stake in this issue may well decide that it is all the same to them which ticket wins or loses, and all the same to the country whether they drop their vote in the ballot box or in the ash barrel.

The reason for this state of things is worth investigating. It lies in the popular idea of the moral character of government. In the old days the idea was that a king got





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his commission straight from God, and therefore he was exempt from the moral sanctions that were binding upon everybody else. The moral character of his acts was not open to question by anyone. He might do whatever he liked – lie, steal, cheat, commit all sorts of oppressions, mayhems, adulteries, murders – and, as we say, get away with it under the special moral sanction that “the King can do no wrong.”

We have now pretty generally got rid of kings and substituted a system of parliaments and executives who administer what we call the State; and now the question is, what is the popular idea about the State? Are the parliaments and executives answerable to the moral standards set for other people, or have we the idea that they may do anything they like because they represent the State, or actually *are* the State for the time being, and can do no wrong?

In one view of this question, the State is a social agency set up by the people to safeguard their freedom and distribute justice. This is the republican view, according to the Declaration of Independence, which says that “to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men,” and says further that government derives its just powers, not from God, but from “the consent of the governed.” In this view, obviously, the government may not do anything it likes; it is merely an agency with a clearly specified function, a definite job. It is not morally irresponsible; on the contrary, it is answerable to moral judgment, like any other social agency. Having been created by the people, it may not arrogate to itself any exemption from the ethical code of its creator. By consequence, those who administer the government may





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not do anything they like. There is no margin of permissible misconduct allowed them. They are merely agents, public servants, no more, no less. The President of the United States is precisely what the late Mr. Bryan said he is, “the people’s hired man,” and in the discharge of his specified duties he is open to judgment by exactly the same standards of integrity that we apply to the conduct of a bank manager or a train dispatcher, a butler or a housemaid.

In another view, however, the State is entirely dissociated from moral considerations. Like the old-time king, it stands alone, outside any ethical code, with no prescribed duty to anyone, and no responsibility but to itself; it is its own judge of its own acts. As Mussolini puts it, “The State embraces everything, and nothing has value outside the State. The State creates right.” In this view, whatever the State disallows is wrong, because the State disallows it; and whatever the State allows is right, because the State allows it. There is no other criterion of right and wrong but the approval or disapproval of the State. There is no criterion of justice between man and man except the interest of the State. If what one man does to another affects the State favorably, it is just – even fraud, arson, theft, murder – and if unfavorably, it is unjust.

This is the old absolutist idea, expressed in a new formula, as against the republican idea. It merely transmogrifies the divine right of kings into the divine right of parliaments, executives, dictators. Hegel puts this plainly when he says that “the State incarnates the divine idea upon earth.” Its essence is that the people exist to maintain and magnify the State. The republican idea





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is that the State exists to protect and prosper the people in their rights and liberties. Thus Fascism, Communism, Hitlerism, Stalinism, are all essentially the same thing. Their superficial differences amount to nothing more than catchwords and claptrap.

We have seen the progress of the absolutist idea in Europe, and we have perceived that the significant thing is that whereas formerly only the few who made up the "ruling classes" were penetrated by it, nowadays immense numbers of people are penetrated by it. Hence, as we see in the case of Spain, any disturbance of stability in the public order opens the way for any adventurer to come forward and establish himself by popular acceptance of any and every act of crime that he may commit on the pretext of "assuring the position of the State." Thus after the French Revolution, a man of no name, no tradition, no habits, no character, no convictions, not even a Frenchman, made himself the State; that is, he made himself master of a people thoroughly impregnated with the absolutist idea, and by a course of inconceivable crime set Europe on fire from end to end. Thus again of late in Germany another, not even a German, assembles a horde of fanatics and desperadoes, and by sheer violence makes himself the State; thus in Italy another, a Socialist agitator and journalist, heads a mob of vicious lazzaroni in a march on Rome, and makes himself the State. Thus in Turkey, thus in Poland, thus in Hungary, thus in Portugal, and so on.

From all this we may see that the dangerous thing is not what actually happens here or there, but the general subversion of moral theory with respect to the State, for this subversion permits anything not only to happen





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but to be approved. Loose talk about “it can’t happen here” is crudely superficial. Given a people thoroughly penetrated with the idea that the State may do anything it likes and can do no wrong, and anything inimical to the interest of the people can happen anywhere. It may not take place by force of arms, nor be attended by bloodshed and rapine; it may take place by normal and familiar processes of political chicanery. In this country, for example, the most exorbitant confiscations of public interest to “assure the position of the State” have lately been effected in this way. The danger is never in the overt acts, for they can be got over; it is in the ethical estimate of such acts as right and just.

As with the State, so with the political party. In the struggle to get control of the State’s machinery, the most flagitious misdemeanors are divested of any moral character in the estimation of the public, on the ground that the party shares the moral exemptions accorded the State. Mendacity, duplicity, breach of trust, diversion of public money to party purposes, are accepted as acts having no moral quality. Moreover, as with the party, so with the candidate. The general view of the State as an amoral entity, inevitably and powerfully stimulates the ambition of the type of person who is best qualified, and also most eagerly disposed, to profit by it and presume upon it to the utmost. His party platform, his campaign promises, his pre-election agreements, his declarations of political principle, his expressions of deep solicitude, are accepted as a kind of ritual – really, as so many signboards reading, *Do not trust me* – and their prompt repudiation, when it comes, is not reprehended on moral grounds.





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Finally as with the State, the party, and the candidate, so also with the elected incumbent. His election qualifies him as a chartered libertine; his certificate of election is a letter of marque-and-reprisal, exempting him from all moral considerations in “assuring the position of the State” – that is, in assuring his own continuance and that of his party in control of the State’s machinery. To promote this purpose he may do anything he likes without incurring any risk of collision with the public’s moral sense; in certain circumstances, even, he may be assured of the most enthusiastic popular acclaim for acts which if committed in a private capacity would mark him forever as a knave and a dog. The only consideration he need take into account is “what the traffic will bear.”

And here we come in sight of the question raised at the beginning of this paper. Whichever party wins, whichever candidate is elected, their measures will be taken, not for maintaining the liberties and security of the people, but for “assuring the position of the State” – that is to say, their own position – by every means consistent with what the traffic will bear; and the traffic will bear as much and no more from one party than from another, as much and no more from Mr. Roosevelt than from Mr. Landon, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Lemke, or Mr. Browder.

Four years ago the psychological condition of the country, the condition of disgraceful funk that took possession of the citizens, was so demoralizing that the traffic would bear an unprecedented amount; and the most conspicuous lesson of that election was furnished by the alacrity displayed in what James Madison contemptuously called “the old trick of turning every contingency into a re-





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source for accumulating force in the government.” Mr. Roosevelt and his associates lost no time about “assuring the position of the State” with immense energy and by egregiously immoral means, quite as their opponents would have done in their place; the difference in results, if any, would have been a difference due only to superior ability and skill in managing those means. At present, the contingency is not so pressing, the people are not in a funk, and the traffic will not bear so much; but all the parties and candidates are quite alive to what it will bear, and whichever party wins the election may be confidently expected to conduct itself accordingly.

Therefore, the sum of the whole matter is that if and when the people of this country drop the neo-medieval conception of the State as an institution completely dissociated from morality, and adopt the republican conception expressed in the Declaration, the thoughtful and intelligent citizen may reasonably be expected to interest himself in the course of the nation’s politics; but until then he may reasonably be expected to do nothing of the kind.







THE POLITICIAN'S OPINION OF YOU

December, 1936

Edmund Burke, probably the greatest British statesman of all time, once wrote a letter to the Duke of Richmond, criticizing his political associates. He said they were good routiners, first-rate on pushing legislation, strong on winning elections, but no good whatever "on that which is the end and object of all elections, namely: the disposing our people to a better sense of their condition."

In the language of the street, that seems to be distinctly a new one on us. We never heard that candidates and campaign-managers were supposed to do anything like that, or that elections were held for any such object. Burke's idea was that the true purpose of an election is to make the people look themselves over and see what sort of folk they actually are, and where they actually stand; and the business of candidates and campaign-managers and politicians generally is to help them do that. His complaint was that his fellow-politicians did not seem to get that idea. He said in some bitterness on another





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occasion that as things stood, the main business of a politician was “still further to contract the narrowness of men’s ideas, to confirm inveterate prejudices, to inflame vulgar passions, and to abet all sorts of popular absurdities”; and as things stand with us, that is precisely the main business of a politician now.

In the light of the recent election, it might be a good thing for us to put these two sayings of Burke side by side, and think them over. Did our politicians do anything that would enable us to get a better understanding of our actual condition as a people? Not a hand’s turn; not even with regard to our economic condition. On the contrary, they did everything they could to mislead and confuse our understanding, for party purposes. Did they do or say anything to enlarge our ideas, to soften our prejudices, to allay our vulgar passions and discourage our absurdities? Nothing; on the contrary, they justified Burke’s complaint in every particular. Consequently the election has left us with our understanding of our own condition as incorrect and distorted as their best efforts could possibly make it. No wonder Henry Adams said he was going to the Fijis, “where the natives eat one another, and perhaps may eat me, but where they do not have any Presidential elections.”

Nevertheless, indirectly and in spite of this, the election may put us in the way of getting a little better sense of our condition, or at least asking ourselves a few questions about it, if we study the nature of the appeals which those same politicians made to us during the campaign in order to get our votes. Those appeals unquestionably show what sort of folk they think we are, and the basis of understanding on which they think we can best be





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reached and influenced; and we can use that as a sort of index or mark by which to measure ourselves and see how far the actual level of our condition lies above or below it. Aside from the usual dash of claptrap about the Constitution and the Good Old American System, all I saw was a straight appeal to material well-being. Industrial employment up so much since 1932, agriculture up so much, unemployment down so much; social security, shorter hours, "Vote for Landon and land a job," and so on.

Now, is our condition such that we take our politics exclusively on those terms, with never a hint of a possible principle involved – terms of increased comfort, leisure, and a little extra spending-money, earned or unearned, for everybody? Our politicians think so. During one of the street rows in Paris in 1830, a clever pickpocket called Mimi-Lepreuil was heard shouting: "Hurrah for the King! Down with the Republic!" A police inspector, knowing that pickpockets were usually rather on the plebeian side, asked him how he got that way. "I'm fed up with republicans," he said. "Every morning here I tap twenty pockets before I find a red cent. At General Lamarque's funeral, I didn't make my expenses. Give me a royal procession, every time."

Those were his politics, and our politicians think they are ours too. We may not like Mussolini, Stalin, or Hitler, but we certainly have to hand it to them that they never held up to their people any such ideal as that. If they had, the people would not have stood for it.

The campaign brought us face to face with some great principles. Did our politicians discuss them disinterestedly, objectively, *as principles*? They did not. For





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instance, the Bill of Rights is vastly more important than any political platform or than any party's chance of getting into power. During the campaign, the Communist candidate was forbidden to speak in one American city, and was jailed in another, in open and flagrant contempt of the Bill of Rights and of the common law as well. At that time, one of his fellow-candidates was in the White House, and another in a governor's chair; both therefore presumably interested in the Bill of Rights, since they were under oath to support it. Did they take advantage of this occasion for a thorough, impartial, non-controversial discussion of the great principle underlying the First Article of the Bill of Rights? Not a chirp from either of them. The obvious inference is that they and their campaign managers think the people do not care enough for that principle to make it worth talking about. Are they right?

Again, the most pressing public question before the whole world today is whether the people exist to defend and serve the State, or whether the State exists to defend and serve the people. Fascism, Communism, and Nazism are merely three names for one and the same thing; their collisions are not collisions of principle, but of secondary interest. Obviously, the principle underlying this public question is the great principle of liberty; and considering all that is going on in the world, one would say that "disposing our people to a better sense of their condition" in regard to this principle is a statesman's first job. Mr. Roosevelt had a gilt-edged chance to do it in the grand style at the Harvard tercentenary, and Mr. Landon had plenty of chances and could have made as many more as he liked. Not a word from either; and the inference



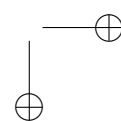
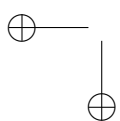
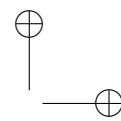
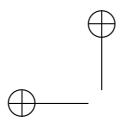


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is once more that they think we have no interest in the principle of liberty, or in any public, world-wide challenge of it. Well, are they right?

So, as I said, if we make use of the election to raise a few questions like these, it does help us in a negative way to get a clearer understanding of ourselves. The evident fact that our politicians regard us as a crew of low, ignorant, careless, and grasping swine whose god is our belly, is negatively helpful. Perhaps we are that; perhaps at least not quite; the election does somewhat set us in the way of finding out. Perhaps, too, if they put a little higher estimate on us we might be capable of rising to it, as Hitler's people were, and Mussolini's. The election might also give us something of a line on that.







COSTING THE PILL WITH HOOEY

January, 1937

The words Communism, Fascism, and Nazism are bandied about so much that it might be a good thing, even as a sporting proposition, if we were pretty sure we know what they mean; not by way of a dictionary definition, necessarily, but of what they actually stand for. Nor need we concern ourselves with what their apostles and disciples say they mean, but with what they really do mean. When we speak of Communism, Fascism, Nazism, what is the thing, actually, that we are talking about?

In Russia, Italy, and Germany there exists a huge taxing-machine called the State; or, if you like the term better, the government. We know what that is, because it exists here, as it does in all countries except some which we agree to call uncivilized. Now, the thing to be noticed about this taxing-machine is that those who can get control of it can take away as much of other people's money and property as they like, and redistribute it to suit themselves. That is, they can live by robbery,





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and enable their beneficiaries to live by the same means. Therefore, since it is easier to live by robbery than by labor, various sets of impostors are always in competition for control of the taxing-machine. Naturally this competition is most attractive to predatory and unscrupulous persons, and hence these sets of impostors are made up almost exclusively of the worst and lowest order of human beings.

In former times the regular thing was to take everything in sight, and either exterminate the possessors or drive them off to shift for themselves as best they might. It was soon seen to be more profitable, however, to leave them subsistence enough to go on with, so that they might be used as labor-motors, producing a steady revenue for the State and its beneficiaries. This was done through various systems of State-protected chattel slavery, serfdom, peonage, and industrial exploitation, according as circumstances made one system more profitable than another. When circumstances changed, the system was changed; as when industrial exploitation displaced chattel slavery in New England and New York, not much more than a century ago.

But as a rule the State and its beneficiaries let their extravagances run wild, and soon begin to take too much, as they did in France of the eighteenth century, when the monarchy, the nobility, and the Church got away with so much that the great bulk of the population could not eat right. Such exactions raise a spirit of rebellion, and this gives opportunity for competing impostors to organize a revolutionary movement and promise the people great things if it succeeds. When these competing impostors get control of the taxing-machine, they sometimes ease





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off a little for a while, and give the people one of Mr. Roosevelt's breathing spells; and in that case they are likely to consolidate their hold on the taxing-machine and become what we call "a stable government." Practically always, however, they do not, and often cannot, for the counsel of prudent leadership is overborne by the rapacity of the rank and file.* In this case, sooner or later "the government collapses," as we say, and another set of imposters mans the taxing-machine.

The history of French revolutionary movements in the nineteenth century is especially interesting on this point, as showing the rise and fall of so many and so various sets of impostors in such rapid succession. Passing over the shifts of power from the revolution of 1789 to the First Republic of 1792, we see the Directory of 1795, the Consulate of 1799, the First Empire of 1804, the First Restoration of 1814, the Hundred Days and the Second

*The original promoters of a revolutionary movement are often men of character and probity, and as a rule comparatively disinterested; for example, Lafayette, Washington, Lenin, and their more intimate associates. But once the movement succeeds, their influence is notoriously short-lived, and very often they themselves are killed or exiled by their successors. The reader may consider Mr. Jefferson's testimony to the difference in "the spirit of Americans" between 1784 and 1789. He may also compare the personnel of Washington's first cabinet with that of his second; or of the Soviet's first government with that of its present government. If Mr. Roosevelt ever had any better than an electioneering interest in the condition of the country (which I do not believe for a moment that he ever had), it did not take much of an eye to see how quickly and completely it was extinguished by the onrush of the herd behind him. There is pathos as well as candor in the French revolutionist's saying, "I *must* follow the mob, because I lead them."





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Restoration of 1815, the July Monarchy of 1830, the Second Republic of 1843, the Second Empire of 1852, and the Third Republic of 1850, tempered by the Commune of 1871. As far as I know to the contrary, this is a record performance, and at any rate worth close study by those interested in the subject we are discussing.

It will be remembered – or should be – that post-war government in Germany, Russia, and Italy collapsed completely, thereby leaving the way wide open to any competently organized gang of adventurers who wished to step in and take charge of the taxing-machine; and such a gang was promptly on hand. The point to notice here is that these gangs did not improvise themselves; on the contrary, they had long been at work on plans for meeting just this crisis when it should come, and these plans included methods and devices for getting enough popular acceptance to enable them to overcome initial opposition.

In the old days, organization was simpler. When William of Normandy and his associate banditti landed in England, he did not think much about the people. There he was, and if they did not like him they might lump him, and that was that. The modern adventurer does not have it quite so easy. He has to take the people somewhat into account at the outset, even though he may deal roughly with a protesting minority later on. Hence, in addition to the purely military, or quasi-military, side of his preparations, he must negotiate whatever quiet trades and deals he can put on foot, and also must carry on a quiet campaign of evangelizing. An “ideology” has to be inculcated, especially upon the young, the ardent, and the impressionable. If I may borrow Mr. Mencken’s





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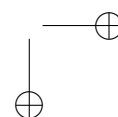
excellent terms, he and his Brain Trust must do a great deal of cautious boob-bumping, and meanwhile make themselves letter-perfect in the art of rabble-rousing, against the time when this art shall come into play.

Thus he must have both a creed and a gospel. In order to copper-rivet his hold on the taxing-machine, he must promulgate the belief that

- (1) The State is everything and the individual nothing; the individual exists only to serve and magnify the State.
- (2) He has no rights that the State is bound to respect, and no rights whatever but those the State gives him.
- (3) The State is bound by no consideration of right and wrong; it may do whatever it likes. Whatever it does is right, and whatever it decrees is just; its will is the only criterion of justice.
- (4) This criterion is determined solely by its own interest. The State wills whatever makes for its own aggrandizement, and disallows whatever does not; and the individual must govern his actions accordingly.

These four articles of faith are the impostor's creed. They are the fundamental thing; they are all that count. Around them is woven a gospel, a texture of pseudoscientific and rhetorical material, designed to help the creed along and make it seem acceptable. In relation to the four fundamentals, it might be described as a sort of ancillary hooey, comparable to the coating on a pill.

But different circumstances and different types of people require different types of hooey. Mussolini's gospel would not attract Englishmen, Stalin's hooey would nau-





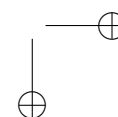
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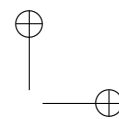
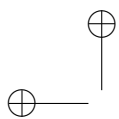
seate the French, and the sort of thing that Hitler hands out would get him nowhere in the United States. The gospel must vary, but the creed never varies. Stalin's creed has precisely the same four points as Hitler's, and Hitler's as Mussolini's. Stalin coats the pill with sugar, Hitler with gelatine, Mussolini with chocolate, but the pills are all exactly the same.

Therefore when we talk about Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, as if they stood for three different things – which most of us do – we are talking nonsense. They are three kinds of hoey, all standing for the same thing, which is the cluster of four propositions just mentioned. In one word, they stand for Absolutism.

So if we want to know what is really taking place in Europe, it is not a conflict of creeds or ideas. Not even in Spain is there any such conflict; the conflict there is between two sets of prehensile shysters, one of which has control of the Spanish taxing-machine, and the other is trying to get control of it. The really important thing that is happening in Europe is that in almost all countries alike, the State and its beneficiaries are absorbing so much money and property that the rest of the population are on the edge of not being able to eat right. This is what happened in Nicholas II's time, and Louis XIV's, and Genghis Khan's, and for exactly the same reason – the creed of Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler and Co. is precisely the creed of Louis, Nicholas, Genghis Khan and Co. It is the creed of Absolutism that counts; the collateral hoey put out to catch the eye and ear does not count.

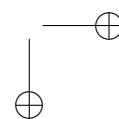
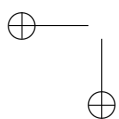
Perhaps my readers will find something in this idea that may help them make up their own report on the

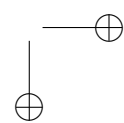
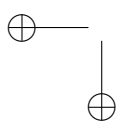




COSTING THE PILL WITH HOOEY

State of the Union this month, and I therefore leave it to them without further comment.







BOGUS ERA OF GOOD FEELING

February, 1937

It appears that a good many editorial post-mortems on the election are advising American business to let bygones be bygones and go in with Dr. Roosevelt's government for an Era of Good Feeling. Some of our leading men of business also are recommending this course. It seems the worst possible advice. Make-believe good feeling is as useless as it is dishonest, and an era of sincere good feeling can not be handed off a shelf ready-made, nor can it be improvised out of any old shoddy stuff that happens to be at hand. Good feeling has to be earned; and where government is concerned, it should always be up to the government to do all the earning, and to do it good and hard.

What really lies behind the advice that these newspapers are handing out is of course the fact that American business has always been run on an opportunist policy. If it met an opponent who was too strong to be disregarded or sand-bagged, it played ball with him for a while until





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it got him. The great new Era of Good Feeling therefore means merely a continuation of this back-number policy. That is the long and short of it, as the newspapers and business both know well enough; Mr. Rockefeller's benighted letter to Mr. Farley reeks with the musk-and-patchouli stench of opportunism. This policy, however, will not work any longer, for too many people are "onto" it, and their confidence is too scary. It will work for a while, but a short while, and then it will blow up in a tremendous bust, followed by State intervention of a much more severe type than was fastened on us by the last bust, eight years ago.

We see, then, what we may expect if the newspapers and the old-line Bourbon type of businessman have their pernicious way at the present juncture. Somewhere, however, there should be businessmen with sense enough to know that good feeling between a people – any people – and their government is as impracticable as between a traveler and a footpad. A knight of the road will go good as long as he is kept aware that the traveler has the drop on him, but no longer. If the traveler lets himself be blarneyed out of his vigilance for a moment, then so much the worse for the traveler. On this eminently sound and safe principle, therefore, any era of good feeling between government and people under any circumstances is a most alarming symptom; it means that with the people off their guard, their attention distracted, the government is on the point of making hay of their rights, liberties, and property. That is what happened after the era of good feeling in the 'Nineties, and it will happen again.

A hundred times I have quoted Mr. Jefferson's saying – and I hope I can live to quote it a thousand times – that





BOGUS ERA OF GOOD FEELING

“the spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it always to be kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all.” Let us be explicit about this spirit. What is it, and what is the normal attitude that it should induce in a people towards their government? Why is it so valuable that even a wrong exercise of it, though occurring often, should be tolerated as the lesser of two evils?

In general, as I take it, the wise old man meant that a half-way decent society, the kind of society that he wished to see established in America, should have exactly the spirit of the Southern Irishman who came ashore from a shipwreck, crying, “What’s the government iv this counthry, f’r I’m agin it?” It should regard government, wherever found, as an alien and an enemy; as Mr. H. L. Mencken calls it, “the common enemy of all well-disposed, industrious, and decent men.” As such, government should be watched with unceasing vigilance, and with unceasing readiness to meet the first sign of misdoing with loud and strong remonstrance as a curtain-raiser for rebellion, if the warning goes unheeded. “I like a little rebellion now and then,” Mr. Jefferson wrote Mrs. John Adams. Even when rebellion was not strictly justifiable, he was for it in a general way, as he wrote W. S. Smith: “The people cannot be all and always well-informed. The part which is wrong will be discontinued in proportion to the importance of the facts which they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is a lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.” There is a statement worth be-





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ing pondered upon by those who are now pushing for a hand-me-down Era of Good Feeling.

In particular, it follows, I think, that in Mr. Jefferson's kind of society, the individual citizen should regard the persons who administer the government as *ipso facto* potential rogues, who may be estopped from active roguery only by the watchful eye and ready hand of an invincibly suspicious and captious citizenry. He believes that if this watchfulness and readiness be relaxed for a moment, these persons, as Mr. Jefferson said, "shall all become wolves." Thus where public officials are concerned, the burden of proof should always be on the defendant. The presumption of misconduct should be upon him continuously until he proves himself innocent. If he does so prove himself, he may be dismissed at the end of his term with a "character" such as an employer gives an honest and satisfactory servant who is leaving his employ. If not, the force of a militant public opinion should drum him out at once.

If this interprets Mr. Jefferson's idea of patriotic spirit correctly, as I believe it does, we may quickly see how mischievous and vicious are those advisers who, at such a time as this, take it upon themselves to address the businessman in the accents of a public relations counsel or a cruise director at a get-together dinner. With 17,000,000 of our electorate having no representation whatever in the government, with no official opposition or check upon our job-holders, with the principle of absolutism already foisted into the Constitution by the income-tax amendment, under which the State may at its pleasure confiscate everyone's last penny – what kind of time is this to be maundering about an Era of Good





BOGUS ERA OF GOOD FEELING

Feeling? Such talk is no more or less than treasonable – not legally so, I know, but actually so – and toleration of it bears the mark of a porcine “lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.”

If there were ever a juncture in public affairs where scrutiny of official doings should be closest, where criticism should be quickest and most uncompromising, where “the spirit of resistance to government” should flame brightest, that juncture is now. Never mind about any new political nostrums or any change of impostors in office. The government that has to be dealt with is the one in front of us, and not some dream of Fascism, Communism, or whatnot; and if a patriotic citizenry watches its job-holders like a hawk and whoops up the battle cry of freedom at the first show of their misfeasances, it will have no time to fiddle around with any new systems or politico-economic patent medicines, and it will be doing a much better job.

Indeed, what else is left for our seventeen million disaffected voters to do? Politically, they are as helpless a minority as one of Hitler’s minorities over in Germany. They have no more official representation than if they had all been disfranchised six months ago. The important thing now is how these people think. How they voted does not matter, for it is always how people think that counts, never how they vote. Well, if this large helpless minority are thinking at all, how are they to give any effect to their sentiments, unless by taking up the Jeffersonian conception of public duty? What else can they do?

It seems likewise that the businessman would be much better advised to take up this Jeffersonian conception





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than to demean himself by cringing to the suggestion of an Era of Good Feeling. I am well aware that he is on an uncomfortably hot spot. The fact that he is there by his own fault is not to the point; however he got there, there he is. The government has him pretty well where it wants him, and can make things most unpleasant for him if it chooses. There are two things, however, that he can do, and it would be greatly to his credit and his ultimate profit if, rather than let himself be dragooned into the trap of a decoy Era of Good Feeling, he set about doing them at once.

First, he can make known through his organizations that he will meet the government's exactions, inquisitions, regulations, supervisions, only under duress; that he will make no advances towards the government and no profession of friendliness; he will obey its orders, but nothing more. He will also make it abundantly clear that he does this only because, when the evil consequences of all these interventions become apparent, it will be seen that the responsibility for those evils rests wholly on the government, and not on him.

The second thing he can do is to revise radically his ideas of publicity and propaganda. Hitherto he has placed his reliance exclusively on *ex parte* publicity, and on propaganda of the Liberty League type. One might suppose that the last campaign has shown him that this sort of thing is played out. I hope it has. It seems certain that from now on, effective criticism of public affairs must have a respectable intellectual content; something which it has not had for almost half a century. To say, for example, that social security is a bad thing because it is backed by Dr. Roosevelt, who is a crook and a liar



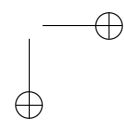


BOGUS ERA OF GOOD FEELING

and probably a Fascist in disguise, will get nowhere, and it deserves to get nowhere even if its truth were certified beyond question, because it is not intellectually respectable; and there are so many respectable arguments available that it is simply silly to employ one that is not. The thing is, to get down to the principles on which the whole doctrine of this particular intervention rests, and discuss them *as principles*. The same is true of the tariff, of credit, of unemployment, and the "Labor problem," and of all public questions. There are great principles underlying them, and the thing is to drag those principles out into the light of publicity and thoroughly thresh them over, in order to see where we actually stand.

These two courses of conduct are quite within the businessman's power, and I repeat with emphasis that he will be well advised if he adopts them.







THE CASE FOR FREE SPEECH

March, 1937

Shortly before I left the country I read a summary of the new German criminal code, and noted its measures for “protection” of the State, whereby any adverse criticism of Hitler or his functionaries lands the critic in the lock-up. A Paris dispatch on the same day stated that M. Blum is out to “clean up” the French press by suppression of “personal defamation.” A day or two later I had a letter from a friend, remarking the fact that by these measures, “Socialist-Communist France and Fascist Germany go hand in hand,” and asking me whether I think these “democratic” United States are soon to join them.

Probably not; yet it is worth pointing out that whether we do or do not join them lies entirely in the discretion of one man; for by the last election – if one can call it an election – our people put themselves under a regime of personal government as absolute as Lincoln’s government of 1860 or Wilson’s of 1917. Therefore as things now stand, a bumptious President and a subservient Congress





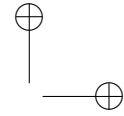
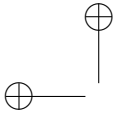
THE STATE OF THE UNION

can resurrect the Sedition Act of 1768 at any time that they deem it politically expedient to do so. The fact that this seems unlikely to happen is unimportant beside the fact that it can happen – the fact that our people have maneuvered themselves into a position, or been hoodwinked into it, where the Bill of Rights is not even a scarecrow.

It will be noticed that my friend's letter brings out the point which I have long been insisting on as important to remember when we hear talk about the different designations that the State takes on, the different modes of window-dressing which it puts on for different peoples. As I wrote recently, the State everywhere progressively confiscates the rights, liberties, powers, and property of its subjects just to the extent to which it can do so without endangering itself. Its final purpose is realized when it controls and directs all the subject's activities; in a word, when it has reduced the subject to a condition of involuntary servitude. Now, what earthly difference does it make whether the State does this under the name of Fascism, Communism, democracy, monarchy, or any other? None that I can see. What difference whether you call the man who sits up on top and runs the machine an emperor, king, president, dictator, *duce*, or *Führer*, or whether he has inherited his job or been elected to it or simply usurped it? Not a pennyweight. Why, then, should we pay so much attention to mere names, and so little to the one invariable process that goes on alike under all those names?

According to the news items just now referred to, the particular liberties that the State in France and Germany has announced as confiscated are those which we call



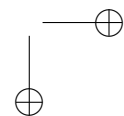
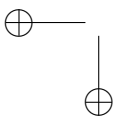


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freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In this country they have not yet been formally confiscated, and as I said, I doubt that they soon will be. Some informal and indirect confiscation takes place every now and then, but that is not the same thing. When it happens, however, it usually gives rise to discussion whether the Bill of Rights is to be taken literally, and if not, just where the line between liberty and actionable license should be drawn. Most of us think, or think we think, that the First Article of the Bill of Rights* means what it says – it is certainly explicit enough – and is to be taken literally; but nevertheless, when a concrete case is before us, we give tacit consent to the idea that a line must be drawn somewhere, and that expediency must determine where it shall be drawn.

There is a profound hypocrisy in this, of course, for while either the Bill of Rights or expediency can be the supreme law of the land if we choose to make it so, both cannot be; and if expediency is to be our fundamental law, the Bill of Rights should be abrogated or amended accordingly. If, as Mr. Dooley puts it, “th’ Constitution iv th’ United States is applicable on’y in such cases as it is applied to on account iv its applicability,” what filthy and ludicrous hypocrisy is implicit in our swearing all sorts of people indiscriminately, even schoolteachers, even harmless poor devils applying for a passport, to support and defend the Constitution!

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.





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In drawing a line across the area covered by the Bill of Rights, some draw it very close, while others leave a liberal margin. For example, as we have lately seen, in certain parts of the Mississippi Valley and the South, and I believe also in California, the Bill of Rights is reduced to the status of a game law; it is “out” on Communists twelve months in the year. On the other hand, the editor of this magazine draws the line against Communism only at the implied or expressed predication of violence; in that case, but no other, he would countenance an anticipation of the overt act. But wherever the line be drawn, I think there can be no doubt that most of us tacitly consent to the idea that a line must be drawn somewhere to establish and delimit a purview of coercion.

From the standpoint of a doctrinaire, there is nothing to say about this. The Constitution is the fundamental law of the land, and it gives to everyone, unconditionally and without distinction of persons, the right of free speech; and that is that. But practically there is a good deal to say about it. To begin with, if I were a rich man, I would cheerfully put up half my fortune as a prize to anyone who showed me a single instance in all human history where coercion ever exterminated an idea, or ever did more than merely set it to running underground. Then I would put up the remaining half as a prize to anyone who showed me a single instance of the State’s employing coercion where there was not some rascality behind it.

Roman society looked on Christianity as something not only intellectually contemptible, but also as morally and politically subversive, precisely as well-conditioned American society regards Communism. The Roman





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State, which knew pretty well how to apply coercion, did its level best for a century and a half to extirpate Christianity, and not only had no success, but was at last forced to make terms with it. Did the allied armed forces of Europe halt or even impede the progress of the republican idea liberated by the French Revolution? The Russian State was uncommonly handy at coercion, but its subsequent efforts against the republican idea not only did not work, but in the long run they set up a reaction so violent that poor Nicholas II was terribly out of luck. Those who are tempted to dally with the patent medicine of coercion ought to read Henry Charles Lea's great work on the history of the Inquisition. There you see the boys who were real horse-doctors at coercion, going the limit to stamp out heresy and schism; and did they succeed? They did not. Well, then, when Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, or any other potentate tells me he is out to do something that ten Roman emperors, the Holy Alliance, Nicholas II, and Torquemada all tackled and had to give up as a bad job, I simply have no respect for him.

My first prize would be safe, every cent of it. As to my second, Mr. Jefferson said: "It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself." The great and good old man knew that when you see the State shirking criticism of anything, you may invariably be sure there is scoundrelism in it somewhere. Think of the unspeakable swineries that motivated the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, and those that lay behind Lincoln's and Wilson's suppressions and censorings! On the other hand, think of old Frederick, who saw people craning their necks at a scurrilous caricature of himself,





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and said, “Hang that lower down!” Frederick had no Bill of Rights and no Supreme Court to worry about; he simply had the confidence of his people, and he had it because he had earned it by playing fair with them and serving them disinterestedly to the best of his power.

I think, then, that my second prize would also be safe; and so we may pass on to one or two other practical considerations that bear on this matter of free speech. Lincoln Steffens told me that just after the revolution in Petrograd, he approached some peasants in a crowd listening to a soap-boxer who was haranguing them in very thick Russian. He asked, why listen to him – didn’t they know he was an agent of the German government – why didn’t they throw him out? To his immense astonishment, one of the peasants replied, “Anything that the German government has to say to us, *we ought to hear.*”

It struck me, as it did Steffens, that this peasant showed a sounder sense of political responsibility than you often find nowadays, especially in America. If we are really out for our country’s good and not out to satisfy some petty interest or petty prejudice of our own, is not that peasant’s attitude a good deal sounder than ours? I think so. Coming right down to brass tacks, if the Fascists, Communists, or any other ilk have anything to say to us, is it not our patriotic duty to hear them? Our government is only a machine, nothing sacred or untouchable, and they might say something that would suggest some valuable improvements on it. If so, the patriotic thing to do would be to talk over their idea with them, and see whether anything in it could be borrowed or adapted to make our machine work better. If not, we could always walk out on them. Edison would listen





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by the hour to any criticism, no matter how ignorant, of any of his machines, and said he made money by it. The criticism itself might be, and usually was, as fatuous as the doctrines of Communism; but once in a while his experienced mind caught a valuable suggestion in it which the critic himself did not know was there.

Again, men and women who are browbeaten, terrorized, sat upon, do not make a wholesome community, Mr. Jefferson said that the effect of coercion is "to make one-half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites." That is exactly what the German criminal code will do, and what M. Blum's program (if he actually has such a program) will do. A society composed on the one hand of those whom the intoxication of unchecked, uncriticized power has turned into fools, and on the other, of those who are timorously watching their step, is a pretty lame apology for human society. The exercise of free speech has its possible inconveniences and its possible dangers; no doubt about that, but how do they weigh against the certainties invoked by coercion?

One more point. Was there ever a man or body of men good enough or wise enough to dispense with the tonic of criticism? I never heard of one. Nor do I mean only criticism that is just; I mean unjust criticism also, as unjust as the caricature of old Frederick. The only way a government's tendencies to tyranny can be kept within reasonable bounds is by an implacable spirit of rebellion in its people, expressed through a steady fire of free discussion and free criticism, just and unjust, rational and irrational. "The spirit of resistance to government," said Mr. Jefferson, "is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it always to be kept alive. It will often be exercised





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when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all.” A people which assumes that government, wherever found, is an alien and a potential enemy that cannot be trusted out of sight for a moment and must stand the closest kind of watching and the most resonant kind of publicity – such a people, and no other, stands some sort of chance of keeping its public servants measurably in the fear of God. “If once the people become inattentive to the public affairs,” Mr. Jefferson wrote in a letter to Edward Carrington, “you and I and Congress and Assemblies, judges and governors, shall all become wolves.” How many individual instances can the reader count up offhand that are exceptional to this rule?

And so, even if we disregard the philosophical side completely, it would seem that the First Article of the Bill of Rights has a good deal to say for itself on the practical side. As I said, we would have to take the fat with the lean – plenty of arrant nonsense, plenty of vicious demagoguery, sedition, incitements to violence and riot, and all sorts of nuisances; you cannot get something for nothing – but even so, on the balance of good and evil, a regime of absolute free speech seems, from the practical point of view, to be the best all round; best for the people, best for their government, and therefore best for the country’s future.





HIGH COST OF DYING

April, 1937

The press not so long ago carried two news items which throw a strong light on the state of the Union. Two rich men, Senator Couzens and ex-Ambassador Straus, died within a few days of each other. Mr. Couzens did not leave a will, and the State took by taxation approximately one-third of his whole estate. Mr. Straus left a will; and it was discovered that he had added a codicil revoking something like a million dollars' worth of bequests to various philanthropic enterprises, because the taxes on his estate would be so heavy that piling these bequests on top of them would not leave enough margin of safety for his inescapable obligations and commitments.

There is more than one way of looking at the effect of levies like these. In general, the mere privilege of dying is not so desirable that the State should charge highwayman's prices for it. Again, it is a pretty serious question how far the State is morally entitled to interfere with the individual's postmortem rights. After all, Mr. Straus





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and Mr. Couzens got their money legally; they did not steal it. They took our economic system as they found it, and did well out of it. If the system is so loose that it enabled them to do too well, it can be tightened up. But tightening up the system is one thing, and confiscating money acquired in good faith is quite another; and here is the moral defect of all levies on production, and also of the commonly-accepted theory that taxes should be levied according to the ability to pay.

All this, however, would probably not be regarded as much of an argument against the State's pilferings from the dead hands of Mr. Couzens and Mr. Straus. What is more to the point, perhaps, is that such levies as these act as a brake on enterprise and ambition. They must act in that way. No doubt Mr. Straus disliked the thought that so much of his property would be stolen and wasted, especially since at the time he started out in business there was no such prospect in view; income taxes and estate taxes are relatively recent. But now, facing the certain prospect of these exorbitant stealings and wastages, a youngster would be moved to think twice about spending his life in the absorbing labor of building up and carrying on an enormous business like that of R. H. Macy and Co. The State, of course, may be doing an unintended good by putting our young people in the way of realizing that there are desirable objects in life besides business and moneymaking. There is something in that; yet on the other hand, since the State's exactions continually increase, the diminishing of enterprise and ambition brings nearer the time when they can no longer be met, and when that time comes – and for quite a while before that – no worthy object of life is attainable.





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The most common complaint of these levies, as we see in the case of Mr. Straus, is that they hamper the prosperity of existing philanthropic enterprises and check the launching of new ones. In an editorial setting forth this point, the *New York Times* says that contributions to fifty-three hospitals fell off from \$4,000,000 in 1930 to about \$2,500,000 in 1934. This is probably a fair indication of what is happening to the general run of our privately-endowed and privately-financed institutions engaged in educational, social, or scientific work – schools, colleges, universities, asylums, libraries, museums, foundations, churches, research laboratories, settlements, social-service concerns of various kinds, and so on. As we all know, the country has bred a huge crop of these, established and financed from private revenues, and they view with alarm the unconscionable rate at which the State is drying up their sources of supply.

In some cases this may not be a wholly bad thing, for by no means do all these establishments earn their keep – far from it – though there would naturally be no great general agreement on what cases those are. Probably not many of us, for instance, would be much distressed if the Carnegie Peace Foundation folded up; while on the other hand, only a few of us – one of whom I am – believe that we would stand a far better chance of some time becoming a civilized people if about eighty per cent of our educational institutions, both private and public, were put permanently out of commission. Again, some of us may feel that the social-service business has been a good deal overdone; while, as we see, great numbers of people are in favor of expanding it indefinitely. But as a general thing, one sees plainly enough that the





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sudden withdrawal of support from those institutions which have been founded by private means and which have gone on in full expectation of continuous support from the same sources, is an extremely serious matter. It involves readjustments that in large part must be experimental and therefore must require more or less time in order to work themselves out; and meanwhile the inevitable curtailments, interruptions, and dislocations of institutional service are bound to cause a great deal of inconvenience, and worse than that, a great deal of actual privation and distress.

This is a valid ground of complaint against the action of the State, and our organs of opinion are fully justified in making the most of it. But there is something else at stake which is much more serious, incalculably more serious, than the prosperity of our philanthropic institutions, or even than their life. What happened to Mr. Straus' estate and Mr. Couzens' is a rather conspicuous instance of a process which is going on all the time, and has been greatly accelerated of late; a process of which some of us – unfortunately not many – seem to be more or less vaguely aware, but which we do not precisely understand and identify, and still less do we see clearly the inevitable end towards which it moves.

This process, which exactly resembles the process of cancerous growth and is in the end as deadly, is the continuous *conversion of social power into State power*. These terms are perhaps unfamiliar. Social power, exercised through what we call “private enterprise,” has built the whole material structure on which our civilization rests. Our production of wealth, our industry, commerce, and finance, our whole elaborate system of distribution,



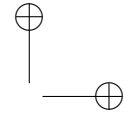
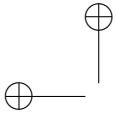


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are due to the exercise of social power. State power has done nothing in a positive way to aid this development, but a great deal to retard it. In a negative way, State power has done something, by punishing certain coarser forms of robbery and fraud, and by enforcing certain modes of contractual obligations. These benefits or assistances, however, are greatly outweighed by the disabilities which the State has put on this development, chiefly through various delegations of its taxing power, but also through vexatious measures of regulation and supervision.

The State, precisely like a cancer, is always seeking to aggrandize itself at the expense of the body on which it feeds; that is to say, at the expense of society. The State has no power of its own, just as it has no money of its own. All the power it has is what society gives it, plus what it can confiscate from time to time, as opportunity offers; and every gift or confiscation of power leaves society with that much less; and since the State, cancer-like, directs its power always towards the maintenance and enhancement of its own interests rather than those of society, the general social structure weakens, and in the end disintegrates, leaving the State also moribund, having nothing more to feed on. As Professor Ortega y Gasset says, since “after all it is only a machine, whose existence and maintenance depend on the vital supports around it,” when those supports disintegrate, “the State, after sucking out the very marrow of society, will be left bloodless, a skeleton, dead with the rusty death of machinery, more gruesome than the death of a living organism. Such was the lamentable fate of ancient civilization.”

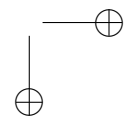
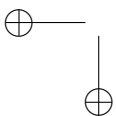




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In discussing the revocation of his bequests, Mr. Straus cites the fact that “increased estate taxes. . . are devoted in large part to governmental social programs.” Here Mr. Straus recognizes a direct specific conversion of social power into State power; and the general consequence of such conversions is to discourage the further use of social power in the same direction. I noticed the other day that in one of our large cities, a campaign for Relief funds had gone flat. People would not contribute; they said, most naturally, “The State is already confiscating our money for this purpose, so go to the State about it.” In New York City, where a special sales tax has been imposed for local “Relief,” this is the natural, instinctive attitude of the citizen who is approached by a beggar. Up to four years ago, distress was always taken care of by the application of social power; since then, that particular fraction of social power has tended to become inert, and meanwhile the State has confiscated a great deal more than its equivalent.

Every positive intervention by the State has just this effect. Its interventions on industry and commerce, whether by direct competition or by regulation and supervision, result in the progressive atrophy of social power and the corresponding enhancement of State power. Now if it were true that State power is, or can be, exercised even measurably in behalf of society’s interests, something might be said for this; but it never is so exercised. The fact is notorious – everybody knows it – that it is exercised in behalf of the State’s interest. It has always been so exercised, and still is, and apparently will always be. Leaving aside the spiritual factors of discouragement and enervation, and taking money alone as a measure of



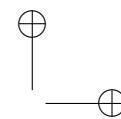
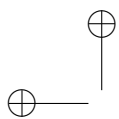


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power, we see that the State is now confiscating, directly and indirectly, nearly one-third the national income; very well, estimate the enormous political brokerage that comes out of this sum annually, and balance it against the amount devoted to all public purposes that by any stretch of reason can be called legitimate! This is merely one handy illustration out of many that could be offered – handy because it lies on the surface of things and is easily apprehended – of the normal operation of State power. It may be observed here that collectivism, which is the culmination of this process of conversion, appears to rest on the naive assumption that if only *all* social power be confiscated and converted into State power, the State will somehow change character at once, and will operate in society's interest instead of its own; or rather, that the two sets of interests will somehow be brought into correspondence. There is manifestly no reason whatever why such an increment of power should produce this effect, but quite the contrary; the assumption is pure nonsense.

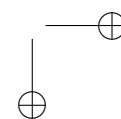
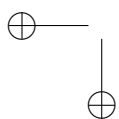
Thus it may be seen that the incident of Mr. Straus and Mr. Couzens is useful because it points straight to the one and only tendency in public affairs that is much worth thinking about at the present time. Focussing our minds on the ups and downs of dictatorships, monarchies, presidencies, parliaments, or whatever form or mode the State may take on, is really very little to the point, because this tendency can go on, and does in fact go on, equally well under any of them. The thing to watch is the conversion of productive social power into non-productive State power; and the thing to apprehend is the disaster ensuing on the culmination of that process. The Roman





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Empire went to pieces because in that process, social power became so atrophied that no one could do any business or get enough to go on with, nobody could eat right, and there was not production enough left to pay the State's bills. All ancient civilizations shared this same fate, and ours is in the way to share it.





THE AUTOCRAT VS. THE CONSTITUTION

May, 1937

At the time of sending this issue of THE MERCURY to press, Mr. Roosevelt is in the thick of giving a very mean and sorry exhibition of what Walt Whitman called "the never-ending audacity of elected persons." His original proposal with regard to the Federal Bench needs no description or analysis here. The discussion it has aroused has made its character so clear that no disinterested person in the country need fail to see it for precisely what it is. When all comes to all, it is simply a proposal to add a kept judiciary to a kept Congress. No such flagrant and specious bid for the reorganization of our governmental system into a peculiarly odious type of absolutism has ever been made by any public servant.

Nor do Mr. Roosevelt's subsequent pleas in extenuation need any long discussion here, for their feebleness and disingenuousness have already been made abundantly clear to the public. His methods of dragooning, moreover, his appeal to emergency, his insistence on headlong haste,





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his use of the argument from dreadful consequences – all these stand before the country as demagoguery of a most repulsive order; they need no comment; they need only characterization. What could be more sophistical, more purely *ad captandum*, than his suggestion that the device of adding six new judges to the Supreme Court at the present time would in some way temper the effect of floods and dust storms; or that it would somehow tend to avert the panic in the stock market which he sees impending? If a pickpocket spun such irrelevant yarns before the humblest chicken-court in the country, how far would they get him?

It would now seem high time for our editors and publicists to leave off a pedantic discussion of Mr. Roosevelt's proposal, and confine themselves to characterizing it as it deserves, and as in any kind of sense and reason they all know it deserves. Especially is it time to drop the nauseous practice of slathering their strictures on its author with soft soap. Why should they longer go so far out of their way to assure the public that while they believe Mr. Roosevelt's proposal is most objectionable, they also believe his intentions are in all respects what they should be? This seems merely another way of saying that Mr. Roosevelt is either too stupid to know what he is doing, or else too obtuse to be aware that what he is doing is improper; a poor sort of compliment in either case. Why go on with the transparent farce of assuming that Mr. Roosevelt may be trusted to make a scrupulous use of the power he demands, and that his proposal is dangerous only because it opens the way for some supposititious successor who might be less scrupulous? Such puny avoidances placate no one, nor do they





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impress anyone with anything but the obvious lack of straightforwardness inherent in them.

Why, indeed, go out of one's way to assure the public that Mr. Roosevelt is quite above any notion of becoming an autocrat in the bad sense, and that he would exercise his autocratic power, if he had it, with due respect to the traditions of our government? What ground of assurance is there for all that? One could hardly predicate it of any man, and there is notoriously nothing in Mr. Roosevelt's public record to justify its being predicated of him, but quite the contrary. Indeed, the testimony of his career in the Presidency, to go back no further, bears substantial witness to his having been fashioned by nature out of the very stuff of which the worst and most dangerous autocrats are made.

In the present instance, for example, he has shown conclusively – has he not? – that his idea of a popular mandate is a blank check. In a matter of such moment as the one he proposes, he had the opportunity as late as last Summer to announce his intentions and thus to find out precisely whether the popular mandate would stretch that far; and a manly man who had no axe to grind and desired to play fair with the people would have done so. Instead he played the invariable game of the born autocrat when on his way to usurpation, for it is of the very essence of that game to conceal one's intentions towards a prospective perversion of a popular mandate.

Again, in the present instance, he has shown himself gifted with a full measure of the dangerous autocrat's stubborn self-will. Instead of proposing any one of the three measures which are regular, appropriate, and fully competent to his professed purpose, he insists on one





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which is arbitrary, irregular, and inappropriate; and his arguments for its competence are specious and far beyond the point of reason. That measure will do no more than give him some immediate assistance in overriding an obstacle to the furtherance of his own purposes; nor is it possible to believe he intended it to do more than that, because for the permanent settlement of the economic difficulties which he says it aims to settle, it will so manifestly do nothing. As the Baltimore *Evening Sun* dryly remarked after his first speech on the subject, "If the situation is as bad as the President painted it last night, his proposed cure is about as effective as painting a cancer with iodine."

Again, a characteristic mark of the dangerous autocrat is his porcine indifference to the moral quality of any means which can be mustered to serve a personal end. In this respect, Mr. Roosevelt's conduct is as far as possible removed from that of his honest predecessor in the governorship of New York, who though a devout Federalist, refused to turn a sharp though strictly legal trick which Hamilton urged on him in the campaign of 1800, and which would have assured Mr. Jefferson's defeat. For four years Mr. Roosevelt has stood by, like a famous character in the New Testament, consenting unto the death of integrity in the electorate by wholesale and intensive Tammanyization in his own interest. He has consented unto the persistent fomenting of class-hatred by his sycophants and janizaries, all in his own interest, and on occasion has himself preached the gospel of divisiveness with a force and fervency worthy of Spartacus. Everyone knows the means by which his control of Congress was obtained, the means by which it is continued, and by





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consequence the means which are now being employed at high pressure to gain him control of the judiciary; and everyone knows that it would be base flattery to call those means immoral. They are essentially the methods of the inquisitor, the methods of *force majeure*.

Once more, the natural-born autocrat is vindictive. He has the uneasy self-conscious touchiness of the *arriviste*, and meets objection or opposition, however reasonable, with the rancid temper of a spoiled child. Mr. Roosevelt has exhibited this disposition often enough, and under circumstances which are striking enough, to make it unpleasantly conspicuous. In the present instance the country cannot well help observing that he has put both his proposal and his arguments for it in the most inconsiderate and – there is no other word for it – the most offensive form he could have chosen. Those who can pretend that in this he had no retaliatory intent, are reduced once more to the dilemma of attributing to him either an unconscionable stupidity or an unconscionable obtuseness.

The foregoing list of characteristics which mark the natural-born autocrat is by no means complete, but it is enough. It is certainly not to the point to vilify Mr. Roosevelt for such serious defects of character as he displays, or to make those defects a target of cheap wit; but on the other hand it is not to the point to butter him up with any pretense that those defects do not exist, that they are anything other than they are, or that they do not distinctly disqualify him for a proper exercise of the power he demands. There is no need for getting up a great heat of moral indignation over them or a great bitterness in denouncing them; one does not revile a





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tone-deaf person who applies for the job of leading an orchestra. One merely makes it clear that nature has disqualified him for the job, and shows why. To do more than this is unbecoming and indecent, but to do less than this is to deal dishonorably with the music-loving public.

Those of us who are forty years old can well remember Woodrow Wilson's incurable affliction with the same megalomaniac delusions that Nature has so unfortunately visited on Mr. Roosevelt; and we can equally well remember the calamitous consequences which they brought about. Our publicists all knew Mr. Wilson's record; they all knew the traits which made him untrustworthy and potentially most dangerous; they all had this knowledge from the outset of his public life as president of Princeton University. If at the first gun of his campaign they had warned the public of these traits as being those of the natural-born autocrat, if they had clearly set them forth and analyzed them, showing how needful it would be in the event of his election to hold his tendencies towards autocracy firmly in check – if they had done this, it is possible that the country might have been spared considerable damage and humiliation; and whether so or not, they would at least have done their plain duty to the public.

So now that another President is bidding for autocratic power, it should be made clear, without heat or animosity but in the plainest terms, that he is quite untrustworthy; and the natural disabilities which make him so should be explicitly set forth. It is not enough to say that no man should be made an autocrat, for while this may be true, it is not directly to the point. Generalizations of



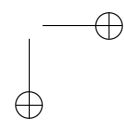


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this sort are confusing and may well be put aside. The matter at issue at the moment is whether Mr. Roosevelt is qualified by nature to exercise properly the power he demands; nothing but that. Manifestly he is not. So far from his being given any extraordinary powers, his natural disabilities plainly intimate that such powers as he has should be cut down to the minimum prescribed by a most literal rendering of the Second Article of the Constitution; and our publicists should be forthrightly saying this and showing cause for it.

If they do not do this, I submit that they are putting the country in a bad way. They are leaving a clear field for the inert thoughtlessness of the masses who are now idly saying that "anything F.D.R. wants is good enough for me." If the people wish to establish an autocracy, temporary or permanent, they have every right to do so. The Declaration of Independence is as explicit on this point as human speech can make it. But it would seem a matter of mere common sense to consider very carefully what kind of autocrat they are going to get. Our national history shows that no country could be expected to go to pieces faster than ours, or to wreck itself more completely, if its destinies were permitted to hang indefinitely on the whim of an individual who by every known turn of mind and temperament was disqualified for directing them. This being true, the public should be all the more distinctly warned against the danger of experimenting with Mr. Roosevelt in the role which he proposes to fill.







A GOVERNMENT OF MEN

June, 1937

During the sit-down strike on General Motors, the Governor of Michigan went on record as saying that if certain things were not done by a certain time he would “enforce the law.” Who gave him an option in the matter? Who gave Governor Murphy discretionary power to say when or whether the law should be enforced? Has Michigan a government of laws or a government of men? If the former, what does the Legislature of Michigan think of an executive who treats its enactments in that fashion? How does public opinion in Michigan take it? What about the country at large, the Federal Administration, and our editors and publicists generally?

These would seem to be natural questions with nothing captious or pernickety about them, but such as would come up at once in the mind of any person who is accustomed to living under the ordinary rule of law. The answers to them are exhibitory. As far as is known, neither the people nor the Legislature of Michigan have





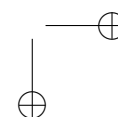
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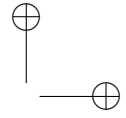
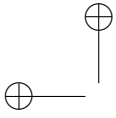
resented Governor Murphy's conduct or appeared to regard it as anything much out of the way. Editorial opinion has not been noticeably touchy on this point; not at all touchy. Michigan seems quite satisfied, on occasion, to let a government of men supersede a government of laws; and this at once raises the previous question: What kind of people are they in Michigan?

The answer appears to be that they are about the same kind of people as form the great majority elsewhere throughout the United States. The evidence for this is that Governor Murphy is notoriously a stooge of the Federal Administration, which is supposed to be, and no doubt actually is, representative of that majority. The Administration stood by Governor Murphy; the Secretary of Labor praised his conduct; and general public opinion has apparently followed suit of public opinion in Michigan in giving tacit consent to the idea that it is quite all right for government of laws to give place occasionally to government of men, if things break that way.

So, if that is the sort of people we are, and government of men is the sort of government to which we occasionally think proper to turn, there is not much to say. After the famous blood-purge in Germany, in which some two hundred or more persons were assassinated, Reichskanzler Hitler said:

If some one asks me why we did not invoke an ordinary court to deal with these men, I can only tell him that in this hour I was responsible for the fate of the nation, and therefore the supreme court of the people during these twenty-four hours consisted of myself.

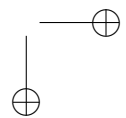
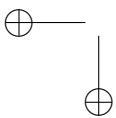




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There you have exactly the principle of executive action which Governor Murphy applied, which the Administration approved, which the Secretary of Labor praised, which Michigan countenanced, and which the articulate majority of our people appear to accept as reasonable and right. It is the principle which on occasion permits an executive to use a free discretion about nullifying, suspending, or evading the provisions of laws which he is under oath to enforce, and substituting for them some arbitrary decision of his own.

If the Germans approve of this principle and relish living under its applications, common courtesy must regard their preference as worthy of all respect. The people of Michigan must likewise be regarded as within their rights, and since our people at large have signified their preference by returning the present Administration to power, they too must be so regarded. On the other hand, our Northern neighbors appear to reject this principle. The Premier of Ontario has served notice that the government of Ontario is a government of laws and not of men. He has been emphatic about it. According to him, law is law in Ontario, its language means exactly what its language says, and sit-down strikes will be dealt with as the law provides if it takes all the resources of the Province to do it. Moreover, he will discuss industrial troubles only with the responsible Canadians concerned. He will have nothing to do with Lewis or Thompson or Martin or any other "paid agitator" who horns in from foreign parts; and he also made some very salty observations on the "state of anarchy" prevailing in the United States, where government of laws is disallowed.





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Pretty plain talk from a friendly neighbor, but we asked for it, no doubt about that. The principle on which the Premier of Ontario is acting was never better put than it was right here in the horse-and-buggy days, in the Constitution of Massachusetts:

In the government of this Commonwealth, the legislative department shall never exercise the executive and judicial powers, or either of them; the executive shall never exercise the legislative and judicial powers, or either of them; the judicial shall never exercise the legislative and executive powers, or either of them; to the end it may be a government of laws and not of men.

The Premier of Ontario is acting on our own old established doctrine of the division of powers, nothing more nor less; the doctrine which Governor Murphy and the Administration have flouted. All talk of Governor Murphy having been confronted by an “emergency” is nonsense, and the Premier is proving it; so is the governor of Connecticut. The sit-down strike is actionable here, precisely as it is in the Province, on seven distinct counts ranging in importance all the way from trespass and blackmail to wilful obstruction and (as witness the dustup in Hershey’s chocolate-factory) incitement to riot. All these offenses are amply covered by law. Nothing is needed but officials who have integrity enough to enforce the law in the ways provided by law; officials like the Premier of Ontario and Governor Cross. It is highly doubtful that there will ever be a sit-down strike in Connecticut, for the governor has given notice that his bailiwick is governed by laws and not by men, and that those laws will be enforced. If Governor Murphy had done the same in the first instance, it is equally doubtful





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that there would be any more sit-down strikes anywhere in the country. He did not do it, however; and why? Because he is a pliant tool of the Administration, and the Administration is a pliant tool of the proletarian vote and must keep its good-will – by legal means, if possible, but if not, then by any means – and that is that.

II

The case of the sit-downers is supposed to bear on “the new jurisprudence” about which various handymen and earwigs of the Administration are indulging in a moderate amount of tub-thumping. We have heard that sort of talk before. It does not take much of a memory to recall, for instance, “the new economics” which similarly-interested persons were touting in Coolidge’s time. Under the new economics of that blessed era, natural law was “out.” Belief in the laws of supply and demand, of prices and wages, of diminishing returns, and all such moldy truck, was pure superstition. What goes up need no longer come down, the whole need not equal the sum of all its parts, nor was a straight line necessarily the shortest distance between two points on a plane.

Some of us remember those economics better than others, but that is because they were suckers and were taken in. Their experience should have taught the salient lesson that when you hear glib talk about “the new” ethics, politics, jurisprudence, or what not, you may safely bet there is some rascality behind it or else some unconscionable idiocy, or more probably both. On the day I write this, for example, Brother Wallace, chief





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medicine-man of the erstwhile AAA, is reported as telling the Ethical Society of New York that “the age we are now entering might with equal accuracy be called the new individualism or the new collectivism.”

Just so. Exactly. So it might. Because whichever of these edulcorant and sedative terms you choose, you will finally wake up to find that it is a synonym for an ever-accelerated submergence of the individual into a condition of involuntary State-servitude. That is what Brother Wallace and his associate magicians of the New Deal are running us into, and one must say that up to now they have made very good running of it. If you doubt this, calculate the amount of your taxes, direct and indirect, and then figure out how much time you spent last year in working for the State, as against the time you spent in working for yourself. One man I know had to give up one-fifth of his income in income-taxes alone, while one concern I know was forced to give up one-fourth of its profits; which means that the man worked one-fifth of all last year for the State, and the concern worked one-fourth; and the added sum of other taxes, direct and indirect, would of course bring their terms of servitude much higher. So much for Brother Wallace’s new ism. Similarly there is every reason to suspect that when all comes to all, the new jurisprudence is merely a device for sanctioning the abandonment of fundamental integrities by those whose particular duty it is to maintain them. In all probability it will turn out to be a compendium or digest of anarchy, regularizing the successive steps by which a government of men has supplanted a government of laws.





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It appears that New York City is promised a run of the new jurisprudence. The *Times* of that city reported the other day that Borough President Harvey, who wishes to be mayor, said in a public speech that if he controlled New York's Police Department, he would rid the city of Communists in two weeks, with the aid of a liberal supply of rubber hose. Mr. Harvey is not politically affiliated with the New Deal – he is a Republican – but his spiritual affiliation with it seems to be complete. He seems to be as strong for a government of men as Governor Murphy himself, for there is certainly nothing in the laws of New York to sanction beating up Communists with rubber hose, but on the contrary, everything against it.

To check up properly on Mr. Harvey's fine and stirring exposition of the new jurisprudence, it is useful to go back to a few incidents of New York's mayoralty in the horse-and-buggy days. In 1911, Socialists were regarded as unfavorably as Communists are now, especially by the police. In his message of February 21st to the Board of Aldermen, Mayor Gaynor wrote:

I have particularly made the police authorities understand that those who entertain views of government, or of economic or social order, different from ours, are not to be interfered with or denied the right of freedom of speech and of assembly on that account. A propaganda by intellectual persuasion and peaceable means for changes in form of government or in the economic or social order, is lawful and not to be meddled with, much less oppressed, by the police.

In the same year a poor and obscure boy was illegally arrested and mishandled by the police. The Mayor examined his case, and on December 19th wrote the Po-





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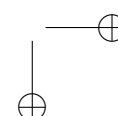
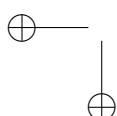
lice Commissioner a blistering letter, ending with these words:

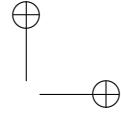
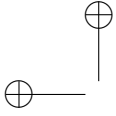
The police must be made to understand that they cannot arrest and lock people up as they like, but that they must keep within the law. The only way to enforce the law is the way prescribed by law. That which cannot be done lawfully must not be done at all, by the police or any other public officials from the President of the United States down. This is a government of laws and not of men.

On July 7, 1910, in answer to a clergyman who had asked him to suppress some motion-pictures of a prize-fight, the Mayor wrote:

If it lay in my power to say whether the pictures should be exhibited, it would not take me long to decide it. I do not see how it can do any one any good to look at them. But will you be so good as to remember that ours is a government of laws and not of men? Will you please get that well into your head? I am not able to do as I like as mayor. I must take the law just as it is, and you may be absolutely certain that I shall not take the law into my own hands. You say you are glad that the mayors of many cities have "ordered" that these pictures shall not be exhibited. Indeed? Who set them up as autocrats? If there be some valid law giving any mayor such power, then he can exercise it; otherwise not. The growing exercise of arbitrary power in this country by those put in office would be far more dangerous and is far more to be dreaded than certain other vices that we all wish to minimize or be rid of. People little know what they are doing when they try to encourage officials to resort to arbitrary power.

I rather dread repeating what the Mayor said in his message to the schoolchildren of New York on Independence Day, July 4, 1912, for fear that THE MERCURY



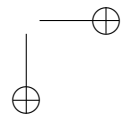
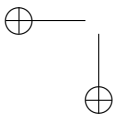


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will be had up for *Majestätsbeleidigung*. However, the chance is worth taking, so here it is:

We must therefore be vigilant of every little approach to despotism, however little it may be. We must see to it that those whom we elect to office do not go outside of the laws or set themselves up above the laws and do as they please. It has always been the case throughout the world that the officials who did this did it on the plea that the laws were not good enough, that they could do better than the laws prescribed. Beware of all such officials. We do not want officials who have any lust of power. We want officials who are very careful about exercising power. We want officials who are careful to exercise no power except that given to them by the people by their laws. There is no more dangerous man in a free country, in a democracy, than an official who thinks he is better than the laws.

In the clear light of the new jurisprudence, the new collectivism, the New Deal, and the new what-not, such sayings are probably to be regarded as museum-pieces, with no practical interest for forward-looking citizens of this great Republic. Perhaps, however, our less sophisticated neighbors up in Canada might like to look at them, so I have pleasure in bringing them to their attention.







ALL THE TRAFFIC WILL BEAR

July, 1937

There are signs that the Administration is beginning to commence to get ready to think about economy. The President has spoken of economy in a way that would almost appear to show he means it, although of course one can never judge by appearances with Mr. Roosevelt. On the other hand, congressmen are anxious because the returns from taxation are ominously shy. As they see the situation, either the pet lambs of our bureaucracy must spend less money, or taxes must be raised, and raising taxes in an election year is one of those things that simply will not bear thinking about. Hence congressmen seem to be talking of economy as earnestly as the President talks of it, and while it is normally as unsafe to judge by appearances with congressmen as with the President, the chances are rather more than even that in this instance we may do so. We may believe that both the President and Congress are really interested in making a few motions towards economy because, as the old proverb puts it,





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“Needs must when the devil drives,” and they are now for the first time facing the disagreeable fact that there is a limit to what the traffic will bear.

All the promptings of political sagacity point that way. Anyone in Mr. Roosevelt’s place would like to hold things together until he can stand from under and be safely up the alley before they bust. This is natural, even perhaps commendable. If he did not have sense enough to take this course without being told, the sorry fate of Brother Hoover would suggest it very pointedly, and all the more so when he remembers the fine footwork of the canny Vermonter who gently tiptoed out and left Brother Hoover holding the bag. Brother Coolidge may have had his weaknesses, but myopia was not among them. He could read handwriting on a wall so far off that it was all most people could do to see the wall.

As for the congressmen, it seems pretty clear that they do not feel under the necessity of eating out of Mr. Roosevelt’s hand much longer, or rather they see that his hand has not much left in it to eat. They can no longer count on being swept back into their jobs on the tide of his popularity, but must devise means of their own to keep their fences mended. Probably they are now saying to themselves that whoever is to be the next President it won’t be *this* man, and if they want to hold their jobs they had better think up some good persuasive new talking-points to suit the day of reckoning with their constituents. Hence they turn to economy, which is always a good talking-point, and all the better for having been used so little of late that the sound of it will have some of the charm of novelty.





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It is all the better also because, with regard to taxation, our people are now hearing so many things that they ought not to hear, and are beginning to ask very inconvenient questions. Reformers like Senator La Follette are all for "making the people tax-conscious" by broadening the basis of the income tax in order to bring in the small fry, or most of them, who are now exempt. This is interesting enough in principle perhaps, but the trouble is that sinful persons, Economic Royalists like the Northwestern National Life Insurance Company, are spreading the word around that the basis of taxation is pretty well broadened already, and that the small fry who can least afford it are bearing a monstrous and crushing burden of taxation; a burden which is none the lighter or less iniquitous because it is imposed indirectly. Here is a summary of the Northwestern Company's findings, clipped from that notorious Economic-Royalist sheet, the New York *Herald Tribune*:

The \$18-a-week laborer or clerk who owns no property pays \$116 a year in taxes hidden in the prices of the goods and services he buys, or 12 cents on the dollar. The mechanic or minor department head, whose \$150-a-month salary permits the operation of a used automobile, pays \$229 annually (or 12.7 cents on the dollar), even though he owns no other property and is a family man exempt from income taxes. A study covering forty-eight cities shows that on an average, 25.3 cents on the dollar paid in rent goes to cover taxes. The tax load on unused automobile ownership and operation amounts to 20.1 per cent a year. Finally, with consumer purchases of goods and services totaling \$52,000,000,000 in 1936, the estimated total taxes which could be (and therefore would be) included were \$8,122,000,000. This is at the rate of 15.6 cents for every dollar of the consumer's expenditure.





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Stuff like this is manifestly seditious, and those who give currency to it, like the *Herald Tribune*, are no doubt acting wickedly and against God. Yet there the wretched facts are, and there seems no way to keep them properly hushed up. Taken in company with the facts of direct taxation which are equally inconvenient, they seem likely to breed annoyance for congressmen who try any longer to feed their constituents on the Rooseveltian doctrine of Soaking the Rich. These misguided constituents are almost bound to ask whether, for instance, if a propertyless proletarian earning \$936 a year has to pay \$116 in taxes, the New Deal is not more or less of a fizzle.

So as things stand at present, economy – or some very devout talk of it – looks like the safest bet for President and Congress alike. Borrowing yourself out of debt was a great game while it lasted, and the Administration has certainly had a high excessive spree at it. But now that the game is about run out and all hands are throwing sheep's eyes at economy, the question is where to begin economizing. "Relief" can hardly be meddled with; it is here to stay forever as a permanent political asset, because Relief means a whaling lot of votes. A politician who proposed to pry the unconscionable Mr. Hopkins and his noisome swarm of Uplifters loose from their death-clutch on the public udder would be taking his life in his hands. Hence the taxpayer may make up his mind to cut his loss at that point for the tidy sum of \$1,500,000,000, if no more. The appropriations for armament must stand, for several reasons; one of which is that cutting them would put a crimp in the steel business and allied industries, whose present flourishing condition is the biggest factor in keeping up the appearance of a





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sound general prosperity. Similarly, every other line of expenditure has a strong political defense; there is not one whose continuance will be determined on its merits alone; and thus we have the interesting spectacle of everybody being strong for cutting down all appropriations except those in which his own political concern is in some way enlisted.

The upshot will no doubt be that we shall see no actual economies effected, but that the present rate of governmental expenditure will be established as the norm. Government will spend no less next year than this year, nor will it ever spend less, but it is unlikely to spend more until some unforeseen contingency arises which will enable it to raise the norm a notch or two higher. This is the one drop of truth in the ocean of bilge-water that is daily poured out around the phrase “balancing the budget.”

II

All this is an old story, so old and commonplace as not to be worth retelling for its own sake, but I have an ulterior object in going over it again. I have often said in these pages – and have been a good deal abused for saying it – that the State’s final aim and purpose is to reduce the individual citizen to a condition of involuntary servitude; and the foregoing old story shows precisely how the State proceeds in the execution of its purpose. To begin with, the man who earns \$18 a week, or \$936 a year, is nearly at the subsistence-level, yet the State takes \$116 a year from him in concealed taxes; so he works for the State,





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at what virtually amounts to forced labor, something over one-ninth of the year. Two friends, a lawyer and an artist, tell me that their federal and New York State income taxes alone – not counting other taxes, direct and indirect – took away one-fifth of their year's earnings; and this means that they each spent about two and a half months in forced labor for the government. In the same way, by reducing the problem to terms of time and labor, the reader can easily estimate the result in cases involving other taxes, such as those on inheritances, gifts, and the like.

The limit to these exactions of forced labor is always set, as we see it set at the present time, by what the traffic will bear; that is, by the utmost that our jobholders can impose without starting a revolt and thereby losing their jobs. The State always takes advantage of every contingency, especially every general disturbance of the public mind, to increase these exactions; and the greater the disturbance, as in 1929, the greater the increase because the traffic will bear it. Thus the norm of exaction is raised progressively higher as the public mind becomes "conditioned" to each increase; and it is never actually lowered. This political generation, say, finds it normal and natural to work for the State one-fifth of each year; presently, in consequence of some disturbance, another will find it normal and natural to work for it one-fourth of each year; later another, one-third; and so on, until the State achieves its purpose, as in Russia, Italy, and Germany, where everybody works for the State all the time.

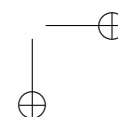
Side by side with these confiscations of labor and in order to safeguard them, goes a progressive confiscation

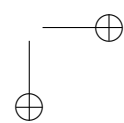
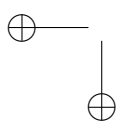




ALL THE TRAFFIC WILL BEAR

of liberty. The State steadily narrows the margin of existence within which the individual is free to act as he pleases. Here, likewise, norms of confiscation are established at the successive limits to what the traffic will bear, and successive political generations are conditioned to those norms. There is no need to go into detail about this, for the two lines of State action are precisely parallel. All the citizen has to do is to compare the time he now spends per year in forced labor for the State with what he spent ten, twenty, thirty years ago; also to compare the area of existence in which he now moves at will with the area in which he moved at will ten, twenty, thirty years ago. These comparisons will fully justify his belief that the State's final object is to reduce its citizenry to a condition of involuntary servitude, and that its progress toward that object is limited at any given stage only by what the traffic will bear.







LIBERALS NEVER LEARN

August, 1937

There is no question that the Liberals and Progressives are in the political saddle at the moment, fitted out with bucking-straps and a Spanish bit, and are riding the nation under spur and quirt. Liberalism became the fashion in 1932, so for six years every esurient shyster who was out to rook the public has had to advertise himself as a Liberal and a Progressive. None other need apply. Hence we now have a hundred-per-cent Liberal Administration backed up by Liberal State, county, and municipal place-men, and a solid nation-wide Liberal bureaucracy running close to a million, all frozen tight to their jobs. One would hardly believe there could be as many Liberals in the world as are now luxuriating with their muzzles immersed in the public trough. They are a curious assortment, too, differing widely in race, color, and previous condition of servitude, but they are all Liberals. Mr. Farley is a Liberal, Governor Murphy is a Liberal; so is Mr. Ashurst, Mr. Ickes, Mr. Wagner,





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Mr. La Follette, Mr. Black, Mr. Wallace, and over all – God save us! – stands the smiling figure of Liberalism’s Little Corporal in person.

It is an impressive array, if you don’t mind what you look at, but nothing to waste words on. We have seen its like before. When Mr. Taft left the Presidency in 1912, political Liberalism descended on the country with a leap and a whistle, under the banner of Mr. Wilson, who being a North-of-Ireland Scotch Presbyterian pedagogue, was ideally fitted by birth and training to give a first-class demonstration of Liberalism in action; and believe me, he gave one. It was the first chance the country ever had to see the real thing in Liberalism, and we certainly saw it dished up with all the modern improvements. When Uncle Sam finally staggered out from under that experience with genuine old-vatted, eighteen-carat, stem-winding, self-cocking Liberalism, most of us thought the poor old man had had enough of it to last him all his life, but in 1932 he was back at the nut-factory again, clamoring for more.

But as I say, speaking seriously, all this is not worth wasting words on, because as everybody but Liberals and unborn children might be presumed to know, a job-seeker’s professions of Liberalism are simply so much in the routine work of electioneering. They are a routine device in the general technique of what my friend Mr. Mencken calls boob-bumping. Hence when Liberalism is in the saddle, as at present or as in 1912–1920, you get substantially the same thing that you get from any other stripe of professional politics: *i.e.*, you get it in the neck, and get it good and hard. Liberalism gives you a little more exalted type of flatulence, a more af-





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fictive self-righteousness, and in its lower reaches you get a considerably larger line of zealous imbecility; but otherwise the public gets about as much and as little for its money from political Liberalism as it gets out of any other species of organized thievery and fraud.

What I do think is worth looking into for a moment is the working of the Liberal mind as displayed by persons in private life; persons, that is, who are not job-holders or job-seekers, but who have an interest in public affairs – such persons, let us say, as are likely to be found in the Foreign Policy Association or who expound the Liberal point of view in the correspondence columns of the press. I have known many such in my time, and the curious workings of their mentality always interested me profoundly. They were, and are, excellent people, and their public spirit is admirable. They are sincere, as far as their intelligence, or their lack of it, permits them to be; that is to say, they are morally honest, their motives and intentions are impeccable; but intellectually they are as dishonest a set of people, taking one with another, as I ever saw. Chiefly for this reason I have long regarded them as the most dangerous element in human society; and it might be worth a reader's while to let me specify a little, by way of showing cause for this belief.

In the first place, I never knew a Liberal who was not incurably politically-minded. Those whom I have known seemed to think not only that politics can furnish a cure for every ill the social flesh is heir to, but also that there is nowhere else to look for a cure. They had an extraordinary idea of the potency and beneficence of political remedies, and when they wanted some social





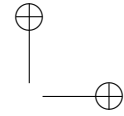
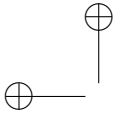
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abuse corrected or some social improvement made, they instinctively turned to politics as a first and last resort.

The upshot of this addiction is that the Liberal is always hell-bent for more laws, more political regulation and supervision, more job-holders, and consequently less freedom. I do not recall a single Liberal of my acquaintance who impressed me as having the least interest in freedom, or a shadow of faith in its potentialities. On the contrary, I have always found the Liberal to have the greatest nervous horror of freedom, and the keenest disposition to barge in on the liberties of the individual and whittle them away at every accessible point. If anyone thinks my experience has been exceptional, I suggest he look up the record and see how individual liberty has fared under the various régimes in which Liberalism was dominant, and how it has fared under those in which it was held in abeyance. Let him take a sheaf of specifically Liberal proposals for the conduct of this-or-that detail of public affairs, and use it as a measure of the authors' conception of human rights and liberties. If he does this I think he will find enough to bear out my experience, and perhaps a good deal more.

Being politically-minded, the Liberal (as I have known him) is convinced that compromise is of the essence of politics, and that any conceivable compromise of intellect or character is justifiable if it be made in behalf of the Larger Good. Hence he does not reluct at condoning and countenancing the most scandalous dishonesties and the most revolting swineries whenever, in his judgment, the Larger Good may be in any way served thereby. He assents to the earmarking of a large credit of rascality and misfeasance, upon which job-holders may draw at

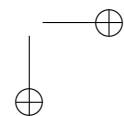
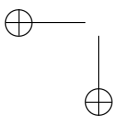




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will if only they assure him that the improvement or benefit which interests him will be thereby forthcoming. Thus, for example, he tacitly agrees to the debauching of an entire electorate – to the setting up of an enormous mass of voting-power, subsidized from the public treasury – because it will insure the election of Mr. Roosevelt, and electing Mr. Roosevelt will in turn insure the triumph of the Larger Good.

Consequently, in his unreasoning devotion to the Larger Good and his inability to see that this kind of service really produces nothing that he expects it to produce, the Liberal is always being taken in by some political peruna that anyone in his right mind would know is inert and fraudulent. This gullibility is perhaps the trait which chiefly makes him so dangerous to society; he is such an incorrigible sucker. He whoops up some political patent medicine, say the Wagner Act or the AAA, gets other unthinking persons to indorse it, and when its real effect and intention becomes manifest, he learns nothing from his disappointment, but flies off to another synthetic concoction, and then again to another and another, thus keeping himself and his whole entourage in an unending state of befuddlement. He was keen to Save the World for Democracy; he was strong for the War to End All War, self-determination of nations, freedom of the seas, the rights of minorities, and all that sort of thing. He was red-hot for the League of Nations, and now he is all in favor of The More Abundant Life, social security, and soaking the rich in order to uplift and beatify the proletariat. He does all this as an act of faith, according to the little Sunday-scholar's definition of faith as "the power of believing something that you know isn't so";





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for if he would listen to the voice of experience alone, it would tell him in no uncertain tones that such stuff is but the purest hokum, and that taking any stock in it merely puts him in line for another brisk run of disappointment precisely like the many he has incurred already in the same way.

The typical Liberal not only puts his confidence in bogus political nostrums and comes to grief; he puts it also in the Pied Pipers who devise those nostrums, and thereby he regularly comes to grief again. For some inexplicable reason he persists in believing that a politician who is enough of a linguist to talk the clichés of Liberalism fluently, one who knows the Liberal idiom and has its phrasebook pretty well by heart, is trustworthy. He has the naive expectation that such a politician will act as he talks, and when he finds that he does not so act, he is very sad about it. Thus the Liberal fell for Roosevelt I; he fell for Woodrow Wilson; he fell for Ramsay MacDonald and even for Lloyd George; he fell for Roosevelt II; and as one after another of his gonfaloniers turned out to be cotton-backed, he lifted up his voice in lamentation and great woe.

I read an article by Mr. Walter Lippmann some time ago, which faithfully reflects this naive and inveterate trait of the Liberal. It was printed in the *New York Herald Tribune*, and by an odd coincidence it appeared in the issue of April 1 – All Fools’ Day – though too much probably should not be made of that circumstance. Mr. Lippmann rehearses in detail his support of Mr. Roosevelt’s various candidacies, and his indorsement of almost all the New Deal policies. In the Summer of 1935, however, he saw signs that Mr. Roosevelt “had





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acquired the habit of emergency action; that he was not disposed to relinquish his extraordinary personal powers and restore the normal procedure of representative government." As time went on, these signs multiplied; "expenditures and subsidies did not decline" and "vested interests had been created which the Administration could not or would not resist." Then came the Supreme Court proposal and the Administration's "tolerant silence" about the sit-down strikes; and these appear to be the last two straws that broke the back of Mr. Lippmann's confidence. He goes on in a despondent strain to say, "So what I see is a President establishing the precedent that his will or the will of the party in power must prevail, and that the law may be manipulated to carry out their purposes."

Sancta simplicitas! One reads this with amazement. Is it possible that Mr. Lippmann actually *expected* Mr. Roosevelt to relinquish voluntarily any personal power that could be made to come his way? Did Mr. Lippmann actually suppose that Mr. Roosevelt, any more than any other professional politician, cares two straws about "the normal procedure of representative government" or would turn his hand over to restore it unless and until it were politically expedient so to do? Why, really, did Mr. Lippmann think there was the faintest possibility that expenditures would decline and bureaucratic vested interests be resisted by the Administration? If it were quite urbane to do so, one might ask what Mr. Lippmann thinks the Administration is there for. As for "establishing the precedent" that Mr. Lippmann cites, the answer is that Mr. Roosevelt is establishing that precedent because he can get away with it, or thinks





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he can, and it is simply silly to suggest that he might have any squeamishness about imposing his will upon all and sundry – the more, the better – or any shadow of compunction about manipulating the law to carry out his purposes. Mr. Lippmann’s article, in short, is based on the assumption that the commonly-accepted codes of honesty and decency are as applicable to professional politicians as they are to folks; and while this does great credit to Mr. Lippmann’s qualities of heart, one must say in all conscience that it does precious little credit to his qualities of head.

But of such pre-eminently is the kingdom of Liberalism. Mr. Lippmann says he is “deeply disquieted,” not because he apprehends the dictatorship of either Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Lewis, or the rise of an organized Fascism. What he sees in the present state of the Union is “the makings of a fierce reaction against Mr. Roosevelt and the whole Liberal and Progressive movement, and against all Liberal and Progressive ideas. That is what I dread.” I can not share Mr. Lippmann’s sentiments; indeed, I hope he may be right. What I have seen of the Liberal and Progressive movement gives me no wish for its continuance – far from it – and if it disintegrated tomorrow I should be disposed to congratulate the country on its deliverance from a peculiarly dangerous and noisome nuisance. With regard to “all Liberal and Progressive ideas,” I have never been able to make out that there are any. Pseudo-ideas, yes, in abundance; sentiment, emotion, wishful dreams and visions, grandiose castles in Spain, political panaceas and placebos made up of milk, moonshine, and bilge-water in approximately





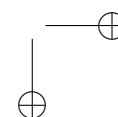
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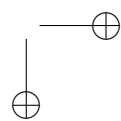
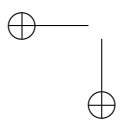
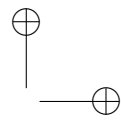
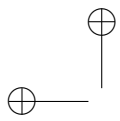
equal parts – yes, these seem to be almost a peculiarity of Liberalism. But ideas, no.

P.S. – As the foregoing goes to press, Mr. Lippmann comes out with another article in the same vein, in the *Herald Tribune* of June 26. In the course of his writing he says:

I wish I could recover the belief that the President really is interested in democratic reforms and not in the establishment of irresistible power personally directed. It is not pleasant to have such fears about the Chief Magistrate of the Republic. But for many long months nothing has happened which helps to dispel these fears. Many, many things continue to happen which accentuate them.

I have no wish to bear hardly on Mr. Lippmann, for his conclusions in both the articles I have cited are sound and true, and I wish the country would heed them. Nevertheless the sentences just quoted are probably, I think, entitled to the first prize as an exhibit of the Liberal's imperishable naiveté. Why, one must ask, should any vertebrated animal ever have entertained the fantastic belief which Mr. Lippmann has lost; and having lost it, why should he wish to recover it?







AUTOPSY ON THE NEW DEAL

September, 1937

At last, thank Heaven, there are pretty clear signs that Spring has come. It may be a false dawn, for I am writing this on the fifteenth of July, which is a little early, but the groundhog has certainly come out and looked around, and I should judge by the feel of the political weather that he has made up his mind to stay out. Congress has adjourned for a few days, out of respect to the late Senator Robinson. My guess is that when it re-convenes it will shelve the Court bill for good and all, pass a minimum of necessary measures, and then go home to mend its fences and sharpen its knives. Then if the boys get any kind of reasonable assurance that they can either beat the local machines or keep them with them, and that Mr. Farley will be unable to invade their districts and buy them out of their jobs, those knives are going to carve Mr. Roosevelt into cat's meat when the next session opens, six months hence.





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You can hardly blame the boys for feeling as they do. For five years they have been cowering under the bull-whip of a blockish and touchy Legree for whom they have not the slightest respect, and who they know would sell them down the river at any time they dared so much as say their souls were their own. Naturally they are tired of this, for there is a limit to what even the most timid and spiritless machine-slave can stand. The sudden blow-up in both houses of Congress is what future historians will probably call a "servile rebellion." It is no discredit to Senator McCarran, for instance, to suspect that his kick over the traces was due more to sheer rage than to principle, for you can hardly imagine any vertebrated animal who would not choose to peddle hot peanuts for the rest of his life rather than put up any longer with Mr. Roosevelt's insolent dragooning. A good soldier will take quite a bit of manhandling from a leader whom he can respect, even though he may not like him much, but taking it indefinitely from Mr. Roosevelt is something else again.

So I repeat that in my opinion there is going to be joy in the presence of the angels around the White House next January, which is emphatically to the good. Our apprehensive citizenry may be assured that when the Senate Judiciary Committee files the kind of report it filed on the Court bill, and when senators bust out against the Administration with language like Mr. McCarran's, Mr. Glass' or Mr. Wheeler's, and when congressmen turn loose a line of talk like Mr. Sumners', dictatorship is as yet a good long way off. Like Napoleon, as Artemus Ward said, Mr. Roosevelt tried to do too much, and did it; and in so doing he has ripped his party wide





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open from tail-hem to neckband. The Court issue gave the disaffected brethren their longed-for chance to pour forth a five years' accumulation of venomous bile in his direction, and they still have enough of it left in stock to keep the flow going for the rest of his term. Mr. Roosevelt is now at last left standing before the country, looking like himself. That is to say, he is left looking like a shallow person, unworthy of confidence, whose wrong-headed ambition has finally made him overshoot the mark and shoot his grandmother; and an unmanly person, moreover, who most conspicuously can't take it – a poor sport, who can only give it, never take it. He may still press the Court issue on the next session of Congress, perhaps may get consideration of it, perhaps even win it, though this seems most improbable. But he has maneuvered himself into a position where if he wins he is hopelessly discredited, and if he loses he is equally discredited; and this is precisely the position which his character and record entitle him to occupy, and which every American of sound mind and independent judgment must be delighted to see him occupy.

II

Therefore as things stand at present, it seems unlikely that we shall hear much more about the New Deal, and we can thankfully begin to speak of it in the past tense. The name has already taken on a back-number sound; it is no longer anything to conjure with, as it used to be in the spacious days of Brother Tugwell, the Economic Planners, and the Brain Trust. This being so, it would





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seem to be a pretty good time to hold a preliminary inquest on the New Deal, with a view to picking out the worst thing it has done, the thing that has been most seriously injurious to the country at large.

To a great extent, naturally, this must be a matter of personal opinion, so when I put in my nomination it should be understood only as pointing to what I think is the worst thing it has done to me and to the few people with whose opinion I am personally acquainted. No doubt there are many who will not agree about this, and who think that other misfeasances of the New Deal are much worse. I freely admit that they have a great deal to say for their view of the matter, and that I am far from hoping or wishing to convert them to my view. What I am interested in is the inquest, not the findings. The reason why I write as I do is that I thought if I say frankly what I believe is the worst thing the New Deal has done to myself and my friends, it might stir up other people to join in the inquest and try to decide what is the worst thing it has done to them; and if a number of people did this, it would help establish a rational public opinion.

What their findings would be, I repeat, is not the important thing, and I would not argue about them. Mr. Lippmann, for example, as I observed last month, dreads the prospect that the New Deal will have brought all Liberal ideas and movements into disrepute. I can understand how Mr. Lippmann would hold that view, and I am glad he saw fit to state it so frankly, even though I believe, quite on the contrary, that if the New Deal has done that, it has done no bad thing at all, but a very good and salutary thing. Again, some say that





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the worst thing the New Deal has done is to burden the country needlessly with a crushing weight of debt. Some, again, point to its monstrous concentration of authority at Washington. Others point to the inroads it has made on the citizen's rights and liberties by its creation of a huge, wasteful, and nagging bureaucracy. Others think it has hurt the country most by its wholesale corruption of the electorate; while others, finally, think the worst thing it has done is to inculcate the vicious doctrine that the State owes all its citizens a living, and thus to convert great masses of the population into loafers and sturdy beggars. All these are sound counts against the New Deal, and a choice for first place among them is, as I say, a matter of perfectly respectable opinion.

Bad as they are, however, there is one achievement of the New Deal that has been worse for me than any of them; and that is its suffocation of a decent humanitarian spirit, its drying-up of ordinarily decent humane impulses toward one's fellow-men. Since I began to notice this effect upon myself I have been inquiring around among acquaintances, and have found that to a greater or less degree, they too have felt it. One of them put it to me very well only the other day. He said: "The mere fact that I wouldn't any longer give a dime to a panhandler is nothing, or that I wouldn't give a thousand dollars to a soup-kitchen or an orphanage, if I had it. I am on perfectly good terms with myself about that, because the government has arbitrarily taken on the job and taxes me for it, and the government may jolly well swing it. What worries me is that I have no longer any proper feeling for anybody who is in any way out of luck, man, woman, or child, rich or poor, high or low, bond or free,





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drunk or sober. I used to have a very strong feeling for any kind of distress. When a poor chap touched me for a nickel, I really had sympathy for him. I was sincerely sorry for him and wanted to help him if I could, and really cared what became of him. Now I don't. I'm ashamed of it and try to talk myself into believing it isn't so, but the sober fact is that ever since Roosevelt confiscated a whole nation's sentiment of decent altruism five years ago and put it in the service of his filthy little political purposes and ambitions, I simply don't care a good goddam what becomes of anybody."

Well, take it or leave it, there is my grievance against the New Deal. I say nothing for it, do not attempt to justify it, nor am I proud of it – quite the contrary. I am no more proud of being maimed than my friend was. No one would be proud of going about with one eye because some ambitious and conscienceless ass of a surgeon had experimented on the other one; nor would anyone be particularly pleased about it, either. But if the eye is out it is out, and that is that; there is no use pretending otherwise, and if you put in a glass eye for appearance's sake, there is no use trying to persuade yourself that you can see with it, because you can't. My complaint is that by hoodwinking man's noblest quality, the spirit of altruism, into the service of the most ignoble ends, the New Deal has caused the mere name of altruism to stink in the nostrils of good-hearted, well-disposed, and decent men, whose sympathies the world can ill afford to lose.

The thing is worth thinking about. We think a great deal about the State's ever-increasing confiscations of money and power; why not think a little about its confiscations of sentiment? They seem to me the most



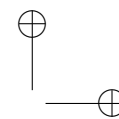
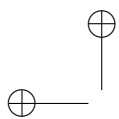


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damaging and degrading of all its confiscations, as well as the hardest to repair. If this view appears extravagant, consider the history of these confiscations for a moment. In every country the State has laid its defiling hand upon man's natural sentiment for his native surroundings, and debauched it into approval of the obscene enormities which go on under the name and sanction of patriotism. In every country the State has laid its hand upon man's religious aspirations and debased them to its own purposes. In every country the State has laid its hand on the natural sentiment for family and kinfolk, and perverted it; for example, does not Mussolini say that "Fascism takes man from his family at six and gives him back to it at sixty"? And now, in our own country, the State has touched and perverted the sentiment which moves us to believe with Dumas' hero that, "after all, man is man's brother."

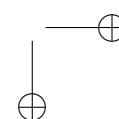
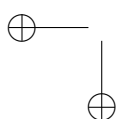
I suggest that once in a while, as we look back on the New Deal, we take a little time off from considering its political, social, and fiscal effects, and consider what it has done to us as human beings. Are we quite the same people we were before, or are we suffering the effects of a sort of moral gas-attack? Has the New Deal's rank betrayal of our better nature hardened us to human anxiety and distress? When we hear about the worries and persecutions of the Economic Royalists; or when Mr. Roosevelt tells us about the submerged third of our population and the sorrows of the proletariat; or when we hear that our hospitals and charities are fast going on the rocks; or that thousands of willing workmen are pitched out of their jobs as an incident of the struggle for power between John L. Lewis and William Green; does

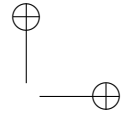
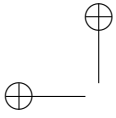




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this kind of thing touch off a ready interest and sympathy as it did, say, six years ago, or in our inmost hearts do we no longer actually care a tinker's damn what becomes of any of these unfortunates, but only wish they would all go off somewhere together and get drowned? This candid examination of ourselves can do us no harm and may do us some good; and at all events it will put us in the way of making a more accurate estimate of the New Deal's moral quality than we have been able to make hitherto.



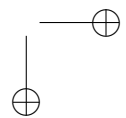
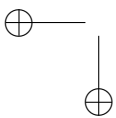


THE PACKING OF HUGO BLACK

October, 1937

Mr. Black's appointment to the Supreme Court will be very stale news by the time these words get into print; but there are a few things to be said about it which will be as much worth saying ten years from now, or fifty years, as they are now. They will no doubt be said so often fifty years hence that nobody will miss them or misunderstand them; but that will not do this month's readers of THE MERCURY much good. At present it is unlikely that any commentator on public affairs will say them, and still more unlikely that any publication could be found to print them if he did. Nevertheless they ought to be said, because the kind of people who read THE MERCURY would already naturally have an uneasy sense that something of the sort is true, and that sense ought to be backed up by seeing these matters set forth in print.

The incident of Mr. Black's appointment is the most exhibitory incident that has happened in this country for





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years. That is to say, it shows up more truths and shows them up in a brighter and clearer light than any other single turn which our public affairs have taken in the lifetime of the present generation at least, and probably much longer. It shows up the kind of President we have. It shows up the Senate. It shows up our newspapers. It shows up organized Labor. Finally, it shows up the kind of people we have, who would elect such a President and such a Senate, and who would accept such newspapers and tolerate an organization of Labor which avows such principles and employs such methods as those to which our present organization seems to stand committed. Mr. Black's appointment shows up all these discreditable matters in one motion and so completely that the dullest eye can make no mistake about any of them.

What it shows about the President's personal character may be passed over with no more than a word. He has often already revealed himself as just the kind of man, as far as personal character goes, who might be implicitly trusted to make just that kind of appointment. One need say no worse than that, and one could not say better. Apparently, however, this incident shows something about his political character and qualities that is worth remarking. We have all seen good evidence of it before, but nothing so completely and strikingly exhibitory as this. Mr. Roosevelt has, up to very lately, been regarded as a first-class politician; probably many people still so regard him. This opinion is mostly justifiable. He is a first-rate politician in every essential respect but one, and that one is a killer. A really top-notch politician has to have his temper always in hand. He must always be able to "take it"; and this Mr. Roosevelt cannot do. He





THE PACKING OF HUGO BLACK

has all sorts of political ability, but that is not enough; he has not the politician's temperament. The test of a really great politician is not how he behaves in smooth water, but in rough water. Lincoln, Quay, Platt, and Penrose had not only the politician's peculiar ability, but they also had the politician's temperament. They never let annoyance, irritation, sulkiness, or vindictiveness run away with their good judgment; and right here is where Mr. Roosevelt misses the mark of being a great politician.

It is a bad miss, too, for if a politician in a fit of temper makes a ghastly break and still wins his point, he is little, if any, better off than if he had lost it; for the consequences of his victory return to plague him. At the present time, for example, it is a safe bet that the Senators who are especially tickled by the egregious Mr. Black's appointment and who voted with most gusto for his confirmation, are those of a cynical turn of mind who secretly or openly detest Mr. Roosevelt. It is those who are friendly to him and at the same time intelligent enough to see beyond their noses, who must be feeling a little blue at the moment. The job of a Supreme Court justice is not quite the same thing as the job of a police magistrate in Alabama or the job of investigating congressional lobbies; and some, at least, among Mr. Roosevelt's friends must be intelligent enough to know this fact, and to be rather anxious about its repercussions.

But editors and correspondents are busily building up a myth for Mr. Black as a great lawyer, and a myth of his appointment as a great stroke of political shrewdness on the part of Mr. Roosevelt. We need not concern ourselves with exploding the first myth; the mere lapse of time will





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take care of that. With regard to the second, the editors and correspondents do not tell us just what political purpose this unconscionable appointment serves, or can be made to serve. They do not even make a respectable fist at telling us anything that normal intelligence can get down without retching. Will it strengthen Mr. Roosevelt's supporters? One would suppose, on the contrary, it must embarrass them dreadfully. Will it tend to reunite the Party? Will it herd back disaffected Southern sentiment into the fold? Will it attract and reassure the wavering? Only a pretty hardy believer could give an affirmative answer on any of these points; and so, if the thing is such a great stroke of politics, one may fairly ask just what will it do?

It will, of course, put another New Dealer on the bench, but then the inconvenient question instantly comes up, why go out of the way to pick on one so thoroughly discredited? There was no need of it. Suppose Mr. Roosevelt had picked another Cardozo; an able lawyer, an experienced judge, a man of unimpeachable character and very high culture, and one who is also on record as a plenty good-enough New Dealer for anybody, always on the Liberal side, always willing to stretch the Constitution to the ripping-point in behalf of the greatest good to the greatest number. Mr. Roosevelt could have found such a man; there are two or three of them around. This would have put a powerful weapon in the hands of his supporters. They could have said, "There, you see what all the commotion about Court-packing amounts to. You have had your fears for nothing. The appointment is perfectly respectable, as we knew it would be. It shows that Mr. Roosevelt can be trusted to do the right thing,





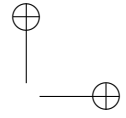
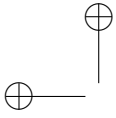
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just as we always said he could be." Such an appointment would have gone a long way to reassure the hesitating, buck up the doubtful, and best of all, it would have put the burden of apology on Mr. Roosevelt's critics instead of on his supporters, those unhappy gentry who even now must be saying to themselves, "One or two more such breaks as this, and that man will be up Salt Creek, and we will be up Salt Creek with him."

It would seem that a really first-class politician would have seen this chance to take the wind out of his enemies' sails, and would have acted accordingly. The fact that Mr. Roosevelt did not do so makes it fairly clear that he had no special political end in view, but merely made the appointment in a fit of swaggering bad temper. It was the act of a man who conceives himself challenged to do his very filthiest, and says, "I'll show 'em." No good politician ever lets any such incentive throw him off the rails; you simply cannot imagine a high-grade political artist like Matt Quay cutting up the petulant antics of a spoiled brat. Hence it appears that the myth of Mr. Roosevelt's great political acumen must shortly go the inglorious way of other myths that have been built up around his person.

Hence also the incident is clear evidence of what the President and the Senate think of the Supreme Court; and by providing that evidence, the President and the Senate give the country an accurate measure of their own sense of propriety and decency. One of the objections alleged against Mr. Black is that in raiding the files of the telegraph companies, he contravened not only the Bill of Rights, but the common law as well. The legal aspect of Mr. Black's proceedings may properly be left for lawyers

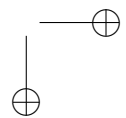
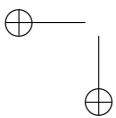




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to deal with, but on the decency of his conduct a layman may pass a perfectly competent judgment. Pawing over other people's private correspondence is something that a decent person not only does not do, but does not countenance; and the members of the Supreme Court are decent persons. One could hardly imagine any of them purposefully opening any message not addressed to himself, or one who would not regard the act as distinctly low and offensive, by whomsoever done. The President and the Senate, however, apparently never entertained the notion of any serious incongruity in placing Mr. Black in such company; and thereby, as I say, they give their own measure. They are probably capable of understanding that a legal point sustained against a candidate might make him objectionable to the members of the Court; but they are incapable of understanding that the fact of a candidate being a vulgar dog who rifles other people's correspondence could possibly make him objectionable to them.

Finally, in considering the way Mr. Black's appointment has been received by the people, and especially by organized Labor, it should be said that there is a great deal of culpable ignorance afloat concerning the Court's functions and duties. One hears it said, for instance, that there should be a good economist on the bench. Well, perhaps it would be nice enough to have a good one there, or a good poet, musician, taxidermist, anything you like. But as Mr. Justice Roberts explained the functions of the Court not long ago, a knowledge of economics would be no more practical use to a justice than a knowledge of Sanskrit – perhaps not so much. Likewise also there seems to be a very hazy popular con-





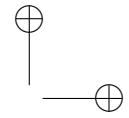
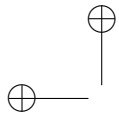
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ception of a justice's duties. Those who are pleased by Mr. Black's appointment, for instance, appear to think that all he will be expected to do is to sit around and smoke until a New Deal case comes on, and then say, "Well, I can't understand the argument and I don't know anything about the law, but I'm for the New Deal, so you can put me down in the affirmative."

A member of the Court bar, however, tells me it does not go quite so easy as all that. Cases even remotely concerning the New Deal do not come anywhere near to one per cent of the Court's business. That business comprises cases taken from anywhere and everywhere in the vast realm of the law, and each justice is supposed to be equal to tackling one-ninth of the business; he is expected to pull his weight. Now, imagine an opinion of Mr. Black's in a tough admiralty case, or a knotty patent case, or a horrible tangle concerning mechanics' liens – imagine that opinion being passed around among the eight justices for concurrence or dissent, and imagine what it would look like when the eight got through commenting on it.

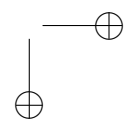
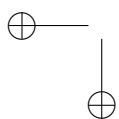
The Supreme Court, by and large, has always been a pretty able body, but there are a few instances in its history – one in particular, I remember – where a member could not pull his own weight, and his fellow-justices, tired of cleaning up his work for him, finally brought pressure on him to resign. This may not be necessary in the case of Mr. Black. He may be found legally ineligible. On the day I write this (the nineteenth of August) I see that a suit has been started to determine his eligibility. But whatever happens, three facts will remain. First, that he has been appointed; second, that





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the appointment has been confirmed; and third, everyone concerned in these misfeasances has indelibly marked himself contemptible.





THE DIFFICULTY OF THINKING

November, 1937

Mr. Ernest Boyd's paper, printed elsewhere in this issue, should be read with the closest attention. It points to a structural weakness in human nature which has always existed, and which seems likely to exist forever. This one weakness accounts for every one of the mistakes and absurdities which men have committed in their efforts to create a stable society, and it is the only thing that will account for them. The dullest mind must sometimes wonder why the whole political world should be permitted to get itself in such a filthy mess as it is in at present. It seems inexplicable. Why does Fascism exist? Why is Communism? Why the New Deal? How can anyone explain such fantastic figures as Stalin, Hitler, Roosevelt, Mussolini?

The answer to all these questions is the same. These preposterous nightmares exist only because Nature has for some reason made it so easy for human beings to feel and to act, and at the same time has made it so hard





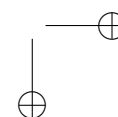
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for them to think. There is no other reason. Nature has fitted us out with self-starting, automatic, high-powered machinery for emotion and action; while our machinery for thinking is at best low-powered, has to be laboriously cranked by hand, and must be watched and coaxed along all the time, or else it will run down at any moment, and stop.

There the fact is, and no one has ever been able to get around it. Without exception the human being has always found it easier to feel than to act, and both much easier than to think. Nature made him that way, and also gave him a strong tendency to follow the line of least resistance; and just there is where the poor devil of a human being has always run himself out of luck ever since the world began.

So, if one cares to take that view of it, one might conclude that Nature never intended man to be a social animal. Or, if she did, it certainly seems that she has built his whole psychical structure wrong end to. It is impossible to guess what her idea was. A stable organization of society must be based on right thinking. There can be no doubt of that. A stable society obviously cannot be set up haphazard by trusting to luck – there are too many chances against it. Neither can it be set up to function by trial and error – it will not hold together long enough for that. Nor can it be set up on the basis of ignorant good feeling and unintelligent, well-meant action. Feeling and action are all very well in their place, but that place is under the strict control and direction of right thinking.

Moreover, in order to be stable, a society must not only be set up on a basis of initial right thinking, but it





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must be kept going under direction of *continuous* right thinking. An individual has to do more than start his life straight by right thinking and then leave it to itself; he has to keep it straight by right thinking as long as his life lasts. He meets new conditions and changing circumstances to the end of his days, and if he does not continually apply right thinking to them, his life goes off the rails. Likewise, human society cannot be stabilized once and for all and then left to itself; it has to be kept stable, and nothing will do this but the continuous application of right thinking.

All this would be a simple matter if only Nature had made thinking easy for us instead of making it so very hard. If she had made thinking as easy as feeling or action, the vicious absurdities of Fascism, Communism, and “the corporative State” would be laughed off the face of the earth, along with the imbecile witch-mongering of the New Deal. Hitler would be peaceably working at his trade, Roosevelt pottering at some harmless trivial pursuit like stamp-collecting, Stalin probably tilling the soil and tending goats in his Transcaucasian home; all amidst stable communities of quiet, prosperous, and happy people. But if Nature ever had any such design as this, it would seem that she did not do her part. By making emotion and action so easy, and thinking so hard, she has brought about the exact opposite. Undeclared wars of aggression, rebellions, piracies, tyrannies, restraints, strikes, riots, production everywhere suffocating under ruinous taxation – such is the delightful order of our day! – and over all is the spirit of passion which knows no rational control, and which vents itself in ignorant, bestial, and frenzied action.





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An observer of the state of the Union, therefore, has to face the strange provision of Nature whereby not only are human beings so largely incapable of right thinking, but so many are incapable of thinking at all. They are capable of blazing emotion, with its corollary of dogged prejudice; they are capable of energetic action; but they cannot think. In this respect, too, the Union is worse off than many of its neighbors, because American education is notoriously not aimed at the cultivation of thought. Strictly speaking, it is not education, but training. It does a great deal for the “average student,” for the motor-minded, for the incompetent, for the person who shows promise of being able to “do” something; but for the person who shows promise of some day being able to think, it does simply nothing.

One may reasonably doubt that there are now in the United States thirty thousand persons who are able to think closely, consecutively, and disinterestedly on any subject, or to carry out a line of thought – any line – to its full logical length. For my own part, I doubt there being half that many. So when Mr. Ernest Boyd blames the Liberal intellectuals for being in full flight from reason, for demanding a united front in action, for being “afraid to think,” one must wonder whether, after all, he is not suggesting something quite beyond their power. Mr. Boyd knows the Liberal intellectuals far better than I do, so I speak under correction, but what little I know certainly leads me to believe that they are appearing quite in character. None of their works and ways has ever associated them in my mind with any capacity whatever for thinking, but only with a great capacity for emotional ardor and a great urge





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for hand-over-head action in all circumstances, even the most serious.

When Mr. Roosevelt says he believes in “democracy and more democracy,” he is talking sheer claptrap; nevertheless we may take him at his word, as we may when he offers lip-service to the ideal of “majority-rule.” But the proper object of democracy and majority-rule or any other kind of rule, is the maintenance of a stable society, and a stable society cannot be maintained except by the prevalence of right thinking. Very well; in this Republic where everybody has a vote, and the majority is supposed to rule, what kind of material have we which can presumably supply a right thinking majority?

According to statistics cited by Dr. Alexis Carrel, there were in this country five years ago, in State institutions, 340,000 insane persons, 81,500 feeble-minded and epileptics, with 10,930 on parole. This takes no account of the number of cases in private institutions. The rate of increase is about 68,000 new cases annually. At this rate about 1,000,000 of the children now in our schools and colleges will be in asylums. There are now in the whole country 500,000 feeble-minded, and 400,000 children who have not intelligence enough to meet the very moderate requirements of our public schools. The deranged are a much more numerous group; neurosis and psychosis run the number of the afflicted far up into the hundreds of thousands. In New York State, one person out of every twenty-two, at some time in his life, and for a longer or shorter period, does a turn in the bughouse. In addition to all the foregoing, one of our most eminent alienists tells me that by the very lowest possible estimate, there





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are 1,500,000 drug addicts in the United States, and the same number of alcoholics.

These statistics are a good beginning – but they are only a beginning – for a person who is trying to get a little real light on Mr. Roosevelt’s sublimated drivel about “democracy and more democracy,” and his devotion to majority-rule. Taking these facts as a starter and going on to sift all the other evidence available, it is only a very intrepid person who would affirm that the average power of reflective thought in the United States is a hair’s-breadth above the normal twelve-year-old level. For my own part, a careful study of the matter leads me to believe it is far and away below that; but unquestionably it cannot be higher.

Very well then, first, in order to have democracy and more democracy, you must first have a *demos*, and is a populace whose power of reflective thought stands at this level a *demos*? Clearly not. Mr. Roosevelt has no *demos*; he has merely an *ochlos* – for the Greeks had a name for it. That is to say, he has merely masses with infantile mentality, infantile sensitiveness to any stimulus which a demagogue may see fit to apply to their passions, and an infantile instinct for blind and violent action. Second, what likelihood is there that majority-rule under these conditions will tend towards stabilizing our society? None whatever; the thing is simply impossible and fantastic. On the contrary, it tends towards just such a state of anarchy and confusion as it brought upon France in 1792 – such a state as Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Lewis, and their entourage are doing their best to bring upon this country within the next three years.





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Furthermore, when one examines this majority and takes its measure, one has no trouble about seeing how little chance there is for the saving power of thought to make any headway whatever against its ignorant excesses. In the years before 1792, as my friend Mr. Hendrik van Loon has lately pointed out, there were men who could have saved France. Turgôt could have done it, and so could Quesnay, the elder Mirabeau, Necker, or any one of a dozen others. But in the period 1789–1792, the power of reflective thought stood no more chance than it would stand today in a discussion with Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Lewis, or in a memorial addressed to Congress. Some years ago the president of Columbia University said most truly that “thinking is one of the most unpopular amusements of the human race. Men hate it largely because they cannot do it.” The masses resent it with the resentment that ill-bred children display against any appearance of superiority, and their leaders and representatives resent it because it interferes with what they want to do.

Consequently, what little power of reflective thought exists in the Union is pretty effectively sterilized. Suppose the whole force of it could by some sort of miracle be concentrated upon Washington, Wall Street, our captains of industry, organized labor, our newspapers, colleges, universities, pulpits, forums, yes, even our Liberal intellectuals – what then? Could it impress twenty-five persons out of the entire lot with the simple truth that America is now precisely where France was in the period 1789–1792, and that the American New Deal is headed straight for the point where the French New Deal of 1789 arrived in the days of the Terror? I greatly doubt it. Yet





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it remains true, as Bishop Butler said, that “things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be.”

In the face of Mr. Roosevelt’s rabble-rousing fustian about “democracy and more democracy” and his homage to majority-rule, could it even impress twenty-five people with the plain common sense of the French painter, Horace Vernet, when he said that “before you can have an ideal republic you must have ideal republicans, and Nature cannot afford to fool away her most precious gifts on a lot of jack-leg lawyers and hobnail-booted riff-raff”? Again I doubt it. Yet it remains true that before you can have “democracy and more democracy” you must have democrats who can think, and Mr. Roosevelt’s ideal of majority-rule is merely rule by a majority of bumptious and turbulent twelve-year-olds.

Still, ineffectual as it may be, the power of reflective thought does exist, and those who have it are of all men the most to be envied, because they have the future with them – a very distant future, certainly, but it is theirs. For the present, too, while all about them are blindly following some dubious leadership and violently taking such sides as ignorance and prejudice dictate, they follow no one blindly and remain on the side of truth and fact, content to go fearlessly wherever reason leads them. In a sense, they are not particularly useful to their fellowmen, but they are as useful as circumstances allow them to be, and their only regret is that they cannot be more useful than they are.





A NEW DOSE OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA

December, 1937

I have to report this month that the Union would be in a much more presentable state just now if it were not so infested and itchy with foreign propagandists, especially those of the British persuasion. The self-respecting American is down on all propagandists, as the self-respecting housewife is down on all vermin. The housewife, however, knows that Nature has given some kinds of vermin the means of becoming more objectionable than other kinds, and she acts accordingly. She is more energetic towards bedbugs, for instance, than she is towards toads in her garden, or even now and then a garter-snake. For like reasons, while the British propagandist is no more or less verminous than any other, self-respecting Americans should know that Nature has equipped him with the means of making his press-agentry more virulent, and thereby getting bigger and better results.

A considerable number of these gentry are in this country now; the newspapers show traces of them branching





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out in many directions. This was to be expected. For many years I have employed a very simple method of observation which has always turned out so informative that I recommend it to my readers. Whenever there is any prospect that international affairs anywhere in the world may take a turn unfavorable to some major British interest, I suggest that my readers buy a copy of a New York paper every morning for a month, turn to the marine news, and study the lists of incoming passengers. I predict that they will be astonished to see the volume of infiltration by first-string British panhandlers which those lists will indicate.

One has to look sharp about spotting the situation which brings them forth, however, for otherwise they will all be here before one discovers that they are arriving. They themselves are so spry about starting that I have sometimes thought they must keep a set of luggage ready-packed to grab as soon as they have slid down the pole. What I do is to read the marine news regularly every day, and I think it is the best way, because one can get so many useful hints about the course of foreign affairs by doing it. In any given situation, no matter how dark it may look, if the curve of distinguished British visitors remains steady, Britain is not interested; but if it suddenly rises, you can safely bet your last cent there is something doing.

These first-string press agents are for the most part highly-placed dignitaries, titled persons both of Church and State, for in England the Church is a branch of the civil service, like the Post Office. I recall that once when things were looking uncommonly shaky around the eastern end of the Mediterranean, an archbishop, I





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think it was, came over. I believe it was the first time in our history that America rated anything as high as that, though I am not sure; nor do I remember which archbishop it was – England has two – but I think it was the present archbishop of Canterbury. We get lords pretty regularly, generals, deans, prime ministers, baronets, and all that sort of thing, and even once in a while a prince.

The bishops and princes are backed up by a horde of publicists, lecturers, bankers, newspapermen, economists, roughneck litterateurs, members of Parliament, exchange professors, actors. These second-string artists have really the heavy end of the job. They do the day-to-day journeyman work. The first-string contingent confines itself mostly to making an agreeable impression on dress-parade, like mannequins at a fashion show. Mannequins are not supposed to talk much about the wares they are showing, although if reporters and leaders of society badger them into a corner, they might drop in a well-chosen word or two where it would do the most good. As a rule, however, the imperialist mannequins leave most of the talking, writing, and interview-giving to the experienced salesmen who follow in their train.

A fine workmanlike job those salesmen make of it, too. I have just been perusing a couple of little efforts, one a magazine article by Sir Arthur Willert, who seems to be headman of the second-string brigade at the moment, and the other a small volume by Sir George Paish. Slight as they are, innocuous as they appear, they are beautiful specimens of what our German friends call tendency-writings, *Tendenzschriften*. They remind one of Mark Twain's comment on Professor Dowden's life of Shelley. The ocean is blue, he said, and you would swear to it,





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yet if you dip glassful after glassful out of it, each one is pure white; so, while every paragraph of the Shelley book is white, the whole book is blue with slander in solution. So too every paragraph of the works I refer to is white as innocence, yet in their totality they are blue with *Tendenz* in solution.

II

The foregoing may seem a little less than partial to our British cousins, and indeed if I left it at that, it would rightly seem that the partiality is all the other way. I shall proceed to show that this is not the case. The British are doing no more and no less than any other nation would do if it had certain natural advantages for the purpose, such as the British have. The fact is simply that ever since Columbus' time, all transatlantic nations alike have regarded America as a milch cow for Europe, and they still so regard it. This idea cannot be got out of their heads. They view the United States quite correctly as a very rich territory peopled by gullible and toothsome suckers. They feel that we have established a reprehensible squatter-sovereignty over this territory, and set up a civilization which by all rights ought to be a good steady producer for Europe. Since we have managed to keep a pretty tight grip on our ill-got property, however, and have so far successfully resisted their efforts to blast us off it by violence, their next best bet is to make our gullibility work for them; in other words, to employ propaganda.





A NEW DOSE OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA

All European nations take this view of the problem. All of them do the very best they can to deal with it in this way. England is exceptional only in possessing certain natural advantages for dealing with it, which the others do not possess; and since this makes British press-agentry the most effective of all, it is obviously useful for us to know what those advantages are. Merely cursing the devilish wiliness and cunning of British overtures is not to the point, for the British are no more wily and cunning than other people; not at all. They are merely more successful, and the thing is to consider what makes them so.

First, the English have a language-monopoly; that is to say, any Englishman can make sounds to which almost any American can attach some sort of meaning; and all without any preliminary study or practice. Hence the ranks of the first-string and second-string panhandlers can be recruited to any extent at a moment's notice. Also the ability to hand it to us in our own language enables these janissaries to work themselves into strategic positions in short order. Think, on the other hand, of the tremendous initial hurdle which the Japanese and Chinese must get over before they can even present their case, and how few of them can do it; or, for that matter, Germans, Italians, French, Russians.

Second, the general line of hypocrisies, conventions, prejudices, catchwords, and clap-trap runs so much the same in British civilization and our own, that the English have no trouble in playing upon it in all circumstances with exactly the right kind of buncombe, or, as I believe our journalists call it, *bull*. Other peoples cannot do this, because these peculiarities are not in their nature; they





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do not understand them, and when they try to flatter our self-esteem their bull does not take. When Mr. Eden talks about “strengthening the ties of friendship between the two great English-speaking democracies,” his voice has the right ring. A Frenchman’s voice would not have the right ring because this line of bull is not his own; it is Anglo-American, and if he tried to handle it, we would detect the imposture. So when a Britisher breaks out into a sweat of moral indignation, we respond promptly because this line of bull is as much our specialty as his.

Third, the dominant middle-class civilization of America is at one with that of England in its inveterate snobbishness. England maintains a skeleton aristocracy whose sayings and doings are daily food for the snobbishness of her own middle class, but we have provided no such pabulum for ours; so when England occasionally opens her storehouse to us, our snobbishness gangs up on it with a pitiable and indecent voracity. Continental middle-class civilization, on the contrary, is relatively free from snobbishness; in France, for example, you have to go a long way to find a snob. You can turn up cads, crooks, coxcombs, about as often as you want them, but snobs are scarce as hens’ teeth. So they are in Germany and in Continental countries generally. Hence the Continental cannot handily manage the rather elaborate technique of an appeal to American snobbishness, while the Englishman understands it so well that he can work it in his sleep.

Finally, the English have the advantage of a curious kind of degenerate sincerity. I suppose my readers will be astonished to hear that I believe most of their panhandlers really do not know they are panhandling. They





A NEW DOSE OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA

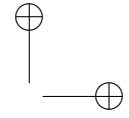
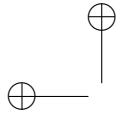
share with practically all their countrymen a congenital incapacity for taking a realistic view of certain points of fact; and hence they are sincere with the appalling sincerity of invincible ignorance.

This sincerity gives them a great advantage over those to whom a realistic view comes naturally. Every Briton, be he baron or be he bum, comes into the world believing that the Englishman, wherever placed and in whatever circumstances, has a natural right to rule. He also believes that the Empire is the flywheel of civilization, and that if it should crack up, a ruined world would lapse back into the arms of Chaos and Old Night. Hence by corollary, all persons who contest the Englishman's right to rule, or who make attempts against the Empire's welfare, are fiends from Hell, such as the Boers were in the 'Nineties, the Germans in 1914, and as the Japanese are now. Hence by corollary again, any measures which can be taken against such persons, even the basest and most flagitious – such as starving German civilians, bombing Indian villages, or dynamiting Arab dwellings in the Holy Land – are righteous and laudable.

Incredible as it seems, this creed is nothing that has been drilled into the Englishman, Nazi-fashion; he is *born* believing it. He takes these matters as part of the immutable order of Nature, and therein lies the strange outlandish sincerity with which he expounds them. On the other hand, no Continental European was ever born believing in any such fustian about himself. Whatever pretense he may put up on occasion is manifestly bogus, and peters out under pressure.

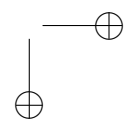
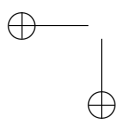
These four reasons are, in my opinion, the chief ones why British propaganda has such success with us as it





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unquestionably does have; and now that this propaganda appears to be rapidly warming up once more, my readers may find it useful to consider them.





WHAT THE REPUBLICANS WON'T DO

January, 1938

At the time I write this the Republican Party, if any, is apparently being made ready for the pulmotor. Some months ago Brother Hoover came out with a magazine-article suggesting an informal get-together meeting of interested persons, to be held at some time before the Congressional elections, to determine where the party is at and what it can best do for itself. Brother Hoover did not wish the meeting to be a closed-corporation affair. On the contrary, he was in favor of bringing in representatives of the disaffected in all parties or in no party. As I understood him, he was not for having the G.O.P. swallow up these disaffected brethren, but rather he hoped and believed that the meeting might bring forth some statement of principles which would induce them into a sort of emergency-alliance against the New Deal. There is sense in this, for the G.O.P. is after all the big frog in the opposition puddle, and if it converted itself into a party of protest, anything which makes it





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easier for stragglers to join up with it “for the duration of the war” would be worth doing.

Since publishing the article I mentioned, Brother Hoover has taken his idea to the country and has publicized it with excellent vigor. We all remember the tremendous park of heavy oratorical artillery which he unlimbered at Boston, before an audience of Massachusetts Republicans. His speech was a speech of protest, and if he is not above accepting praise from an adversary, I will say it was superb. I do not see how his most determined foes – and being one of them I ought to know – could refrain from associating themselves with every sentiment he expressed. Moreover, I am quite prepared to believe that in that speech he did not speak as a partisan but as a citizen, as he said he did.

As a sporting proposition, Brother Hoover’s plan for reanimating and galvanizing the party is certainly a good one, but when he first put it out, one could not help noticing that the boys did not take to it particularly. Brother Borah came out against it, while Brother Landon and the smaller fry cold-shouldered it in eloquent silence. The Republican National Committee, meeting on November 5, turned it down. This is understandable. The only substantial asset the party has is the unpopularity of Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal, and at present this asset is frozen and non-negotiable. The professional politicians in the Republican Party know that if it remains frozen they cannot win, no matter what they do; and if it thaws out and becomes negotiable, they can win on their own, in the regular way, free from any embarrassing commitments such as subscribing to Brother Hoover’s plan might lead to. So long as Brother





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Hoover is willing to go around as a non-commissioned, free-lance Peter the Hermit, thawing out their asset with his perfervid oratory, they are naturally willing to lie low and let him do so; but giving any formal or quasi-official sanction to his plan (unless and until their hand were somehow forced) is something else again.

Nevertheless, they should be warned that as things stand at the moment, no opposition would have a ghost of a chance with an affirmative program such as Brother Hoover wants. Its only chance is to view with alarm and denounce with indignation. Whether this would work or not depends entirely on the reaction of the pocket-nerve. If business goes on three legs much longer, the New Deal Congressmen may have to stretch a bit to hold their jobs. If the country runs into an actual depression, it will be a real sure-enough depression, for we are not as fat as we were in 1929, and no party in power could weather it. In that case, viewing with alarm would turn the trick for almost any sort of opposition candidate put up on any sort of lying, pinchbeck platform, as in 1932. But if business rubs along even moderately, the opposition will be out of luck. In my opinion, Mr. Landon's grotesque campaign of 1936 was quite as good as anyone could have made under the same circumstances, for he did not hold a single card; and it was as good as anyone can make under like circumstances hereafter.

But in no case will any campaign of affirmation be worth a straw, and my impression is that the seasoned professionals of the G.O.P. are aware of it. Brother Hoover's notion of an "affirmative program" for such a campaign, setting forth principles and ideas, is excellent and ought to be exactly right, but the trouble is that





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it will get nowhere in a campaign, because American voters are notoriously not interested in principles and ideas. They do not care a button for them and will not vote for them. The immense majority vote whichever way the money comes from; they vote for “prosperity”; they vote for revenue only. Brother Hoover must surely remember his own prosperity-campaign of 1928, with its alluring ideal of a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage. Why should he think that American voters are now more interested in principles and ideas than they were then? They are not. Many of them vote out of resentment, many out of prejudice, indolent habit, indolent conformity; but not a corporal’s guard of them vote out of ideas, and still fewer out of principles.

So a campaign of affirmation will hardly do, and no more will a campaign of concession and preposterous promise, like Mr. Landon’s. Such a campaign would have to match its promises against Mr. Roosevelt’s performances, and every sane voter knows there is not that much money in the whole world, let alone in the depleted pocket of the American taxpayer. Concession to Mr. Roosevelt’s “objectives” coupled with a promise to realize them cheaper – this would not work either. Mr. Landon tried that in 1936, and it seems to be very close to what Mr. Vandenberg has been suggesting recently. The immense mass of voting-power which Mr. Roosevelt is subsidizing has a shrewd idea of what his actual objectives are, and would choose to stick where the sticking has been so abundantly proven good. So all in all it is pretty clear that the policy of watchful waiting, which the Republican professionals apparently are inclined to adopt, is the only one which gives any





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promise of success. After all, the Treasury must soon run dry, and production, already swaybacked under its overload of costs and taxes, must soon break down; so why not mark time until that happens?

In all these considerations, however, it must always be borne in mind that the party in power has one unbeatable resource, namely, the disturbed and ticklish condition prevailing in foreign affairs. As long as this condition prevails, it is always in the power of a President to engineer commitments and connivances which would enable him, at the right time, to confront the country with a *fait accompli*, and instantly to set in motion a train of lying propaganda which would do the rest. Those of us who got our growth before 1914 know all about this, for we have had experience of just this technique. Moreover, when Mr. Roosevelt was in difficulties a few months ago over the Black affair, the country might have seen how promptly those difficulties were dissipated by a mere wave of the bloody shirt. Well, if Mr. Roosevelt desires a third term, or if he wishes to bequeath his powers intact to some other tycoon, a really energetic shaking of the bloody shirt is all that is necessary. In a time of general peace, or in circumstances where a pretense of substantial interest could not be made plausible enough to "go down," the party in power is deprived of this resource; but unhappily, this is not the case at present.

II

When elections are coming on, editors and publicists devote themselves to speculating about possible shifts





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of power and the probable effect of such shifts. Now, for example, there is a good deal being said about the forthcoming Congressional elections and what they may portend for the immediate future of the country. There is already some discussion, too, of the Presidential election, two years hence. Will Mr. Roosevelt seek a third term? Will his party be in shape to carry him or to carry a successor named by him? Or will the electorate be fed up with the New Deal by that time, and go over to the resuscitated Republican Party; and if so, what is the country likely to get out of that?

Speculation being free to all, it is interesting to speculate on what would happen if the voters showed sense enough to elect an administration that would take its stand on the principle laid down by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, that a country which is least governed is best governed. In the present state of the Union, such an administration would do nothing for four years but act as a wrecking-crew. Its first move would be to state that under no circumstances would the President or any member of Congress accept a second term; and its second move would be to post every public building in Washington with large signs reading, LOBBYISTS NOT ADMITTED. NO VACANCIES. NO JOB-SEEKERS NEED APPLY.

Then it would settle down for a steady go at the greatest job of repealing, revising, department-shattering, bureau-busting, cost-reducing, and general decentralization that the world has seen since the days of Lycurgus. The steam-shovel would take the place of the steam-roller, and in three months' time there would be more office-space vacant in Washington than there is now in



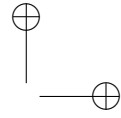
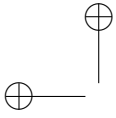


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New York City. Nothing but what is necessary – actually necessary, not politically necessary – would be left of the whole federal structure. Everything else would be off-loaded on the smaller political units, and if they did not choose to shoulder the burden, why, it would be just too bad.

For example, “Relief” would go; Mr. Hopkins and his myrmidons would be scraped up and dumped into the Potomac. The States and municipalities might look after their own wastrels as they saw fit, or let them “go dry,” as far as Uncle Sam was concerned. The Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, and the Interior would be folded up. The Treasury would be admonished, in the words of Mr. Jefferson, that “the accounts of the United States ought to be, and may be, made as simple as those of a common farmer, and capable of being understood by common farmers.” Budget balancing would not aim at Mr. Roosevelt’s budget, or Mr. Hoover’s, Mr. Taft’s, or even Mr. McKinley’s. It would aim at Mr. Madison’s expense-account of the year 1810, and probably would balance at about the figure set by Mr. Van Buren, if not a little better. Wholesale repeal and revision would give the Department of Justice about one-tenth of its present volume of business, at about one-tenth of its present payroll. The Post Office Department would be farmed out to private enterprise, as a former Postmaster-General, Mr. Wanamaker, once suggested it should be, for even now private enterprise carries the mail; all the Post Office does is to collect and distribute it. The State Department would lose that hoary anachronism, the diplomatic establishment, which was so useless even as far back as Mr. Jefferson’s time that he was all for



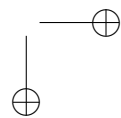
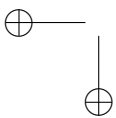


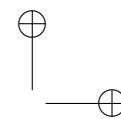
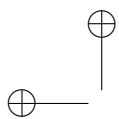
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getting rid of it and letting the consular service take over. “An ambassadeur, Hinnessy,” said Mr. Dooley, “is a man that’s no more use abroad than he wud be at home”; which is precisely true. If other countries wished to keep on sending ambassadors here, the Administration would be polite and pleasant about it, but there would be mighty few state functions for them to decorate, and no preposterous “chief of protocol” to arrange their order of precedence and tell them what to do with their hands and feet.

While this was going on, privilege-seekers – rich or poor, bankers or labor-leaders, enterprisers or uplifters – would be halted at sight and thrown out on their heads. As for those who wanted something to be done in a general way to “help business,” the Administration would make it clear that government has no proper concern with business except to punish fraud and enforce the obligations of contract, and that the State and local governments can do this much better than the Federal Government can. The Administration would take its stand firmly on the great and true saying of Thoreau, that government never helped any enterprise except by the alacrity with which it got out of the way; and that would be that.

At the end of its four-year term, the Administration’s parting advice to the people would be, “Don’t lean on government. When you want your pinafores buttoned or your noses wiped, don’t run to Washington about it. Don’t run to your State or local governments about it. Don’t run to anybody about it. Do it yourselves. Government has its legitimate job. Its job is to safeguard your freedom and security; nothing more. Don’t try to

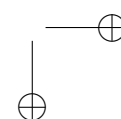
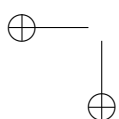


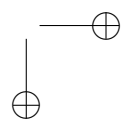
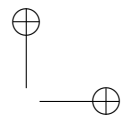


WHAT THE REPUBLICANS WON'T DO

make it do anything more. Above all, don't let it get on your backs. We have put in four hard years here, merely prying it off your backs. Don't let it climb on again."

It seems to me that this line of speculation points to something rather interesting, and yet I somehow feel that it would not interest our Republican friends much, not even Brother Hoover. I may be wrong about this, but some instinct makes me think so.







STEALING TAMMANY'S STUFF

February, 1938

The recent election in New York City, which returned Mr. LaGuardia in triumph to the City Hall, was in some ways an amusing affair. To a good-humored person who knows what to expect from elections and does not take them too seriously, a contest between an Italian and an Irishman, a Wop and a Harp, for the mayoralty of an American city, the Yank metropolis, was reminiscent of the later years of the Roman Empire. At that time Rome had about run out of blooded stock. The noble Roman had pretty well gone out of commission; his relics, if any existed, had been swamped into obscurity by the mass of miscellaneous riff-raff which made up the Roman population, and were leading an exiguous and encysted life, like flies in amber. Public affairs promptly reflected this change of conditions. There were no more Catos in action, no more Julii and Augusti at the head of the Empire. Instead, all sorts of enterprising outlanders from anywhere and nowhere began to horn in





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and contend for the emperorship. Rome got its emperors from the Province, from Spain, even once in a while taking on a barbarian hailing from Dacia or some other uncivilized region. The name of Odoacer, for example, coming in succession to names like Tiberius, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, must have sounded as strange to the Roman ear as the name of LaGuardia sounds to the American ear when coming in succession to names like Mitchell, Low, Gaynor, Strong. For a considerable time, in short, the affairs of Rome were administered by anybody and everybody except Romans.

There may be a moral in all this, if anyone has a mind to look for it. One might remark the coincidence, for whatever value one chooses to attach to it, that the heyday of the outlander was a petering-out period for Rome. The Empire was no more than a cadaver when the foreign adventurer sunk his fangs in it. It really died with the Antonine; after that, like the Irishman's squirming snake, "it was dead, but it wasn't sensible iv it yet." The remains of its civilization passed over to the Province and took root there, while the glory of Rome itself faded out of life and into history.

But I shall leave these interesting matters connected with the death of Rome for the reader to ruminate upon as he sees fit, while I go on to speak about matters connected with the reported death of Tammany Hall. The morning after election day the newspapers had it that Tammany at last was dead, and that all good people might therefore duly rejoice. Mr. LaGuardia's re-election had not merely protracted one of Tammany's recurrent spells of "taking the count." No, this time the Tiger was dead for good and all, beyond any hope of resus-





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citation and recovery. Righteousness and civic virtue had prevailed, morality had triumphed, the sword of the Lord and of Gideon had done its noble work, and henceforth the just might rejoice in a chemically-pure administration of the city's affairs.

All this was highly exhilarating; it read well. Nevertheless, some of it seemed to me to be open to question. In the first place, I am not so sure that the Tiger is dead. He looks dead, acts dead, and I think he is dead, but I am not sure. I know so much about the methods which have kept Tammany to the front all these years as a going concern, and I have so much respect for the efficacy of those methods, that I am not helping to kick the Tiger around until I get more evidence than I have at present that he is as dead as he looks.

Time, however, will settle that. What I am quite sure of at the moment is that if the Tiger be actually dead and not merely going through the motions, it was no onslaught of righteousness, morality, and civic virtue that killed him; not by any means. The death of Tammany, if, when, and as, is due to the incorporation of Greater New York, years ago. Tammany's activities have always been mostly confined to Manhattan and the bridgehead regions of Brooklyn, and in the days when the vote in the outlying boroughs was negligible, that was all well enough. But with the development of the Bronx, Queens, Richmond, and the pushing-out of Brooklynite subway commuters – God pity them! – into the regions of Flatbush and beyond, Manhattan can no longer be counted on to swing the city's vote. It is an open question whether Tammany will be able to reorganize itself on the lines of the great new national policy of complete





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centralization, and thus overcome this handicap. If it cannot, or does not, I think we may safely say that the Tiger is dead; otherwise I am not at all sure that we may say that. There is no doubt, however, that it was no great accession of civic virtue which has temporarily, at least, laid him low, but the diligent marshaling of voting-power in districts beyond the effective range of Tammany's operation.

Tammany's aims and methods are so well known that they need no more than a word or two by way of showing their extreme simplicity. Tammany Hall wanted control of the city's government for what there was in it. Political power and prestige never interested Tammany much; megalomaniacs were at a big discount in the Hall. Its aim was prosaic. Politics was its business, and the object of business is to drag down the stuff. To its everlasting credit, Tammany never made any bones about this; as Richard Croker put it, Tammany worked for its own pocket all the time, "like everybody else," and was never ashamed to say so; and it regarded the fuzzy ideals and fuzzier pretensions of reformers, uplifters, and "sociologists" with calm and contemptuous superiority.

Control of the city's government meant getting votes; and here Tammany was as simple and direct in its method as in its aim. It got votes by looking after its people, especially its poorer people, not only around election-time, but all the time, every day in the year. It imported into its method that something which our Uplifters are so fond of calling "the human touch"; something which cannot be learned by taking courses in sociology. Putting one of Mr. Hopkins' best assorted social workers up against a Tammany Irish saloonkeeper in a case requiring the human





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touch would be like putting an eighth-grade schoolboy up against Albert Einstein in a problem involving the differential calculus. There was very little humbug about it, either, for Tammany's working personnel came largely from that quick-witted and sentimental race which seems to be born with a deep understanding of human sorrows and a ready sympathy for them. When Tim Doyle got hurt and was put out of work for a month, Tammany did not send around a "trained investigator" with a pocketful of index-cards. No, the bartender on the corner looked in and said, "I've heerd iv y'er trouble, Mrs. Doyle. Tell me, was Tim much hurted? He was? Dear, dear, now, but that's too bad. It's hard f'r ye, Mrs. Doyle, so it is. I'll see if somethin' can't be done." Then he passed the word to the ward-boss, who passed it to the district leader, who saw to it that something was done, and done at once.

Taking care of its people costs money, and Tammany got its money in the same way that Mr. Roosevelt's machine or any other political machine gets its money – by holding up the public. In all such cases the public pays through the nose for its own exploitation. Under Tammany's régime the "good" people of New York, whoever those are, had periodical spells of being tremendously worked up about this disgrace, and once in a while they would muster strength enough to elect a "Reform" administration which put the Tiger on short rations for a year or two but presently petered out, usually through pretentious incompetence. The history of these administrations abundantly justified Rémy de Gourmont's observation that "when morality triumphs, very filthy things take place."





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II

In 1932 an unusual combination of circumstances presented the interesting possibility of taking over Tammany's methods bodily and applying them to the nation at large; and as usual, the right man was on hand for the job. A man of no traditions, no intelligence, no convictions, no habits, precisely like Tweed, Croker, Murphy, he was gifted only with the low sagacity which unerringly perceives such chances, and with the stubborn audacity which instantly fastens on them. The result of his endeavors, as far as a disinterested observer can see, shows no essential difference between Tammany's aims and methods and those of the New Deal. Tammany aimed at political control, to be exercised in the furtherance of its own purposes; so does the New Deal. Tammany attained its aim by building up an unbeatable political machine; so did the New Deal. Tammany built its machine, and kept it running, by subsidizing a proletarian vote; so did the New Deal. Tammany paid for this subsidizing with money filched from the public; so did the New Deal — Mr. Morgenthau is even now scraping the bottom of the Treasury. The only difference one can see is a superficial one. Mr. Roosevelt's fancy is for political power and prestige rather than money, whereas Tweed, John Kelly, Croker, Murphy, cared not a button for power and prestige except as they could be converted into terms of cash. In a word, whereas the sachem of Tammany worked for his own pocket all the time, Mr. Roosevelt worked for his own megalomania all the time; that is the only difference.



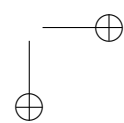
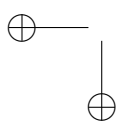


STEALING TAMMANY'S STUFF

Now, the most interesting thing brought to light by the New York election is that most of the “good” people who are so scandalized by the iniquities of Tammany, seem to be strong for the New Deal. It is hard for a logical mind to understand this. Mr. LaGuardia is a good New Dealer – whether by force of conviction or of expediency makes no difference – and may be trusted to jog along comfortably with it. Therefore, if political principle plays any part in determining a New Yorker’s vote, it would seem that one might as well have tossed up a cent for the choice between Mr. Mahoney and Mr. LaGuardia. If sentiment determines it, one would suppose that a straightforward person, disgusted by the New Deal’s nauseous pretensions, would vote for the blunt forthrightness of Tammany, world without end, in the spirit of Colonel As a Bird Gardner’s famous saying, “To hell with Reform!” Even if voting be determined on a lower plane, it is doubtful, very doubtful indeed, whether the exactions of Tammany at its worst could possibly run to more money than those of the New Deal, or even match them.

So the behavior of the “good” people, at least such of them as fall into the foregoing category, is a puzzle which I shall have to leave to my readers, for it is an impenetrable mystery to me. Their view seems to be that the principles and practices of Tammany, which are so heinous in New York, somehow become thoroughly moralized and sanctified by the mere process of extension over a country-wide area. I do not understand this view. Perhaps my readers may find some sort of lunatic consistency somewhere in it, so I have pleasure in offering it to them as an interesting problem in human conduct.







TAXING PRODUCTION TO DEATH

March, 1938

Well, the thing which this magazine has been a long time predicting seems to have arrived. I refer to what is delicately called the “recession in business.” For my own part, I did not look for it quite so soon, and I imagine it took most other observers by surprise, as well as myself; but apparently it is here. The surface of the situation shows some rather unusual features.

For instance, side by side with a thin and depressed stock market and a depressed state of industry (as of February 1), there exists a large healthy demand for capital goods. This is something of an anomaly. There is no doubt, I believe, that the demand for capital goods, both for replacement and expansion, but especially the former, is urgent. The trouble is that this demand is not an economic demand, in that it does not represent purchasing power; it represents only need and desire. A boy in front of a candy store with no money and no means of getting any, is not exerting an economic de-





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mand, however much he likes candy, and however much his system needs sugar. Just so, concerns needing capital development have been unable to get funds for it, because the Administration's measures of control stood in the way. The undistributed profits tax, the capital-gains tax – two of the most ill-conceived taxes ever levied – and the equally prejudicial rules and requirements of the Securities Commission, under the pretext of “regulating” investors and investments, have simply combined to regulate them off the face of the earth, especially the large investor whose operations would naturally have tended to support the market. Thus new issues, no matter what their purpose or value, have been practically impossible to float; thus again, the market has been thinned down to a most unnatural degree of vulnerability, notwithstanding a plenitude of money knocking about, and a normal desire, on the one hand, to put it to use, and on the other to get hold of some of it for purposes of legitimate capital development. Added to these deterrents, there has been, of course, the uncertainty about what unsound, ignorant, and vindictive financial policy the Administration would turn to next.

All these deterrents except the last, however, lie on the surface of things. If the Administration eases off on them, and if the business world is willing – though God knows why it should be – to put any confidence in its intentions, business may again take a temporary spurt ahead. In that case all would be quickly forgotten, perhaps forgiven, for such is our public's short-lived memory which politicians count on to let their misfeasances drop into oblivion. But as this magazine has consistently pointed out from the beginning, anything





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gained in this way is only for the moment. Reliance on it is merely reliance on a policy of prosperity by fits and starts; no hopes worth having can be built on it, and no one actually interested in his country's welfare should be satisfied with it. Progress by "breathing-spells" may be satisfactory to a person of Mr. Roosevelt's peculiar temperament, but the industrial statesman who aspires to be a bit more of a figure in his country's future than the common or garden variety of plug-ugly captain of industry, will find nothing in it to accept for a moment.

Such a person would naturally like to know how the fundamental laws of economics bear on the situation, so for a beginning I would suggest that he think carefully over an elementary truth which this magazine has repeatedly stressed, and follow out a few of its more obvious corollaries. This truth is that everything which is ever paid to anybody must come finally out of production. There is nowhere else for it to come from. Wages come out of production; so does interest, whether in the form of dividends or otherwise; so does upkeep; so do taxes; and so on. Wages are labor's share of production, interest is capital's share, and taxes are the government's share. (I am putting it roughly in order to be brief, but I think correctly.) It must be carefully observed, however, that the government's share is a first lien on production; whether wages and interest be paid or not, taxes must be paid; and governmental debts and deficits are a first lien on future production.

As wages, interest, or taxes or all three become excessive, prices rise; and as the excess continues, the rise continues up to the point of "what the traffic will bear"; and when that point is passed, production falls off and





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a depression or “recession” sets in. There may be a way of automatically regulating wages and interest with full justice to both labor and capital; I think there is, but I am not concerned with that at the moment. I am concerned with pointing out that there is no similar way of regulating the government share of production; it takes what it likes, and what it likes is oftentimes in the long run so excessive that there is too little left for labor and capital to go on with, and production breaks down.

I suggest that our industrialists and financiers, especially those who may be casting sheep’s eyes at some American form of Fascism, might look over certain historical breakdowns in the light of this fact. There was France in 1789, for instance, when the government had taken so much out of production that there was not enough left to go around. They might also consider certain régimes at present struggling for existence, where the Fascist tail is now wagging the industrial and financial dog. In Italy, for example, as M. Mussolini said not long ago, “capital is at the orders of the State.” Rather so. In fifteen years the government’s share of production has mounted to the point of a stiff levy on capital, a stiff limitation of profits and dividends, a forced loan on landed property, a confiscation of all foreign securities, and an almost complete control of current savings.

How do our industrialists and financiers like this picture, especially since by far the largest part of the Italian Governments takings have not been devoted to any social purposes, but to the governments own purposes, mostly imperialistic and martial? Not only in Fascist and Communist countries, but in so-called democratic countries as well, one can see the same state of things.





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The true inwardness of the trouble in present-day France, for instance, is that there is not enough production to keep the government going and to keep business going too, for what is produced costs so much that the people simply can't pay for it, and therefore business goes on three legs.

My purpose in writing is to raise in the minds of our representative businessmen the suspicion that something of the sort may be impending here. Some authorities, notably Mr. Moulton of the Brookings Institute, say that labor is taking too much out of production; it may be so. Others again, notably Mr. Lewis and the forward-looking brethren in Mr. Roosevelt's entourage, say that capital is taking too much, and this also may be so. I would like to get our representative men to consider whether government, federal, state, and municipal, is not taking too much, and to forecast what will happen to production if it keeps on taking so much. I would like them also to scrutinize the purposes to which government devotes its takings, and to decide whether those purposes are worth pursuing at the price.

It is a hard exercise that I am proposing, because we have been trained for more than a century to regard government as a sort of omnipotent man-of-all-work, ready to be run to by anyone at any time, chiefly for discriminatory favors requiring an unscrupulous exercise of sheer force, and also for interventions to save us the trouble of using patience and headwork to get us out of any little difficulty that came our way. We never have considered the relative value of these services, as long as we got them, or cared what the government spent on providing them. Hence I admit it is hard to





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disengage our minds from this idea of the nature and purpose of government and see if it needs correction. But I for one see no way of getting ourselves out of our distressing economic tangles without revising this idea, and if we are to revise it at all, we cannot begin too soon. I cannot go through the matter exhaustively, for that would require a treatise, so I shall make only one or two general observations which may serve as a starting-point for further thought on the subject.

On the one hand, we see that government is always eager to aggrandize itself by progressive encroachments on the liberties of the individual. On the other, we see that by our submissive eagerness to give government more and more to do, by our constantly inviting it into new fields of activity, we have encouraged those encroachments which, needless to say, all cost money. These reciprocating eagernesses, therefore, have not only tended to make the citizen a mere creature of the State, but have also enabled the State to increase enormously and continuously its levies upon production, both current and future. Obviously this course can have but one logical end. By going on giving the State more and more to do, we get to the point where, as in Italy, the State does everything, controls and directs everything; and by encouraging it to take for itself an ever larger share of production, we reach the point where labor's share and capital's do not come to enough to go on with.

If this end is thought undesirable, then the logical thing would be to reverse ourselves and give government less to do; and this idea starts a very interesting line of thought. How many things is it actually necessary – not merely convenient, but actually necessary – that





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government should do, and what are they? How many of those it is now doing, if necessary to be done at all, would be done better and cheaper by some other agency? How many economic and social difficulties would be better left to settle themselves by the operation of natural laws than dealt with out of hand by governmental interference; since in the end it is only natural law that does, or can, settle them? On this last point I make room for just one example which is much to the front at the moment. The Liberals of the last generation, perhaps taking their cue from latter-day British Liberalism, thought that government might be used as an instrument of "social welfare." Were they right? Well, we are in the thick of a vast experiment with that theory, and the upshot of that experiment, so far, is that the federal government has put us more than thirty billion in debt, with virtually nothing to show for it. On the strength of this exhibit one would say they were wrong, and this conclusion instantly gives rise to one of the most illuminating questions in the world, which is, Why were they wrong? Why cannot government be successfully used in that way? There is a reason, and a perfectly sound one. Let the reader think the matter over and see what he can make of it.

One other line of thought. Of all the things actually necessary for government to do, how many are being left for the larger units to do, which the smaller units could do better and cheaper? How many is the Federal Government doing, for instance, which the States could do better for themselves; how many are the States doing which the townships could do better; and so on? How many are they all doing which the individual citizen





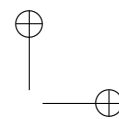
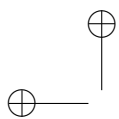
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could do better, if they would merely keep their hands off him and let him alone?

If the reader thus mentally shaves down the functions of government to those for which he can give irrefutable evidence of necessity, I predict he will find them much fewer than he thinks. Then if he mentally redistributes those functions among the smaller and larger governmental units in the way I have indicated, he will find that the larger ones have but little to do. Those functions which he would concede to be legitimate are no doubt highly important, but they are very few. Finally he will emerge with the conviction, I believe, that the less government has to do, the closer it sticks to its unquestionably necessary functions, the more efficient it is; and obviously, the less there is for it to do, the less it costs, *i.e.*, the less it takes out of production and the less its share of production, the greater the shares of labor and capital, and the less the chance of general collapse. After all, we could keep our heads up with labor and capital getting their full shares, even if government went on short rations; but the other way around, we could hardly hope to do so for any length of time. No nation ever yet did if, though many have tried.

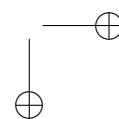
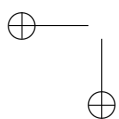
I doubt that my suggestions will interest our politicians especially, and therefore they may be regarded as of no practical use. They are not meant for politicians, however, so if the revamped Republican Party sees nothing in them, I shall not be disappointed. They are meant for such of our industrialists and financiers, if any, who believe as I do that we are not going to be brought out of the doldrums unless and until somebody begins to do some fundamental thinking, and who believe accordingly

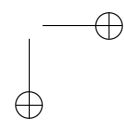




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that fundamental thinking is the most practical thing that anyone can propose. As a starter, I have merely suggested a couple of lines along which it seems to me that fundamental thinking could profitably proceed. If any better suggestions can be offered, I shall be glad to withdraw mine and accept them.







WHEN IS A MURDERER?

April, 1938

My recent meditations on the state of the Union have led me to believe that the country sorely needs a formal statute of limitations on recognized murderers. I would not know how to draft one, nor could I supply the requisite data for the purpose. I am not a man of precision, like Mr. Stuart Chase or Mr. George Soule, who can get a clean-cut formula out of the most formidable mess of statistics as handily as a dairy-farmer makes a refractory cow "give down." In fact, my ideas on the subject are exceedingly vague. Like the good hundred-per-cent American which I am, I have no doubt that something ought to be done; but just what and how and by whom, I don't know. All I can do is to talk a little about the matter in my bald disjointed way which gives offense to so many – they little know what it is to be born artless – in the hope that some one like Mr. Chase or Mr. Soule will go through it with the stringency of a true social philosopher, and make something respectable of it.





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In recent years, when certain men made their appearance on the public stage, I saw that almost universally my countrymen put them down as murderers and desperadoes, and held them in horror and detestation. So did I, for the case seemed clear; there could be no doubt of it. Time went on – I still holding that opinion rather naively, as it turned out – and I presently saw with pain and mortification that my countrymen had changed their opinion entirely and left me in the lurch. Apparently something had taken place which had transmogrified these assassins into pretty good fellows. I could not make out what it was, nor could anyone tell me, and my best efforts to discover it only left me in an exhausted and ignorant state.

M. Mussolini is a case in point. At the time of the Matteotti affair most Americans were freely and loudly vocal about his being a cutthroat in the good old tradition of the Mafia. Well, why not? Later on, however, it seemed that he must have had a change of heart, for he stood before those same Americans quite absolved. I saw nothing which indicated a change of heart, however, nor do I now. His good works certainly bear no testimony to it. I hear that the Italian trains now run on time and that Naples does not smell so bad as it used to, but achievements like these do not attest anything about the moral character of the person responsible for them. I have tried my best to think of something that might have happened to moderate American opinion of M. Mussolini, but I can turn up only one which could be suggested as a possibility – the mere lapse of time. Is this all there is to it? If so, shifting the question away from M. Mussolini, and putting it in general terms, how much time does this





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sort of transformation take, on the average? At what rate per annum may a common cutthroat and plug-ugly be expected to metagrabolize himself into an honored and respectable member of the human family, all things considered?

Something like this is what I would like to have a competent person work out; something which could be embodied in the statute of limitations, to show definitely when the statute might be expected to go into effect. In the first place, such a formula would save a good many innocent and single-minded readers of *THE MERCURY* the embarrassment which I suffered in the instance just mentioned; the most dreadful embarrassment of suddenly discovering that they are no longer thinking with the mind of the herd or speaking with its voice. Moreover, it would keep writers like myself in touch with the times, for the benefit of their readers. In the days when the game law was still out on M. Mussolini, for instance, how advantageous it would have been if I could have given warning through *THE MERCURY* that the closed season would be on in, say, another six months, and that we must all begin to revise our opinions accordingly, in order to keep up our character as good sound herd-conscious and herd-minded Americans!

In fact, it was the American adventures of M. Mussolini's son Bruno which made me see how urgent is the need for some such formula as Mr. Chase or Mr. Soule might give us. Young Bruno, it appears, was a bomber in Ethiopia with a very good bag to his credit, largely of women and children. The report is also that he has a literary flair, and had published something which dealt learnedly with the most up-to-date technique of busting





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pickaninnies from heights above bow-and-arrow range. Then he came to America, where he encountered a most unappreciative public. I was not on the spot, and am taking all this at second hand, but the press-accounts say that the White House was memorialized against receiving him, also that wherever he went he was assailed and bedeviled by pickets, mobsters, anti-Fascists, and assorted demonstrators of all kinds, so that finally he had to be chaperoned around by strong-arm men; and all in all, it would seem that he had a brisk and stirring time.

Now, clearly, public opinion regarded young Bruno as a murderer of a peculiarly mean and low type. I believe it still so regards him. But suppose (for observers of public affairs have to take all sorts of chances into consideration), suppose he should some day succeed his father, or even suppose he should be plumped into a less conspicuous job, and suppose in that capacity he should visit this country again. If he came before the statute of limitations took effect, he would be greeted with the bum's rush, as he was the other day; if after, he would receive a salute of the right number of guns as he came up the bay, and would be welcomed with all the amenities prescribed for an upright and virtuous statesman. Obviously, then, it is important to have some great actuarial genius go into the matter and tell us when the statute of limitations may be expected to become operative in the case of young Bruno.

There are many eminent possibilities of this kind before us at the moment, and it would be a great satisfaction to have them impartially and scientifically examined by some one in whom we all have confidence, like Mr. Chase





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or Mr. Soule. On the strength of the pogroms, for instance, and especially the “blood-purge,” Herr Hitler is very generally regarded as a fearful fellow in the murdering line, which it quite seems he must be. If he came here now, I would not give more for his chances than I would for young Bruno’s. But good heavens! I remember when all America was red-hot for hanging the Kaiser. For once I did not share my countrymen’s enthusiasm, not because I knew so much about the Kaiser, for I did not, but because I knew plenty about the political higher-ups in this country who were fomenting the popular mania – so much did I know, indeed, that I would not believe a word they said about anything or anybody under any circumstances. All America, however, regarded the Kaiser as a murderous villain; but at present, when anyone thinks of him at all, he seems to be thought of as a harmless and rather decent old dud, whom no one would care about hurting.

Now, while Hitler is no doubt our current fiend in human form, one can see plainly that if he holds his job he is headed straight for the kind of plenary absolution which we have accorded to M. Mussolini; and if he does not hold it, he is headed for the kind accorded to the Kaiser. Well, let us have full scientific data on the process, and a formula by which we may know precisely when we may expect to see Herr Hitler’s wings sprouting. Then there is our fine old friend M. Stalin, who is probably responsible for more murders (outside actual warfare) than anyone now alive. I read a note in the *London Times* a few days ago, quoting an estimate of 10,000 cleaned up in the current “purge.” It seems a good many. I cannot see, however, that American public opinion





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is much worked up about it; though if Hitler, why not Stalin; or, again, why make fish of bombing Ethiopians, and flesh of liquidating kulaks? Yet we surely cannot all have forgotten how tremendously our public was worked up over the enormities of Bolshevism only so few years ago. Surely we remember the deportations, the innumerable Red raids, the sweet-scented pecksniffery of Mr. Secretary Hughes, and all the blatant silliness served up by the newspapers throughout the post-war period. I, for one, have good reason to remember those days, because I almost got into trouble once for casually saying no more than that I thought the Bolshevist régime was there to stay – I, who have not, and never did have, any more sympathy with Bolshevism than I have with the New Deal.

Yet if Stalin came to the United States tomorrow, would our populace rise up against him as an arch-criminal? I doubt it. Somehow the statute of limitations has interposed, as it has in the case of Mussolini. Hence it appears that at the present time the game-law is still out on Hitler and out on Bruno, but the season is closed on Stalin and on Bruno's dad. One would think there must be some sort of pattern for the process by which these very remarkable and interesting effects are produced, and I now turn my desultory observations over to abler minds in the hope that they will find it.





GOVERNMENT BY RACKETEERS

May, 1938

I see no reason to be mealy-mouthed about the fact that the United States has always been governed by pressure-groups. The actual power-groups, consisting of Congresses, Presidents, courts, and the general job-holding personnel, have always functioned at the will of the pressure-groups behind them. Everybody now knows this is so, and any pretense to the contrary is preposterous. The Constitution was hammered into shape at the bidding of a set of pressure-groups. The same set dictated the enabling legislation that was framed under Washington's Administration. Under John Adams the same set continued to run things with a high hand, but overdid it considerably and ran them into the ground, politically speaking; and in 1800, another set of pressure-groups ousted the old set, put its own representatives in office, and began the bitter fight which culminated in 1829 in the great irruption of "democracy" under Andrew Jackson.





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So it has gone ever since. Financiers and industrialists; farmers and artisans; diggers of gold, silver, oil, coal, iron; land-speculators; railway speculators; enterprisers carrying the flag into exploitable foreign parts; ex-soldiers; labor-racketeers; racketeers in various pseudo-religious, pseudo-moral, pseudo-social undertakings; latterly hoboes and ne'er-do-wells; all these groups, singly or in combination, have at one time or another held a directing hand on the reins of government, and there is at present no prospect but that government by pressure-groups will continue indefinitely.

Some say, however, especially our friends who are of the Liberal persuasion, that this is quite the way democracy ought to work. Their idea is that democracy means government by compromise. Its politics are the politics of continuous compromise, and its policies are therefore always what Dr. Charles A. Beard, in speaking of the Constitution, so happily calls "a mosaic of second choices." Out of these rough-and-tumble struggles for group-control, government is supposed finally to take a sort of resultant line set by all the divergent lines along which the contesting groups are moving; not coinciding with any, but yielding a measure of compromise-consideration to all; and this is democracy in action.

Theoretically it may be so, perhaps, but I doubt it. Actually, however, the thing does not work out that way; it never has, and apparently never will. What always happens is that when a pressure-group gets control, it also gets a vision of "too much ego in its cosmos," and overplays its hand. It bears down too hard, not only on competing groups, but also on a large neutral public which is in the position of a mere innocent bystander.





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This goes on until all hands are fed up with its exactions, oppressions, enormities, and it is replaced by a competing group which comes into power voracious, unscrupulous, full of vicious resentment, and intent on imposing fresh exactions, oppressions, and enormities of its own. Then presently another displacement to the same effect; then another and another – pull Dick, pull devil! – and so on.

Meanwhile the whole social machinery runs further and further out of gear; and all the faster because the triumph of each successive pressure-group lets in collateral evils which were generally unforeseen, and which sap the spirit of a whole people and deprave it. The long triumph of the Prohibitionist pressure-group is a notorious instance of this; and even more notorious is the triumph of the pressure-group which brought in the income-tax. I choose these two examples because, as it happened, the objects aimed at by both sets of pressure-groups were good; in the one case the reduction or prevention of drunkenness, and in the other the reduction or prevention of over-large concentrations of wealth. But as a recent writer says, “to seize upon the wrong thing and use it for the right reason is a fair working-definition of barbarism,” and this was precisely what was done in these two instances; the remedy which was invoked was far worse than the disease. Certainly, if the design had been, on the one hand, deliberately to demoralize the spirit and conscience of a whole people; and on the other, to give the greatest incentive to governmental extravagance, wastefulness, corruption, and coercion, no two better devices for the purpose could have been conceived than Prohibition and the income-tax.





THE STATE OF THE UNION

The latest thing in pressure-group government is furnished by Mr. John L. Lewis proletarian cohorts. Their aims and particularly their methods fully illustrate the point we are making. Those methods reflect almost exactly the technique of the Fascist European governments – a technique simply of “Do this, or else. . .” The *démarches* of Hitler and Mussolini are essentially only the purposeful, hard-hitting tactics of Mr. Lewis’ guerillas, transferred to the international sphere. Again as in Italy and Germany, the brunt of these minority pressure-group forays is borne by an amorphous unorganized public, almost wholly of the middle class, inert and without leadership; and thus their effect is only to throw the social mechanism still further out of order.

To show how this is so, it is only necessary to imagine what would happen to our social mechanism if this amorphous middle-class public should organize itself into a pressure-group and take over the roughneck tactics of Mr. Lewis’ legions. Such a thing is of course impossible, but it is easy to imagine, and easier still to imagine the social consequences if it became a fact. Suppose that in the case of a strike against the motorcar industry, for instance, as in Flint or Detroit, the whole middle class throughout the region declared a strike against the strikers. When a striker goes into a grocery to buy food, the clerk will not deal with him; when he orders his Winter’s coal, he is told that he is unfair to the organized public, and there is nothing doing; the dry-goods shops refuse to clothe his wife and daughters; the dairies will not sell him milk for his babies; the butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker follow suit; physicians and druggists turn him down; so even do money-lenders. If the striker objects to this sort





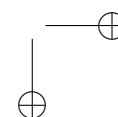
GOVERNMENT BY RACKETEERS

of treatment, a middle-class posse, like Mr. Lewis' shock-troops, stands ready to do him in. Again, there are in the country about twelve million capitalists, large and small, shareholders in various enterprises. Suppose they organize themselves into a union, get into the game with the tradesmen and professional men, and refuse to put up a cent of capital to make work for anybody until Mr. Lewis and his janizaries are satisfactorily tamed down?

As I say, no such thing is possible, but one can imagine what the state of society would be like if the unorganized public thus rose in self-defense against Mr. Lewis' pressure-group, and employed Mr. Lewis' own tactics. Well, my point is that the whole general principle of government by pressure-groups invariably tends towards just this intolerable and anarchic state of society, and there is no help for it. When the Prohibitionists had the government under their heel, they pushed our society as far as they possibly could towards this state of anarchy and dereliction. Now that Mr. Lewis' pressure-group have it under their heel, they are pushing it as far as they can in the same direction.

II

Why, then, must government by pressure-groups go on? Simply because every American citizen is born with the idea that the main function of government is to "help business," and helping business means, first and foremost, helping *his* business. There is no possibility of getting that idea out of the citizen's head, even though it be ever so clearly shown that governmental intervention





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to help *his* business invariably means hurting somebody else's business, and that the total cumulative effect of these interventions must be to bring about a state of anarchy and social collapse. As long as this idea persists, obviously, there can be no government except by pressure-groups, because the essence of that idea is that government is a machine which, if one can get control of it, may be used to help oneself and hurt somebody else. But as I have said, all our fellow-citizens have just that idea fixed in the very foundation of their minds, and nothing can dislodge it.

Consider again for a moment the course of government by the pressure-group of which Mr. Lewis' CIO is the spearhead. In 1932, Mr. Roosevelt fused this group overnight by the simple expedient of declaring that it is the duty of the government to support its people. This doctrine immediately caused the coalescence of the most formidable pressure-group the country ever saw, consisting not only of unfortunate and deserving persons, but also including an enormous mass of unemployables, small-bore racketeers, the discontented and envious, idlers, wastrels, and job-holders – in short, all who could be attracted by the prospect of getting something for nothing. This nondescript group, like all pressure-groups, regarded government as a machine for helping *its* business and hurting other people's. It has now controlled the government for five years under the ægis of the New Deal; and what has been the result?

The New Deal threw away billions of dollars, then blew up ignobly, leaving the country precisely as it was to start with, except for an appalling weight of debt and a swarming rabble of job-holders. It has hurt every-





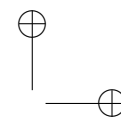
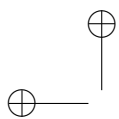
GOVERNMENT BY RACKETEERS

body's business but the pressure-group's – if you wish to see the New Deal's monument, look around you. Its policy of plundering the rich and thrifty to subsidize the “underprivileged” has also seriously jeopardized the future by taking away money which normally would be invested in making good the wear and tear of capital and providing fresh means of production hereafter – a danger which seems to be going quite unrecognized. It has debauched the electorate, debauched the national spirit, debauched the public service, debauched Congress and the legislatures, debauched the courts; it has lowered the tone of our institutions to the full extent of its power to do so, and it has immeasurably lowered the tone of our society at large.

So much, then, for the most recent and striking example of what happens under the theory that the chief duty of government is to “help business.” That theory has brought the country's whole economic structure most uncomfortably close to the point of complete collapse. When the Republic was formed, a hundred and fifty years ago, some men – a few – held to another theory. Benjamin Franklin, generally thought to be pretty level-headed, was one of them. They believed that government should have nothing to do with business, either to help or hinder, except to punish fraud and enforce the obligations of contract; and under that theory, of course, there could be no government by pressure-groups.

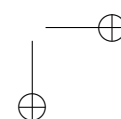
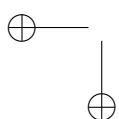
Query: Would the country be in as bad a mess as it is today if that theory were put in force tomorrow? Suppose that from tomorrow on, the government, federal, state, and municipal, took its hands off business and kept them off, except to punish dishonesty and fraud, and to





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compel the fulfillment of contractual obligations; what then? Nobody would expect any miracles; the change would not turn all hands into angels overnight. My only query is whether, no matter what the resulting mess might be, it would be as bad as the mess we are in now as a consequence of having the government's finger stuck deep in every commercial and industrial pie? For my part I heartily doubt it, and I believe that if my readers will dispassionately think the matter out, they will doubt it as heartily as I do.



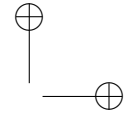
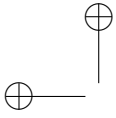


DOWN THE RAT-HOLE

June, 1938

I see that the epidemic of armament “for defense” has moved from Europe to America, like the post-war influenza, and is now raging in the Union. The prospects seem to show that there is nothing to be done about it but to let it run its course, for the cry of “defense” always starts a panic as promptly as an alarm of fire in a theatre. We all remember how we were stampeded by the cry of “preparedness” twenty years ago, when the European war was on. Reason, judgment, common sense, all went by the board in what we now know was nothing but a plain case of jitters. Similarly at the present moment it would be quite useless to attempt stemming the rush of mob-fear and mob-superstition, because wherever fear and superstition come in, reason and common sense go out. Fortunately for me, my duty does not require me to make any such attempt. A commentator on the state of the Union sees the defense-mania as a purely symptomatic social phenomenon, like the dancing-mania



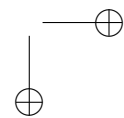
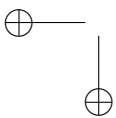


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of the Middle Ages, and his comment is only by way of trying to account for what he sees.

Presumably no one would deny that defense is the first function of government. According to Mr. Jefferson, the primary reason for having any government at all is the protection of the individual citizen in the free exercise and enjoyment of his rights. "To secure these rights," he wrote in the Declaration, "governments are instituted among men." I think the extreme militarist and the extreme pacifist would have no difficulty about coming to an agreement on this fundamental point. The difference between them, as I understand it, is on the secondary point of how, and by what methods, government can best fulfil this primary duty; and I believe they would cordially agree with Mr. Jefferson that defense of the citizen against molestation or aggression is not only the government's duty, but is also its primary duty.

This would be all very well, and there would be no more to say about it if it could be presumed that governments always do act, and will always act, with no other motive than a purely disinterested regard for the public welfare. Unfortunately this is not the case. A government is made up of job-holders, and these job-holders all belong to a party. The tenure of their jobs is bound up with the party's prospects. Consequently, as Benjamin Franklin remarked in his priceless observations on the party system, job-holders are not primarily interested in the public welfare. They are primarily interested in furthering their own fortunes, and since those depend on the fortunes of their party, their next interest is in the party's prosperity. Whatever interest they may have in the public welfare is strictly subordinate to these two sets





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of interests and is conditioned by them. As a rule, they will act for the public welfare if, when, and as such action is not inconsistent with the promotion of the party's interest, and thus indirectly of their own; but otherwise they will not, and any presumption to the contrary is illusory.

This fact, which is even more generally obvious now than it was in Benjamin Franklin's day, should be kept in mind always and under all circumstances, and especially when the peace of a country is said to be threatened. If the threat is real, the people should quite rightly look to the government to do something about it, because first and foremost that is what a government is for; but they should first insist on being shown that it is real, and should also insist on being shown beyond peradventure that the measures which the government proposes to take are in all respects justifiable. I say "being shown" advisedly, for that is what I mean. Merely taking a job-holder's indefinite insinuations at their face value – insinuations such as Mr. Roosevelt put out at Chicago last October, for example – is not "being shown"; far from it. Merely validating a job-holder's estimate of a reasonable policy and procedure is not "being shown." In the first case a job-holder's unsupported word is worthless; and in the second case, giving a government a blank check simply insures its being filled out for every cent the traffic will bear.

This is true by reason of the fact which Franklin so ably discussed. When for any reason a government's prestige is weakened, it at once thinks up some grandiose project for restoring it at public expense. Perhaps it may have been caught out in some uncommonly flagrant





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rascality; or perhaps a business depression has set in, and people are grumbling; or any one of many other causes may have made its position shaky. In any case, however, the thing which always happens is that the government immediately discovers some great public need, and announces a large and costly scheme for satisfying it. This suddenly-discovered need may be for roads, it may be for "conservation," it may be for housing or schools or anything, as long as the plea for it is plausible enough to create a satisfactory diversion of popular attention. Thus, for instance, when business was a little dull in England not long ago, and the Tory government began to notice a choppy sea, it suddenly discovered that housing conditions were shocking bad; and again last year, when our own Mr. Roosevelt found blowholes forming in his popularity, he immediately played up the plight of the submerged third of our population who are ill-fed, ill-clad, and ill-housed, and declared that something must be done about it now, now, now.

Diversions like these usually serve their purpose when the government has the political sense to manipulate them adroitly enough, as we say, to "put them over," for there is always a fairly plausible pretext for them. The one diversion, however, which can be invariably counted on to consolidate a government's position and make it impregnable, is the menace of war. If a government can make it appear that there is ever so slight a chance of a collision with some other government which might result in war, all its misfeasances are at once forgotten, and it has the pleasant certainty of remaining in power with a free hand to launch practically any program of "defense" it likes, however extravagant. This diversion being so





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effective, the temptation to create it is correspondingly great; but the trouble is that it is so seldom practicable in a country like the Union, which has no dangerous neighbors. There has to be a fairly large-scale row going on somewhere, or the immediate prospect of one, in order to give the plea of “defense” any kind of plausibility; and hence it is only at a time like the present that this plea can be successfully worked.

In Europe, where presumably dangerous neighbors abound, the case is different; it can be worked almost anywhere there at almost any time, and it is now being worked to the limit. It is not for me to say whether the plea of “defense” in England and in the European countries is justified by probable fact, or whether it is a diversion. I am not entitled to an opinion about that. There are certain striking coincidences here and there which make one suspect that it may not be always and altogether justified, but it is not an outsider’s business to say how much they amount to. In either case, however, it is competent for any one to observe the extent to which this plea is working, and to reckon up the amount of economic loss and damage which it entails.

England, for example, proposes to spend in the next fiscal year over half-a-billion dollars on the one item of mechanizing her army; which is nearly a million-and-a-quarter more than the whole cost of the army in the present year. On the day I write this, the newspapers are publishing an unofficial statement that the English government will shortly place orders for armament to the tune of a billion-and-a-half dollars. The French Cabinet has raised the ante on “defense” by four-and-a-half billion francs. Hungary chips in with about a hundred-and-fifty





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million, to be raised chiefly out of a capital levy on fortunes exceeding \$10,000. Even Norway comes to the front for something like ten million, and thinks it may need more. I mention these few figures merely to give some little idea of the enormous aggregate of economic difficulties which the defense-mania in Europe is piling up against the future – difficulties which are increasing every day in every country, and which are now on the very point of portending universal ruin, for these prodigious expenditures are for wholly non-productive purposes; they will not produce a single dollar's worth of new wealth, and therefore they amount simply to putting that much money down a rat-hole.

In the Union, such coincidences as I have said are occasionally noticeable in Europe are too impressive to leave any doubt that the demand for “defense” is a pure diversion, got up to meet the exigencies of the election this autumn. The first of these coincidences appeared last October, when Mr. Roosevelt suddenly discovered that the Japanese were doing dreadful things in China; things which they had been doing for six years, apparently unnoticed by him. Again, it was when he was faced by a recalcitrant and troublesome Congress that he as suddenly discovered our need for a larger navy, in view of the disturbed condition of the world. Again, it was when the slump in business began to look like a real slump, that he found this need for a new navy to be actually quite pressing. He did not say just why it is so pressing nor, indeed, why any such need exists; nor can any one say, for the only conceivable need is a political need, for party purposes.





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It is pretty generally acknowledged now, as Mr. Chamberlain said the other day, that in war there are no winners. When I came back to the Union from Europe in 1916, saying that whoever won the war would lose it, I hardly expected to live long enough to see my prediction come true, but I have done so with some time to spare. There is no longer any such thing as winning a war, if indeed there ever was. What now remains to be learned is that the economic dislocations caused by ruinous programs of "defense" are so complete that if they are allowed to go on, they soon leave nothing worth defending. I imagine that the present run of the defense-mania will give a conspicuous proof of this before it ends, but it will then be too late. We have learned that war is an utterly ineffectual way of dealing with international squabbles, and that some better way must be found; and we are now seeing that defense by armies and navies is too expensive, and that some cheaper means must be employed, unless we are prepared to face indefinitely a state of unexampled poverty and wretchedness such as that which is so fast destroying the peoples of militant foreign lands.

This matter of national defense would take on an entirely different aspect if peoples could be brought to understand that the only government they need to defend themselves against is their own government, and that the only way to defend themselves against it is by continual distrust and vigilance. It is a rather bitter reflection on human imbecility that the world could be reduced to permanent peace tomorrow, if by some magic its peoples could be made to transfer to their own governments all the fear, hatred, and incessant suspicion which





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they bestow on other governments. It is their own governments which have the power to hurt and despoil and destroy them. Other governments have no such power; and if all the peoples once perceived this, there would be no wars and no need of further defense against war.

Suppose, for example, that when Herr Hitler came to the front, instead of making him a sort of Brummagem tribal god, the Germans had said to him, "Now see here, Adolf, old Kamerad, we are willing you should do our dirty work for us if you wish, but you will find us very hard masters. We will stand by you for anything in reason, but we are afraid of you and have no love for you and would not trust you as far as we could throw a bull by the tail, nor shall we take your unsupported word for anything under any circumstances. We propose to watch you like a cat at a rat-hole, and at the first sign of any jiggery-pokery, down you go. If you attend strictly to business and behave yourself, we shall do the handsome thing by you when you retire, but not one minute before."

Then suppose, while the Germans were ticking off Herr Hitler in this fashion, the French were saying to M. Blum or M. Daladier or whoever happened to be in office at the moment, "*Dites donc, mon vieux*, do you hear what the boys across the border are telling their hired man? Well, that goes for you, too, and if you know when you are well off, you will take it carefully to heart, because if you don't, we are afraid the future looks a little dark for you." Then suppose meanwhile the English were saying the same thing to Mr. Chamberlain, Italians to M. Mussolini, Americans to Mr. Roosevelt, and so on all around the world. No war could possibly be got up



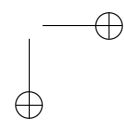


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under those conditions, and “defense” would go by the board.

That was Mr. Jefferson’s idea of a people’s right attitude toward their government; an attitude of unceasing dislike, outspoken distrust, and jealous watchfulness. The wise old man never uttered a truer word than when he wrote to a friend that unless the people resolutely maintained that attitude, “you and I and Congresses and Assemblies, judges and governors, shall all become wolves.” Why, then, should any citizen of the Union waste his time on fear and hatred of the wolves in foreign sheepfolds – wolves which are neither harming him nor likely ever to harm him – and meanwhile give the wolves in his own fold *carte blanche* to do him all the harm they choose to do?







NO MORE RABBITS IN THE HAT

July, 1938

There is a wrong impression in certain quarters concerning the American's capacity for getting hot under the collar about governmental rascalities. The reader has probably heard it said that we are a flabby, pampered lot who have lost the power of resentment and cannot be kicked into a fighting interest in anything but our own comfort and convenience. In particular, we are supposed to be incapable of getting our dander up about public affairs, no matter how disgracefully they are going. True, the people who say such things or hint them (for they seldom go beyond innuendo) are those who either do not know us very well, or else have some sort of ax to grind. In any case their criticism does not amount to anything, and it would therefore not be worth noticing, except for one curious fact which gives a little artificial color to it. Actually, there is not a word of truth in it, but as a people we have a peculiar characteristic which unfortunately tends to make it seem plausible.





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To say that Americans are hard to stir up is rank nonsense. We are the easiest people in the world to stir up. Moreover, when we are stirred up we are distinctly bad medicine for the objects of our hatred. My observation is that we have always shown ourselves quicker on the draw than any other race or nation, the French and Irish being no exception; and also keener than any, except the British, to stay and shoot it out.

But here is the odd thing. We are quicker than anybody to get all het up about public affairs – there is no doubt about it, we are – provided it is somebody else’s public affairs. It takes us no time at all to whoop up a whirlwind of wrath against the iniquities of government, provided it is somebody else’s government. Any government will do, no matter what or where, as long as it is not ours. Give me a good publicity staff and a month’s time, and I will guarantee to raise a wave of honest rage against the Ahkoond of Swat that will make his kingdom rock and tremble. In what other country can such things be done so easily, quickly, effectively and with less questioning? I know of none.

Why, look at it! If all the energy generated by good, sound, honest American hatred of Herr Hitler today could somehow be controlled and applied directly to his person, it would throw him to the moon. You could get power enough out of American universities alone to destroy Franco’s whole army. If you could convert American hatred into heat-units, people would think the Japanese government had got itself caught in a crematory, and that Moscow had been shifted to the tropics.

Then, too, when it comes to the power of detecting the enormities of tyranny and oppression, the American eye





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is as farsighted as the Lick telescope. Distance is nothing to it. Governmental iniquities in Austria, Manchuria, Bohemia, Ethiopia, stand out like flies in a pan of milk. Our sense for spotting them as iniquities is equally prompt and unerring. The moment they strike the telescopic eye we recognize them as iniquities, get all steamed up over them, and feel that something has to be done about them right away. Then we start a “movement” of anti-this or anti-that, organize committees, work up publicity, hold mass-meetings, and raise the devil generally. Also, in our brief intervals of dethroning tyranny and busting oppression, we go around cleaning up after the oppressors in every corner of the earth while some sleazy politician in Washington eggs us on by saying that “we must lead the world.” We succor the suffering Belgians, buck up the indigent Poles, assuage the afflicted Armenians, dry-nurse the refugee Spanish children, and so forth and so on.

All this is fine. “The spirit of resistance to government,” said Mr. Jefferson, “is so valuable that I wish it always to be kept alive”; and Americans beat the world at doing this – except where their own government is concerned. That is where their vision fails, and their capacity for red-hot indignation seems to peter out. All my life they have made me think of Herr Trippa, the astrologer mentioned by Rabelais, who could perceive everything that was going on among the stars, planets and all the heavenly bodies, but could not perceive the adulterous didoes that his wife was cutting up in the very next room to where he sat. It is this peculiar kink in our national character, I think, which puts a color on our critics’ libels about our being soft and willing to stand anything rather than put up a fight about it.





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II

So my readers can easily see why I am so delighted by the recent evidence, slight though it may be, that we are in some degree capable of perceiving wrongs done us by our own government, and of getting fighting mad about them. I refer to the failure of the scandalous and outrageous Reorganization Bill. The fact that the House of Representatives turned this wastrel out to die in ignominy was in itself a good piece of news, and as such I welcomed it; but what really rejoiced me was the report of a hot and lively popular revulsion against Mr. Roosevelt's unconscionable effrontery in proposing such a measure. It seems, after all, that there is still a limit to the amount of chicane and demagoguery that can be rammed down the American craw; and also it seems that when our public is fed up, and knows it is fed up, the demagogue and chicaner will still feel its hand on the back of his neck in a way that does him no kind of good. The reports I get from private sources as well as from the press are almost reminiscent of the frontier spirit displayed by one of Alfred Henry Lewis's cowboy heroes. "I'm a slow hard team to start, Huggins," said Dan Boggs, "but once I goes into the collar, I'm irr'sistible."

It is, of course, a great pity that a sound scheme of governmental reorganization cannot be effected or even seriously proposed; a scheme honestly planned to save no end of money and abolish no end of filthy jobbery. Thomas Carlyle said that the only way to reform the British Foreign Office was to put a live coal under it, and he was abundantly right, as the history of that institution so well proves. Similarly, the only effective





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way to reorganize government in America is to reorganize a good round ninety per cent of it off the face of the earth, for fully ninety per cent of it is purely parasitical and therefore not only useless but noxious. This is an old story, however, and not more than a passing reminder of it is in place here. In fact, if the growing cost of this parasitism is not in itself a sufficient reminder – and apparently it is not – no verbal reminder is worth the breath to utter it.

For example, writing this in Europe at the end of April, I see that Mr. Roosevelt's five-billion-dollar pump-priming plan for spending and lending ourselves out of the depression is now being threshed over in Congress. Perhaps, indeed probably, by the time these words get into print it will be going full blast, for we all know how little Congress thinks of economy in an election year. Perhaps, on the other hand – and this is what I hope, though it is a long chance – the fine spirit of popular rebellion which came out so nobly against the Reorganization Bill will come out with tenfold force against this new piece of impudent audacity.

The measure may fail, or it may not; no matter. All that now concerns me is that it has been *proposed*. It is an Administration measure, with every available ounce of political pressure put behind it. It is a measure of desperation, the inevitable upshot of five years of government by sleight-of-hand. The country is now liquidating a brief spell of bogus prosperity induced by doubling the national debt, and all the elaborate wizardry of the New Deal has been exploited. There are no more tricks left in the magician's cabinet, no more rabbits in the hat; and the only thing the Administration can find to do is to try





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palming off the old original fraud of pump-priming once more, in the frantic hope that a few more billions will carry the election this autumn, and thus will jerry-build the New Deal's prestige out of its own débris.

To think what utter degradation our public affairs have been brought to, when such a proposal can be put out on the heels of the Reorganization Bill! However, I shall not discuss it, because I am mentioning it only for the sake of the record; not my record, for that is unimportant, but the record of *THE AMERICAN MERCURY*. This magazine has held consistently to the simple truth which every farmer knows, that a pump won't stay primed; the next time you go for water, you must prime it again. Furthermore, this truth being as simple and invariable as it is, *THE MERCURY* has held that, by consequence, those who deny or disparage that truth must be either fools or knaves. Also, by consequence, if anyone of apparently sound mind can be shown to have a large personal interest in denying it, the presumption is that he is a knave rather than a fool; and, by consequence again, if he indulges this interest at great cost and damage to the public welfare, he is a knave of the very first water. The editor permits me to say that *THE MERCURY*'s steadfast opposition to the New Deal's spendthrift policies, and its utter detestation of all and sundry who are responsible for those policies, rest on this one piece of extremely simple logic, and on nothing else.

But, getting back to the subject with which I began these notes, a citizen's own government is, after all, the only one against which he needs protect himself first, last and all the time. Only occasionally, if ever, does he need protection against any other, but if he does not



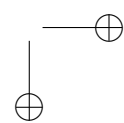
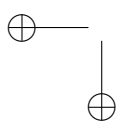


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protect himself against his own government twenty-four hours a day, it will eat him alive; and the only way he can protect himself is by the assiduous cultivation of a hawk's eye and a tiger's temper.

Americans, as I have shown, are fully capable of doing this, and they keep themselves in practice at it, but there seems to be no convincing them that the place for steady practice is at home. If today they lavished on their own government one-half the vigilance, distrust and burning hatred which they now dissipate on government in Russia, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the world in general, they would have at any rate a harmless government, and even very likely a good one.







THE AMAZING LIBERAL MIND

August, 1938

In a recent issue of the *New Republic*, Mr. Lewis Mumford, like another Paul Revere, rouses up the sleeping peasantry with a call to arms against the menace of Fascism. It is one of the most exhibitory performances I have ever seen for showing the incredible lengths to which “the Liberal mind” will go when driven into hysterics by the noise of its own firecrackers. It was too much even for the editors of the *New Republic*, for while they loyally printed their colleague’s article, they also printed a note dissociating themselves from his proposals, and intimating that he would do better to keep his shirt on.

Mr. Mumford’s call is a call to real arms; the title is not fanciful or poetic. It calls us to real shooting-irons, bayonets, tanks, and bombs. His thesis is that there can be no peace with Fascism, so he is for exterminating it at once, before it has the chance to shoot first and destroy us completely. Like Mark Twain’s frontier hero, Scotty Briggs, Mr. Mumford is “a man of peace, and





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he will have peace if somebody has to be carried out on a shutter.” His practical proposals are, first, that our government break off all relations, commercial as well as political, with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Then he would have us all put on our war-paint, reach down the gun, and set forth on a high crusade of self-preservation. He justifies this because, he says, (the italics are his) *Fascism has already declared war*. At the end of his article he rises to a Tyrtæan strain:

To arms! We must rally to our republican institutions and be prepared to fight for them. Now. *Now!* Tomorrow may mean never; the day after tomorrow may bring on the long brutal reign of Fascism’s servile ideal of life and its savage, demented notion of human destiny... To arms! Gather together your strength and prepare for action. Strike first against Fascism, and strike hard. But strike.

This is all very fine and animating, and to keep from being quite carried away by it, I had to remind myself that the lead-up to this stirring peroration seemed a little *ex parte*. I went over the article again, substituting the word *Communism* wherever the word *Fascism* appeared, and I thought Mr. Mumford would have more than doubled the force of his rhetoric if he had bracketed them both together. I could judge only by my own emotional response, and I was quite sure that if he had done this he might really have “got me going.” I might still have thought his plan of action was misguided and wrong – in fact, supremely silly – but I would have understood his indignation, and been much more disposed to share it. For while Mr. Mumford is right on every count against organized Fascism, the same count can be brought with





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equal force against organized Communism. He says, for example, "Fascism is a codified and co-ordinated barbarism." So it is; but equally so is Communism. "To the extent that Fascism has become self-conscious in both Italy and Germany," he goes on, "it has systematized its delusions, erected its perversities into a standard of values, and set up a series of barbarian alternatives to the ideals of civilization." No doubt of it; but those words describe with equal precision what Communism has done wherever it has become self-conscious. "Every form of dishonesty, torture, and violence is justified by the Fascist if it promotes the advantage of the State." Quite true; and quite as true of the Communist. Every form of these villainies, Mr. Mumford says, "has already been used by the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists and the Japanese militarists." Who in his right mind would deny it? – but every form of these villainies has already also been used quite as freely by the Russian Communists. The evidence is quite as clear and abundant against the one perversion as against the other.

Mr. Mumford mentions Fascism's great rival in rascality but once, where he accuses the Roman Church of an alliance with Fascism, and accuses the American Romish priesthood of spreading "the typical Fascist hoax of making war on popular government by playing up the fictitious threat of Communism." He describes this as "a particularly odious trick in an overwhelmingly unbolshevik country like ours." I am not so sure of what he says about the Church and the priesthood, but I am sure he is right about our country being unbolshevik. Yet is it any more overwhelmingly unbolshevik than it is unfascist? I have never counted noses on the question,





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but I would not think so, nor do I believe there is any reputable evidence that it is so. I would even suppose the contrary might be true, since Communism has an official party-status in this country, and I understand that Fascism has not. This may mean little to the point, however, so I do not lay any stress on it.

One might say plausibly that Mr. Mumford's article is a straight piece of sugar-coated propaganda for Communism, from end to end. I have purposely picked my quotations to show how easily this rather grubby little accusation may be made. I do not believe it is anything of the kind. I have known Mr. Mumford for years, and I believe he is incapable of low and shabby indirection. He may be a Communist, for all I know; but if he were, and if he felt he had any propagandizing to do, it is not his way to do it otherwise than fairly and squarely and aboveboard.

No, I quite see how the whole Communist faction might fall on Mr. Mumford's article with yells of joy, for it is as serviceable a piece of larvated propaganda as if it were made to order. Nevertheless I would stake anything it was not made to order, for I cannot see Mr. Mumford as a hole-and-corner propagandist for any cause. I wish I did not have to add that I do see him as something far more dangerous than that; he is a Liberal. I can well imagine his protesting good-humoredly that he would much rather I should make him out a knave than a fool, and I admit it is a hard choice, but there it is, and what can one do? His article interested me immensely, not because I smelled propaganda in it, for I did not and do not, but because I saw in it the complete and perfect reflection of the Liberal mentality.





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A Liberal is dangerous for the same reason Amiel thought women are dangerous. A woman, Amiel says, is “sometimes fugitive, irrational, indeterminable, illogical and contradictory. A great deal of forbearance ought to be shown her, and a good deal of prudence exercised towards her, for she may bring about innumerable evils without knowing it.” This may or may not be a true bill against women – I am not entitled to an opinion about that – but I have observed Liberals closely for many years with ever-increasing wonder and amazement, and I am prepared to say that Amiel’s sentence fits them like a poultice.

When a Liberal steams up on his emotions, they take complete charge of him. His intelligence goes on a sit-down strike; he cannot think; and therefore he runs to an incorrigibly superficial view of things, even of the thing which has riled him. One looks for this trait in the average of uninformed, unintelligent, and largely sensual human critters; but not in a man like Mr. Mumford, who is so very far above that average. Neither would one look for it in any of the Liberals I have known, for they were all, by and large, as far above that average as Mr. Mumford is; yet it was in every one of them, without a single exception.

The mischief of this in Mr. Mumford’s case is typical of the damage which Liberals do without knowing it, as Amiel says. He confirms his readers in the monstrous notion that the villainies of Fascism are something very special and peculiar. He believes they are – or believes he believes they are – and does his eloquent best to make his readers believe they believe likewise. Nothing of the sort is true; his view of Fascism must be termed incorrigibly





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superficial. The simple truth is that the State, wherever found, and under whatever form or name, works always with one object in view, which is the progressive confiscation of the individual's rights, liberties, and properties, and his reduction, as far as possible, to the footing of State servitude. Fascism is but the name given to one formula for doing this. Communism is the name given to another formula for doing the same thing; the New Deal, another; the French Popular Front, another; Belgian Socialism, another; and so on.

The national formulas for State exploitation vary only as the national formulas for lamb stew vary; they show superficial differences, but they are all variants of the same essential thing. In Italy, Russia, and Germany, the State works by the method of sheer dragooning meanwhile busily building up a great force of romanticist hooey or "ideology" to help out. In method as well as purpose, Communism and Fascism are merely two sides of the same counterfeit nickel. In Japan, the State has the force of a powerful hereditary hooey already at command, and its method is therefore prescriptive. In this country, the State works chiefly by straight over-the-counter purchase with public money, meanwhile perfecting a most formidable apparatus for dragooning its citizenry into subservience when the time comes for it to do so. Its method is the method of corruption-plus-embracery; and the flagrant obviousness of this is what makes Mr. Mumford's lurid talk of "rallying to our free republican institutions" so exquisitely ludicrous.

No State known to history ever had any other final purpose than the one I have described. The monarchical State did not, nor the republican State, nor the merchant





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State; nor now do the Communist, Fascist, the self-styled “democratic,” the totalitarian, or any other kind of State. Revolutionary shifts from one form of State to another have been no more than the mere shift of crews at work on the same exploiting-machine. Hence, as Thomas Paine said, “the trade of governing has always been monopolized by the most ignorant and the most rascally individuals of mankind”; and the limit of their progressive oppressions and exactions has always been set according to what the traffic would progressively bear. Owing to poverty, or the temper of the people, or to other national conditions, the traffic will bear less sometimes, and sometimes more; but never anywhere does the State aim short of what it will bear.

Emotion blinds the Liberal to this fundamental fact, and hence he is always being taken in by “ideological” clap-trap of one sort or another, whereby his pronouncements on public affairs become like Mr. Mumford’s, not only worthless, but actually a misdemeanor of evil example. When two gangs of desirous thugs anywhere in the world start a squabble for control of the exploiting-machine, the one which first raises the cry of “Democracy” or “liberty” causes the Liberal to sizzle with all Mr. Mumford’s naive belief that by getting into a great sweat over an empty phrase he is really doing something for Democracy or liberty. After the sorry sight which American Liberals made of themselves twenty years ago, when the Pied Piper of the White House got them on the run to make the world safe for Democracy, one might think the present crop of Liberals would have learned to control their emotional effervescence and cork it down; yet apparently they are ready as ever to be touched off





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by whatever preposterous blackguard comes along with the most plausible line of quackery.

Thus they become the most inconsequent of mortals. To save us from the horrors of war and militarism, for instance, Mr. Mumford would plunge us into war and militarism. The egregious Woodrow harvested the whole field of American Liberalism with exactly that proposal; and we now know what it was worth and what came of it. Again, when the Liberal warms up to a cause, he becomes stone-blind to the moral character of any absurdity, swinery, or villainy which promotes that cause. As a casuist and special pleader, he has Gury and Alfonso de Liguori looking like jack-leg lawyers in a chicken-court. If a Fascist, he is red-hot over Communist atrocities, but those of his fellow-Fascists are necessary expedients for the time being, temporary measures required by unusual conditions, and all that sort of thing. If anti-Fascist, he is another Mr. Mumford. If a New Dealer, he condones the disreputable doings of his leaders and associates with an appeal to "necessity, the tyrant's plea." The Liberal's inconsequence makes him a master-hand at countenancing wrong that right may follow; and the fact that it never does follow, and never can follow in such circumstances, is beyond his grasp.

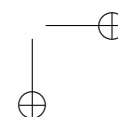
I wish I might convince Mr. Mumford that no alien State policy will ever disturb us unless our own Government puts us in the way of it. We are in no danger whatever from any government except our own, and the danger from that is very great; therefore our own Government is the one to be watched and kept on a short leash. I suggest that Mr. Mumford take his mind entirely off Fascism, Communism, and foreign affairs in general,





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and devote it exclusively to finding out and carefully considering what our own Government is up to. Never mind what goes on in Japan, Germany, Italy, Russia, Czechoslovakia. Let the heathen rage; the important thing for us is what goes on here, and there is quite enough going on to engage Mr. Mumford's fine abilities profitably – instead of their being engaged as now, unprofitably – for the rest of his life.







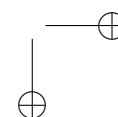
JOB-HOLDER'S PARADISE

September, 1938

I sometimes wonder what the author of the Massachusetts Bill of Rights would think if he could come back to earth and see what has happened to his bedrock doctrine of the "separation of powers." John Adams was the most profound student of government that we ever produced – Calhoun was perhaps his equal, but no more – and this doctrine was never better stated than in the Massachusetts Bill:

In the Government of this Commonwealth the legislative department shall never exercise the executive and judicial powers, or either of them; the executive shall never exercise the legislative and judicial powers, or either of them; the judicial shall never exercise the legislative and executive powers, or either of them to the end it may be a government of laws and not of men.

This doctrine was not peculiar to Massachusetts. It was a national product, a good, sound, hundred-per-cent American principle. As the late Justice Gaynor, of the





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New York State Supreme Court, pointed out, it was “common to all of the State constitutions and bills of rights, and was expressed therein in the most scientific and felicitous manner.” The only special credit due to the Massachusetts Bill is for expressing it “in a manner which has never been excelled.”

The Founding Fathers had a long spell of living under a government of men in the colonial days, and apparently they had seen enough of it, for they took the strongest measures they could against its recurrence. What, now, has happened to their doctrine? I am not interested in what has happened to it in various foreign countries where it is an exotic, but I am a little curious about what has happened to it right here in America where it was born. In his Independence Day speech at Gettysburg, Mr. Roosevelt presented a modern, stream-lined model of government in competition with the old-style, model-T affair which Lincoln put on the market at the same place some years ago. His phrase was “a people’s government for the people’s good,” and his speech made it presumable that this is the kind of government which he and his henchmen propose to furnish and are furnishing.

Now the best that can be made of a government “for the people’s good” is one for what Mr. Roosevelt decides is for the people’s good. This being so, the best that can be made of “a people’s government” is one that the people will accept *ex post facto*, after they have had a taste of it. But what evidence is there that Mr. Roosevelt is competent to decide what is for the people’s good? It is a large order. I have heard him praised for many good qualities, but I have yet to hear one of his admirers praise him for his intelligence. There is no





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evidence that he was ever able to do a respectable job of thinking on any subject, let alone such a subject as the welfare of 130,000,000 people; and there is a prodigious amount of evidence to the contrary. He has advisers, and presumably listens to them, but they are of his own choosing, and in any case the final decision rests with him. Is it to be supposed, then, that election to a public job touches off a sort of Whitsunday miracle whereby a notable intellectual lightweight becomes a competent judge of what is for the people's good?

Aside from this, moreover, one may well ask who is Mr. Roosevelt, or Mr. Anybody, that he should set up a self-sprung scheme of government for the people's good, and then apply every kind and form of political pressure, fair or foul, to get the people to accept it. Maybe it actually is for their good, but are they not entitled to a free say in the matter? Lincoln's phrase "of the people, by the people" at least implies a more or less spontaneous assent, rather than a consent induced by cajolery, open purchase, blackmail, and dragooning. Perhaps the people do not know what is good for them; I for one am very sure they do not. Freely acting for themselves under a government of laws, however, gives them some faint chance of some time learning what is good for them; but under the paternalistic dry-nursing of a government of men – even men of the highest wisdom and the best intentions – they can never learn.

Running Lincoln's old-style model-T with the people at the wheel means untold centuries of bad-driving, stalling, complete smash-ups, and appalling casualties, but it is barely possible (I have some doubt of it, but it is certainly possible) that in the end the survivors, if any,





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will have learned how to drive. On the other hand, first, it is highly improbable that Mr. Roosevelt's new model, with the people in the back seat, will have any better accident-record or any lower casualty-lists; and second, no amount of back-seat driving can ever make good drivers. So, admitting that it is a choice of evils, the old model-T is still probably a better bet than Mr. Roosevelt's high-powered 1938 Marx-Hitler racer.

All this, as I say, is taking the most favorable view of the phrase which Mr. Roosevelt used at Gettysburg. I do not take that view. In my humble opinion, what a job-holder does is always more significant than what he says, and all Mr. Roosevelt's public conduct points steadily to something very different. It points to government by a boss-owned and boss-operated partisan machine, for partisan purposes. What else is government by "must" legislation, or government by executive order? Government by an executive, exercised through bureaus, boards, commissions – bodies appointed by him and responsible to him alone – what kind of government is that? Some of Mr. Roosevelt's critics believe that his motives are good, and that his pretensions may be taken at their face value. They say that while he does great evil, he does it that good may come. I believe nothing of the kind. The two Napoleons put up precisely the same pretensions, and so do Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini; and I take no more stock in pretensions as coming from Mr. Roosevelt than as coming from these gentry. You will go a long way in history to find an absolutist usurper who did not seize power in the name of the people and maintain stoutly that he was governing for the people's good; and you





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will go further yet to find one whom the mere passage of time has not marked indelibly as a common liar.

II

We are beginning to notice one of the interesting consequences of substituting a government of men for a government of laws. When once you establish the principle of personal government by a highly-placed job-holder, you establish it for all job-holders. Let a *Duce* or a *Führer* or a President ignore the limitations of law and start arbitrarily imposing his will on the people-at-large, then every scurvy little Dogberry in his political retinue takes the cue from his superior and starts imposing *his* will on the people in his petty bailiwick. Mr. Roosevelt, for instance, advises Congressmen not to be too particular about the constitutionality of a measure which interests him; how long a step from that is it to Governor Murphy's flat nullification of law, or to Mayor Hague's assertion, "I am the law"? Given a Roosevelt who manipulates or disregards the law as he sees fit, and you immediately spawn a tribe of Murphys, Hagues, Ickeses, Wallaces, Blacks, Mintons, who may freely manipulate or disregard the law as *they* see fit.

Thus we now have minor executives everywhere openly violating the principle that the way to administer law is the way prescribed by law, and are instead administering it arbitrarily or not at all. We have mayors "forbidding" this or that – entertainments, assemblies, demonstrations, public speeches – thus passing judgment on them in advance of the fact, which is not only an exercise of



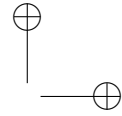
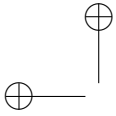


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the judicial power by an executive, but a flagrant misuse of that power. We have police-chiefs exercising censorship arbitrarily and at their own pleasure, in disregard of primary constitutional rights. Under our new system of government by innumerable boards, bureaus, commissions, and that most ill-conditioned of all institutions, the Congressional investigating committee, these bodies exercise not only the legislative and executive powers, but some of them exercise the judicial power as well. The result is a government of men, pure and simple, precisely as the author of the Massachusetts Bill foresaw it would be. Its wilful and often malevolent character is so regularly manifested and so well understood that the term “cracking down” has become a commonplace of our newspapers. Once the limitations of law are overpassed, the way is open for the satisfaction of all manner of private grudges and dislikes. It is notorious that when a “purge” is declared, a great many more private enemies than public enemies are liquidated.

Well, then, what about it? Politicians who carry water on both shoulders say that times have changed, and that there is some peculiarity about our times which makes the separation of powers inadvisable – to a certain extent, of course, and with carefully protected restraints. Mr. Landon was saying something like this the other day. It may be so, and if our people generally feel that way, I certainly have nothing to say. After the French Revolution, which he thought was an unmitigated calamity, Edmund Burke ended his reflections on it by saying:





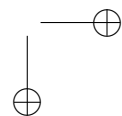
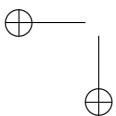
JOB-HOLDER'S PARADISE

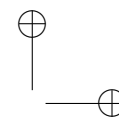
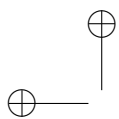
If a great change is to be made in human affairs, *the minds of men will be fitted to it*; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear and every hope will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself than the mere designs of men.

This being so, he said, “it would be presumptuous in me to do more than to make a case” against the principles of the Revolution, leaving the final decision to the judgment of the future. Very possibly, if the Revolution had stopped with its first phase, as Mr. Jefferson hoped it might, Burke would have lost his case; the judgment of the future would have been against him. But it did not do that; revolutions seldom do. It ran on through its second and third phase, with its original principles and promoters very thoroughly liquidated; ran on into one amazing excess of murderous lunacy after another, and finally into complete chaos; and the future has given Burke his verdict.

If “the general opinions and feelings” of our people are indeed drawing towards the revolutionary change from a government of laws to a government of men – as they quite appear to be doing – it would be presumptuous in me to do more than to make a case against that tendency. Indeed, I am even spared the trouble of doing that, for in the July issue of this magazine Channing Pollock presented my case far more ably and cogently than I could hope to do. Where there is a government of men, the actual ruler of the people is fear; and where fear rules, there is moral and economic chaos.

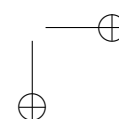
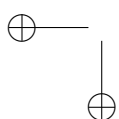
None but a malefactor is ever afraid of a government of laws; none ever need be. Everyone, criminal or innocent,





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honest or dishonest, is afraid of a government of men, and with reason. It is in fact the honest, industrious, and well-disposed who have the greatest reason to be afraid of it, for they are the most acutely conscious of their helplessness. Despoiled of initiative, they become apathetic, demoralized, pursued by a nagging sense of outrage and indecency, and the general consequence is an incurable progressive debility in every department of life. This debility is plainly manifest now; Mr. Pollock has given a full factual account of its symptoms. No one can possibly mistake or miss it; it is everywhere. Those whose opinions and feelings turn towards a government of men may make what prognosis from it they see fit. I make none; I merely mark it as Exhibit A, and rest my case.





WPA – THE MODERN TAMMANY

October, 1938

The country seems to be keeping up a polite and pleasant fiction about the WPA's relation to the government. Every once in a while a story pops out that the WPA is being used in one place or another for political purposes. Usually the story is backed up by confessional or circumstantial or documentary evidence – sometimes all three which makes it look fairly plausible. When this occurs the country-at-large apparently files a tacit verdict of “not proven,” or, in an exceptionally flagrant case like that of the Kentucky primaries, of “not guilty, but don't do it again.” In the few instances where the charge is likely to be too embarrassing, the blame is laid on some local understrapper, and the matter is promptly forgotten. In short, there appears to be a tacit agreement all round that the WPA shall not under any circumstances be openly acknowledged as an integral part of Mr. Farley's political machine, expected to function as such, and, if need be, coerced into functioning as such. No one will





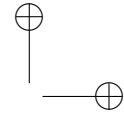
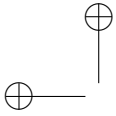
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say that it might not be just that, but to say that on evidence offered it is just that and cannot in any kind of reason be regarded as anything but that, would be horribly bad form. It would be tantamount to saying that the Administration is deliberately capitalizing destitution and distress; in other words, that the New Deal's whole high command, all the way from Mr. Ickes up to Mr. Farley, and from Mr. Hopkins down to Mr. Roosevelt, are a parcel of peculiarly despicable racketeers – and that simply isn't done.

There is something to be said for this attitude. When persons are under suspicion, they should have the benefit of every reasonable doubt. The law provides for this, and the natural sense of justice insists on it. But in establishing a reasonable doubt the persons' known character and previous behavior play a great part. Two men, say, are found messing about a safe at night. If they turn out to be gangsters with a record, and are in possession of burglar's tools, that is one thing. If they turn out to be officials of the bank, whose accounts are all straight, and who say they are checking up on a report of trouble with the time-lock, that is another thing. The circumstances are easily sifted, and that is the end of the matter. If, however, the officials resent investigation, or try to shirk it, or get on their high horse about it, they simply enhance suspicion, and do themselves no kind of good.

The alleged activities of the WPA in Kentucky have made me think that the country is overdoing the judicial attitude a little. THE MERCURY lately printed a letter from a WPA worker there which gave a circumstantial account of flagrant coercion practiced on himself and





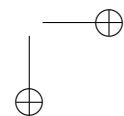
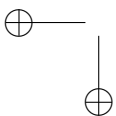
WPA – THE MODERN TAMMANY

many others. In the correspondence which followed,* what especially interested me was this statement from the same worker (the italics are mine):

Soon after Mr. Ben Dishman, area engineer for Whitley County, had told me that Roosevelt was feeding me, and that the WPA was not big enough to hold any man who was against any person, program or thing that Roosevelt sponsored, and especially Barkley, I received a circular letter from Mr. Harry L. Hopkins, telling me that I was free to vote as pleased; but on that same day I received a visit from my boss, who stated that I had been reported again for favoring Chandler. When I showed him my letter from Mr. Hopkins, he said, "You are not putting confidence in that, are you?" I replied that surely Mr. Hopkins would not lie. He said, "You should know better; that is merely to whitewash Hopkins's face. He has to do something. The letter does not mean a damn thing. Should you attempt to report the matter, *the same man who gave the orders would be sent to investigate the charges.* The only result would be that you would be blackballed from WPA for life."

It is of course possible that all this is a monstrous exaggeration or a downright falsehood. If so, it would seem all the more important that for the honor of the Administration the worker's story should be hunted down and refuted, and he himself dealt with as he deserves. It alleges a dirty business – a very dirty business – either connived at or initiated by Mr. Hopkins, and condoned, to say the least, by the New Deal's general staff. As in the case of the bank officials, if the Administration shirks or obstructs an investigation of this statement, or strikes a top-lofty attitude towards it, a profound suspicion of

*The editor of THE MERCURY tells me he has laid the whole of this correspondence before the Senate committee on campaign expenditures.





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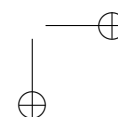
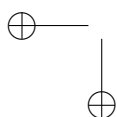
the WPA relation to the government would seem bound to be revived and strengthened.

For my part, I think the record of the WPA's original formation is worth going over again, exactly as one would re-examine the previous record of the bank officials. One would want to know what the bank officials might have done in this-and-that circumstance of their previous career, and what they actually did do. Was their conduct open to doubt; was it shifty or suspicious? Did they behave carefully, honorably, straightforwardly, and did they show a commanding sense of the importance of keeping their reputations clear?

Just so with the Administration. In 1932 it was confronted by a situation which could be met in either of two ways. By meeting it in one way, the Administration would create a coercible political asset of prodigious value. By meeting it in another way, it would still create a valuable good-will asset, but not coercible. If, therefore, we recall the circumstances, consider what the Administration might have done, and then consider what it actually did, we have gone a long way towards determining what its purposes and intentions were.

II

The circumstances were these: In 1932 there were among us great numbers of people who had always been and would always be utterly worthless from the economic point of view. They were unable to make a living, had always been so and would always be so; they were born that way, for which there was no help. They were in their





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chronic state of unemployment at the time. Then besides these we had a smaller body of labor so poorly skilled as to be always on the selvage-edge of incompetence, and economic causes had put this body of labor out of employment – causes which were beyond immediate economic control, and of course beyond political control.

Now, suppose that the Administration had wished to act disinterestedly and honorably in these circumstances, what would it have done – assuming, of course, that it was its duty to act at all? Is it conceivable that it did not perceive the opportunity to weld together at one stroke the greatest mass of coercible voting-power ever assembled in the country? Can anyone pretend that Mr. Roosevelt could not perceive this, or that his Tammany-trained janissary, Mr. Farley, could not perceive it? Can any one bamboozle himself into believing that the political architectonics of the WPA and the general Relief-program were only a happy accident? Well, then, if Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Farley, not being born yesterday, did perceive the political possibilities inherent in this program, how might they have acted?

They might have put it not only out of their own power, but out of any succeeding Administration's power, to take advantage of these possibilities. Two measures, both very simple, would have sufficed. First, Mr. Roosevelt might have demanded that every recipient of governmental aid should be disfranchised while receiving it. Second, he might have demanded that governmental aid should be confined strictly to supplying the destitute with food, clothing and shelter, on a system of food-tickets and non-interchangeable vouchers; no tobacco, beer, moving-





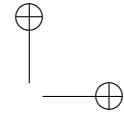
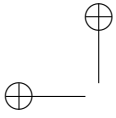
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pictures, reading-matter, and not one cent of money under any circumstances.

Was this practicable? Of course it was. In 1932 Mr. Roosevelt could have got anything he wanted. Suppose he had explained the situation over the radio, told the country candidly all about the possibilities of corruption inherent in the Relief program, and said he wished above all things to have his Administration go down in history as a standing example of decency and integrity in the face of temptation. Would the country have "got it"? I believe so; and as for the country standing by him, I believe that this one speech would have copper-riveted his popularity and made it impregnable, so that while it would have been a dreadful blow to local politicians everywhere, they would not have dared withstand him for a moment.

But what actually happened? Both these measures were proposed, not of course officially, but by citizens who saw what might be coming and were properly anxious about it. These proposals promptly threw the Administration into a great fit of unctuous rectitude. It was especially horrified at the first proposal, although there is plenty of precedent for disfranchising paupers, and even if there were not, it was certainly called for as an emergency-measure, far less dubious than any of the "must" legislation which the Congress was busily rubber-stamping at the time. But the Administration could not dream of subjecting luckless citizens to such gratuitous humiliation and obloquy; the mere suggestion was slanderous, the product of an evil mind. If the news-reports were correct, even the Secretary of Labor, who I truly believed was a cut above that sort of thing, was very



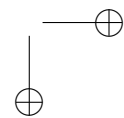
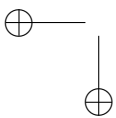


WPA – THE MODERN TAMMANY

outspoken against it. So both proposals were smothered, and the WPA and Relievers generally were allowed to gravitate into their present anomalous position.

How far would suspected bank officials get, with such a record behind them? If they were shown to have confronted a situation which had immense illegitimate profit in it, and had indignantly refused to take a simple and easy means of putting that profit out of reach, what would one think? Then when subsequently it appeared almost beyond peradventure that they were raking in that profit with both hands, what would one be bound to think?

For these reasons, as I said, I believe the country is bending over backward a little in its attitude towards the political status of the WPA. It should by no manner of means be forgotten that Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Farley are very astute and realistic politicians, and according to Abraham Lincoln, there is no such thing as a politician who is honest. Lincoln frankly gave himself as authority for this statement, saying that he knew what he was talking about, for he was a politician himself. *A priori*, therefore, it is highly improbable that two politicians having “interests apart from those of the people,” as Lincoln said, would make any but a most unscrupulous use of such an opportunity as the general program of Relief held out. So when this *a priori* probability is tacked on to such evidence as I have cited *a posteriori*, the case seems to be pretty thoroughly established. If the people like that sort of thing, or are indifferent to it, that is certainly their privilege, but in my poor opinion the keeping up of any pretense about its character is a first-class exhibit of infantilism.







BUSINESS DODGES THE TRUTH

November, 1938

My personal doings are very seldom important enough to be worth anybody's notice, but I have lately had an experience which I think might interest some of my readers, so I shall take a chance on describing it.

First, though, I shall ask the reader to look at an imaginary picture. Suppose you saw a country where people were tremendously interested in Christianity, all giving themselves out to be sound, hundred-per-cent Christians, and then suppose you found that in the whole length and breadth of that country you could not buy a copy of the New Testament for love or money. What would you think?

Suppose further that you went around among publishers in that country, and said, "This is a queer kettle of fish. How about getting out a cheap edition of the New Testament just as a flyer, and see what could be done with it. I can't believe but that these people would want to have a copy around the house for the looks of the





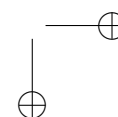
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thing, if nothing more” – and the publishers all told you it would be a dead loss, that nobody would buy it if you offered it in paper covers as low as twenty-five cents.

Still further, suppose you then looked up some rich men who were especially strong on Christianity, not only in a personal way, but officially – vestrymen, deacons, trustees, elders, and all that sort of thing – and who were all terribly worried because Christianity was being cold-shouldered by a godless government just then, and they didn’t know what to do about it. Suppose you suggested that they might buy up a small edition of the New Testament and distribute it around among influential people as ammunition, with a strong personal letter accompanying each copy. The letter would say that in this time of trouble Christians who were really up-and-coming ought to know something about the first principles of their faith, its history and general philosophy; that the New Testament was a pretty fundamental document in those respects, and no Christian who expected to be called on to defend his faith could afford to leave it unread. Then suppose these men told you that they did not know of anyone who would read it as a gift, or who would let it go any further with him than the nearest waste-basket!

I imagine you might think there must be a screw loose with Christianity in those parts, and that the sooner the godless government made hay of it, the better.

I have lately been dabbling in a noble experiment of that kind, with results pretty much as stated. When I arrived in this country after a long absence, I found that our great captains of industry were in a terrible twitter over the government’s interferences with business. They were saying that the government ought to get out of





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business, keep its hands off business, let business alone. I was immensely pleased to hear this, because it was exactly what I had been saying for a great many years. I was a good bit astonished, too, for I had never heard businessmen talk that way before, and whenever I had ventured to talk that way, I had found myself distinctly unpopular. Nevertheless I was glad to see myself in good company at last, and so I started in at once on the best move I could think of to help the cause of righteousness along.

For anyone who really wants the government to let business alone, Herbert Spencer's essays called *The Man Versus the State* are precisely what the New Testament is for anyone who wants to be a sound intelligent Christian. They are *the* fundamental document, an impregnable arsenal, bristling with irresistible philosophical and historical weapons. A businessman who is framed up with this volume knows just where he stands and what the real strength of his position is, and he knows how to defend that position against all comers. It is a small book, too. In England, if you don't mind taking it in a paper cover, you can buy it for an English shilling, somewhat under twenty-five cents. In this country, unless you have the luck to pick up a secondhand copy somewhere, it is not to be had.

Well, then, like Mr. Squeers with the milk, I said to myself, here's richness. Here is something which will at last put me really solid with my newly-made friends, and maybe give me a chance to die in the odor of respectability. Businessmen will jump at it. They will see that we old-fashioned radical individualists whom they have so long sneered at and despised were actually





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on their side all the time and were the best friends and defenders they ever had, as in fact we were. They will see that the old horse-and-buggy fellows like Franklin, Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Quesnay, Herbert Spencer, Henry George, Turgôt, du Pont de Nemours, had something on the ball; and that the disciples of these men, like myself, were not quite the cranks and crackpots we were taken for, but had the business man's best interests steadfastly at heart.

I have quite a few acquaintances in the publishing business, some of them pretty enterprising, so I went around among them, suggesting that since our businessmen were so het up about governmental interferences – and most justly – it might be worthwhile to republish Spencer's essays. I even offered to do the editing, free gratis for nothing. The publishers looked at me with a pained expression; they were pleasant and friendly but evasive. They quickly shifted the conversation with a few well-chosen words, and I saw it was useless to pursue the subject further.

That didn't work. I then looked up some acquaintances who are close to various eminent captains of industry, and suggested that one or another of these captains take a cheap edition of Spencer and send it around to a picked list of representative businessmen throughout the country, with a personal letter. This did not work either. I was told that the representative businessmen would not read the book, could not be hired to read it, and that the eminent captain of industry who was fathering the issue would not read it himself; so that was that.

My last attempt of this kind was especially interesting. The person I talked with was on very close terms with the





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heads of an immense concern – something in the mining way, I think. He was sympathetic and extraordinarily frank. “This talk of wanting the government to let business alone,” he said, “is all hooey. They don’t want it to let business alone. Go to them today and offer to set up a government tomorrow on Spencer’s model, one that would really let business alone, and they would die in hysterics. What! – no tariffs, no protection, no subsidies, franchises, concessions, nobody to run to when you get into a jam over some competitive scheme to swindle somebody? Do you think they would stand for that? Show them how to make a clean sweep of Roosevelt and John Lewis, and they’ll give you their daughter in marriage, or all their daughters if you want ’em, and you can take ’em tandem, four-in-hand, or six-abreast. But show them how to put a crimp forever in *all* the Roosevelts and Lewises, their own kind included, and see what you’ll get. Take it from me, the last thing they want is to abolish privilege, precisely as it is the last thing John Lewis wants. They want to *monopolize* privilege, which is just what Lewis wants, and your friend Spencer would stand the same show with them as he would with Lewis or with Roosevelt himself, and not a dam’ bit better.”

II

To tell the truth, I had more than half suspected something of this kind. My newspaper this morning carried an item about a whaling big new subsidy granted to a shipping firm. It started up in my mind once more





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the question of who ever got the government into business, anyway. Who got it into the shipping business? Politicians? I'm afraid not. The reader probably knows by this time what I think of politicians – at least, as much of it as can be put into print in a family magazine – and knows that I would never give one of them an out unless it were unmistakably coming to him. To my mind, the American job-holder, from pound-master to President, is the very lowest form of verminous life. To his credit be it said, however, that he tried hard to keep the government's hands off the shipping business; he fought ship-subsidies for years. It was a nice little junta of businessmen – shipbuilders, steelmakers, outfitters, and such – who put the government in the shipping business, and thereby created one of the most notorious rascal-nests in the country. Have these men undergone a change of heart lately, so that they now want the government to let the shipping business alone? Not according to this morning's newspaper.

The papers also say that the railways are hard up and must have some relief from the government. Well, who nagged the government into the railway business, cadging land-grants and subsidies in the first instance, and then running to Washington for political rate-fixing and regulation of traffic? Who pestered the government into the aviation business, the road-building business, the business of dredging harbors and worming out internal waterways? Who hectored the government into setting up things like the Federal Trade Commission and the erstwhile Farm Board? Businessmen, every time. Just so; and now do businessmen want the government to





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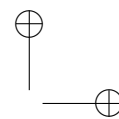
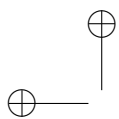
take its hands off those businesses and forever after let them alone? I don't believe it.

But I am not in the least interested in merely showing up the American captain of industry as a Bourbon and a humbug. That is a poor thing to do, and gets nowhere. What interests me is the impressive evidence now before us that there is no practicable middle ground, or No-Man's Land, between a type of government which lets business strictly alone to hoe its own row, and the type which dabbles progressively in all business, as ours is now doing, and thereby runs society down into a most calamitous bust. There is no such thing as successfully segregating certain areas of business activity in which it is proper for the government to take a hand, and others in which it is not. Letting one group use the government to promote a group-interest or class-interest means letting any and all groups use it, according as one or another, by fair means or foul, can get itself a break.

My point is, then, that either you take Turgôt, Franklin, Spencer and Co., and take them straight, or in the long run you get chaos. At the present time our society has yet but a short way to go before landing in chaos, and there is no chance but it will keep going. That is the upshot of a century-and-a-half of feverish wangling for breaks by economic group-interests and class-interests. Once admit that there are any breaks to be had, no matter how few, no matter how sharply delimited, and the government immediately becomes an auctioneer.

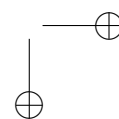
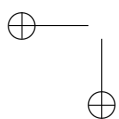
In relation to business, the proper functions of government are three, and no more. First, to punish fraud. Second, to enforce the obligations of contract. Third, to make justice costless. If anyone wishes to know why this





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is so, and why no society which adds one jot or tittle to these functions can permanently hold together, Spencer will tell him in terms which no one can misunderstand or fail to understand. But would our businessmen wish to be told that? I think I have reason to doubt it.





WANTED: HONEST RADICALS

December, 1938

If I smoked cigars, which I never do, I should probably see a good deal of force in the late Mr. Marshall's idea that the country's greatest need is a good five-cent cigar. Not having the habit, however, I can think of a good many other things that seem more necessary. For instance, since I am a bit on the radical side myself, I naturally think the country could pretty well do with a few good sound old-line radicals. We have plenty of ists and ites of one sort or another who are called Radical by editors, labor-leaders, college presidents, Chamber of Commerce executives, and such-like ignorami, but an old-fashioned radical would not be found dead in their company. Think of our Fascists, Communists, Socialists! – can anyone imagine an old-time dyed-in-the-wool radical herding with Mr. Browder, Mr. Norman Thomas, Mr. Fritz Kuhn, or taking any interest in their antics? I cannot. The radical breed used to be fairly well represented in this country, though never numerous – it is never numerous





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anywhere – but of late it seems to have petered out, and I think it was too useful to be lost.

The radical always saw things as they actually were, not as somebody told him they were, or as everybody thought they were. He had a clear eye for bedrock fact, like the child in Hans Christian Andersen's fable of the king's magic garment. Courtiers were praising the garment, crowds milling around and jubilating, all hands saying how marvelous and beautiful it was, when suddenly the little chap piped up and said, "But he has nothing on." That youngster had the makings of a real radical. He threw an eye on the king, saw that he had nothing on, said so, and that was that. What the crowd and courtiers were saying did not count with him at all. He was the embodiment of Plato's doctrine that the first condition of human wisdom is to see things as they are; and that is what the radical always made the first and greatest point of doing. He never took the appearance of things as a measure of their reality, but always cut straight down through them to see what the underlying reality, if any, actually was.

His creeds were fundamental; hence they were simple and brief. He was nothing at all on "ideologies," but was always on the matter-of-fact and practical side. To him, a social program was nothing but a piece of machinery, to be judged like any other machinery, solely by the way it would work. If it would turn the trick, and turn it cheaper and better than some other machine, he was for it; if not, he was for the other one. But all the time he had his eye steadily on the thing the machine was supposed to do, for this was all that interested him. Hence he was as far as possible from being a doctrinaire,





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like most of our social and economic prophets of the present day. The doctrinaire gets so much interested in his machine that so long as it keeps running, he pays little or no attention to what it turns out, or whether it turns out anything. His machine is no longer a machine, but a fetish.

Thus it is a quality of mind and character that differentiates a radical. Radicalism does not connote a set of tenets or a program or platform. Except *ad hoc*, there is no such thing as radical principles or a radical platform, nor could there ever very well be, in the ordinary sense, such a thing as a radical party or group. Radicalism might perhaps be best described as a *temper*, a mode of mind and character which applies itself to whatever principle or program may appear before it. One might show this by taking examples from any of the isms now abroad in the world – Socialism, Fascism, Rotarianism, Presbyterianism, anything you like – but since I am a Single-Taxer it might be in better taste to pick my examples from among my own kind.

The fundamentals of Single-Tax doctrine are axiomatic, and are therefore accepted everywhere and by all. Like the axioms of geometry, they are recognized by the common sense of mankind. They are three: first, man is a land-animal; second, man derives his subsistence wholly from land; third, if deprived of access to land, man cannot exist. Those are the three rock-bottom articles of the Single-Taxer's faith, and nobody disputes them. He draws an inference from them, however, which some do not agree with, and others accept with a difference. The inference is that as a matter of right, man should have free access to the source of his subsistence. On the one





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hand, our whole historic system of land-tenure is based on a denial of this inference's validity. On the other hand, Communists and Socialists draw the same inference, but believe that man's right to the use of the earth is given by the State and may be revoked by the State; whereas the Single-Taxer believes it is a natural right and not revocable by anybody.

At this point there comes up the difficult question of how to restore this right with a maximum of justice to all concerned. Several ways of dealing with this question have been proposed. The Communists have one scheme, the Socialists have one, Napoleon had another, Brigham Young had another. These schemes are mere pieces of machinery. The radical Single-Taxer has looked them all over and decided that the Single-Tax is the best machine for the purpose. Nevertheless in his view it is only a machine. He has no superstitious reverence for it, and if anybody will show him a better one *for that purpose*, he will scrap it instantly. Nor is he interested in claiming anything for his machine beyond the scope of that one purpose. Doctrinaire Single-Taxers, of whom there are many, like to recommend it as a sort of mechanical man-of-all-work in moralizing politics and regenerating society. I noticed the other day that Isabel Paterson referred to the Single-Tax impatiently as a "panacea," and considering the way the Single-Tax has been too often represented, perhaps she is hardly to be blamed for that; but the radical mind entertains no such claim. It goes off on no tangent towards possible collateral effects, and is not looking for any miracles. Enough is enough. The radical's interest is fixed on the one purpose set forth in the first words of this paragraph, and he is as





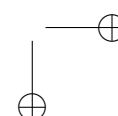
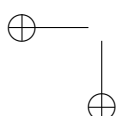
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objective about subscribing to the Single-Tax as he is about buying a furnace to heat his house. He looks over all the types of equipment on the market, and takes the one he thinks best for that one purpose. If it turns out that the furnace will also bake his bread, wash his dishes, make his bed, and say his prayers for him, that is something else again, and he is not counting on it; all that interests him is that it should warm his house as efficiently and cheaply as possible.

II

That is the way the radical temper applies itself in every situation throughout the whole course of human events, public and private. It never stops on the surface of things, but digs down to their reality, examines their principles and intentions, and keeps close track of the relation of cause and effect between what they are supposed to do and what they actually do. That is the way it approaches the myriad of current schemes for a planned economy, price-fixing and wage-fixing, “social legislation,” and such-like. It regards all these simply as so many pieces of machinery, sizes up the people who designed them and put them on the market, considers the claims made for them, and forms judgment accordingly. It does this, moreover, all on its own, irrespective of the way the herd and its bell-wethers are moving, for it knows that 50,000,000 people are quite as likely to be wrong now as they were in Galileo’s time – and usually are wrong.

The old-line radical was no joiner, no organizer, no propagandist; he had no interest whatever in putting any-





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thing over. All that meant compromise, and compromise is the last thing he would do, under any circumstances. I have lately wondered what the radical Communists, if there are any, think of Mr. Browder's new policy of teaming up with the Rooseveltians and "boring-from-within." The old-fashioned radical would say such tactics were probably all right for those who liked them, but for his part he would see all his fellow Communists frizzling in Tophet before he would subscribe to anything of the kind. Boring-from-within was something that Thoreau, for instance, would not understand at all. Radicals were pretty self-respecting individuals; they did not submit their right of private judgment to any man or any body of men. Party loyalty and party discipline meant no more to them than it did to Mr. Jefferson when he said that if he could not go to Heaven except with a party, he would not go there at all:

I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever, in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. . . . I am neither federalist nor anti-federalist; I am of neither party nor yet a trimmer between parties. . . . I never had an opinion in politics or religion which I was afraid to own. A costive reserve on these subjects might have procured me more esteem from some people, but less from myself.

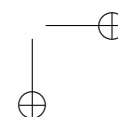
Think of simon-pure radical stuff like that being put on paper by a President of the United States who served two terms and could have had another for the asking! It seems almost ludicrous, considering what the Presidency has come to. But that President was Thomas Jefferson – enough said!





WANTED: HONEST RADICALS

Our civilization is very pawky. As Sam Weller said of the waters of Bath, it has "a very strong flavour of warm flatirons." Any civilization ruled by fear is bound to taste like that, I suppose, and ours is ruled by a composite of a great number of fears. I have thought that a few real radicals dotted around in it here and there might season up its flat and uninteresting monotony a little. It produces enough discontent, and breeds plenty of dissenting "causes," isms, and perunas of one kind or another, and plenty of people to promote them, God knows; but these only stir up its vapidity without freshening it, like the electric-fans in the evil-smelling air of a subway-car. Perhaps radicals can no longer be produced; it may be more than a coincidence that when our civilization became uninteresting the breed apparently died out. Certainly our institutions cannot produce them; they can produce likely candidates for Methodism, Fascism, Islamism, or any other sect or persuasion, but they have no machinery whatever for producing radicals. Probably not even the greatest radical spirits, the Jeffersons, Emersons, Thoreaus, could now survive the slow desiccation set up by our spiritual atmosphere. I doubt that they could. I daresay therefore that my space in the magazine this month is worse wasted than usual, and I should be more than ever grateful for having a tolerant editor. But I have seen the genuine old-style American radical with my own eyes, as I have seen the great flight of wild pigeons, now also extinct; and as I now look at the Browders, Kuhns, and Roosevelts of these days, I cannot help remembering what an inspiring sight he was.







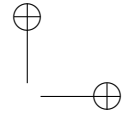
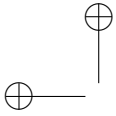
WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

January, 1939

I wonder if my readers are as completely fed up with the word “democracy” as I am. A century ago, when “liberty, equality, fraternity” were the big words in France, Prince de Metternich said he got so sick of hearing about “fraternity” while he was in Paris that if he had a brother he would call him cousin. I believe if I had a “democrat” in my family today, I would call him things far worse – things which can’t be printed, so disgusted I am with the term.

For the first time in three weeks I picked up a New York newspaper yesterday and there I read that, in a speech the day before, Hitler called himself “the arch-democrat.” An editorial on the Monroe Doctrine, in the same paper, spoke about “our interest in joining with the other democracies to preserve the Western hemisphere from any threat of attack.” These are mere casual samples of the wretched literary sculch which confronts one at every tack and turn. There must be as many





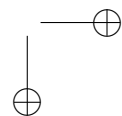
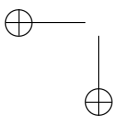
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different kinds of democracy in this country as there are of Baptists, or even more. The communists say they are democrats, but on the other side of the fence the fascists put in the same claim. So do the New Dealers, but so also do the Princes of Privilege and the Economic Royalists. Press-agencies must keep half a hundred assorted ecomiums on democracy in standing type, like Western Union's canned messages for Mother's Day. Paraphrasing what Mark Twain said of a certain German word, every time one of our first-string publicists opens his mouth, a "democracy" falls out; and every time he shuts it, he bites one in two that was trying to get out.

I presume there is nothing to be done about it but to pass up our newspapers and periodicals unread, which I think most sensible people probably do. But for once my readers and I may as well have what fun we can get out of such a forlorn subject, so suppose we examine the word *democracy*, and see just where and how it fits in, or doesn't fit in.

The Century Dictionary says that democracy is "a system of government in which the sovereign power of the State is vested in the people as a whole, and is exercised directly by them or their elected agents." Good enough, I think; that seems to cover it satisfactorily. Then the United States is a democracy; so is England, so is France. Certainly. Therefore our publicists are right by definition when they put out their dreadful blether about "the three great democracies." Of course they are.

But why, by definition, is not Germany a democracy? Why not Russia? Our publicists seem to think not, but how do they make it out? Is not the sovereign power vested in the people of those countries, as in ours?





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Do they not hold popular elections and vote, as our people do? Are not Stalin and Co. and Hitler and Co. as competently qualified agents of the Russian and German peoples as Roosevelt and Co. are of the American people? Just where did Hitler slip up the other day when he called himself “the arch-democrat”? Perhaps he was a little immodest, but job-holders can’t afford to be shrinking violets exactly; and did not Roosevelt strike much the same pose when he gave it out that he was for “democracy and still more democracy”? Are not the popular majorities for Stalin and Hitler as impressive as Roosevelt’s? It seems to me that I recall something of the kind in the press-reports of the last German and Russian elections.

But those elections were phony; all the people voted under duress. Can we be quite sure of that? I cannot. I think some of them, perhaps a good many, voted the affirmative ticket because they preferred it. Not all the voters were dragooned, at any rate, for some voted the other way, and were so recorded; so there seems to have been at least a shadow of an option available in the matter. But never mind; let it pass that the Russian and German elections were shotgun elections, and were therefore no proper test of democracy.

Very well, then, how about ours? For purposes of fair comparison let us take the last Presidential election. Is it not perfectly competent for any Nazi apologist to say that Roosevelt won that election by straight over-the-counter purchase with public money, and that it was therefore no fair index of democracy in America? Nor if he were honest would he make the utterly extravagant claim that *all* the votes for Roosevelt were either purchased





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or purchasable; on the contrary, he would say that no doubt a great many of them were cast in all good faith. If a Hitlerian “democratic” press-agent said these things, it is mighty hard to see how anybody could refute him.

Stupid as I may be, I cannot get it through my head that job-holding by economic pressure is any more democratic than job-holding by shotgun-pressure. “It may be,” as Dr. Pangloss said, “but if so, it has escaped me.” The difference seems to me purely one of method. Therefore, taking elections and electoral procedure as a test – and I know of no other that is applicable – if the United States is a democracy, Germany and Russia are democracies. If Roosevelt is an arch-democrat (and I hardly see how he could cavil at the title) so certainly is Hitler.

Let us move on to the next point, and consider “the need for preserving democracy in the Western hemisphere.” Whereabouts, I may ask. In Venezuela? In Mexico? Is it Brother Vargas’ special brand of democracy that needs preserving, or Brother Ortiz’? If not these, whose then, for there seems to be a pretty liberal choice? Also, preservation from what? Naturally, from being undermined by the surreptitious infiltration of “undemocratic ideologies” imported mostly from Germany and Italy into certain parts of the lower Americas, and from Russia into other parts. But if you are going to stick to the dictionary’s definition of the word, then tell us in what respect these ideologies are “undemocratic” as compared with ours. If, on the other hand, each man furnishes his own definition of democracy, making the word mean whatsoever it suits him to have it mean, the consequence is that it has no meaning that is either





WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

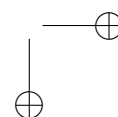
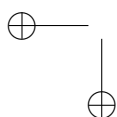
communicable or intelligible, and is something merely pitchforked in because it sounds good.

II

Talk about your “banner with a strange device”! It is hard to find a newspaper or magazine or even a professedly serious book, nowadays, that does not run off into caterwaulings about democracy; viewing with alarm because, in one or another part of the world, democracy is either demolished or is perishing and must be saved; or pointing with pride because here or there it has got a new lease of life and is bound to be triumphant. Kings bow low before the word, and every politician in the world posts the record that he has fit, bled, and died for democracy on every conceivable occasion in the past, and will keep on doing so as long as he can hold his job.

All this is very tiresome; very tiresome indeed. I notice today that ninety-four persons of more or less prominence have memorialized the President to raise the embargo against the Spanish government for the sake of democracy. Their memorial includes all the usual catchphrases; as usual, it lines up the “totalitarian States” against the “democratic peoples and ideals.” As usual, it is against measures “which confer increased power and prestige upon the opponents of democracy.” As usual, it gets up a prodigious great sweat about the sorry reaction of “a victory of fascism in Spain.”

The memorialists may be right in their contentions, or they may be wrong. What interested me was to look over their names and find to my certain knowledge six





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distinct and different brands of “democracy” represented among them; every known brand, I think, except one. It would be invidious to mention names, nor is it necessary; but I could not restrain my sinful wonderment at what democracy in Spain would be like if my revered friend Mr. A.’s special brand of that commodity should prevail there! If the brand of my impetuous young acquaintance Mr. B. should prevail in this country, how long would it be before his ninety-three co-signers would be liquidated? What would democracy be like in China and Czechoslovakia if Messrs. C. and D. ran their respective democratic brands and earmarks on those unhappy countries? Such speculations are rather grim, perhaps, but they amused me, and their total effect was to put the effort of the ninety-four signers under a very heavy discount in my mind; I should say probably about eighty-five or ninety per cent.

As a matter of fact, whenever you meet the term democracy, you are safe in assuming that it was put to you in either ignorance or fraud. As used by the ninety-four, for instance, or by the newspaper I cited, it means simply nothing. I cannot recall a single instance in current usage where the term meant anything. In the early days of the Republic, as everyone knows, democracy was a term of abuse, like Jacobinism, Bolshevism, Radicalism, in years following. *Democrat* was a fighting word in Washington’s time. Subsequently, when the franchise was extended and the erstwhile “filthy democrats” began to get votes, politicians began to make up to them, and the term began to be respectable; and now that everybody has a vote, it has become a mere conjuring-





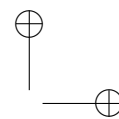
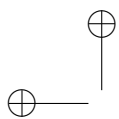
WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

term, empty of meaning, and in my poor opinion, an uncommonly disgusting one.

Neither ignorance nor humbug is particularly interesting. If our editors and publicists would give up the specious plea of democracy, I could go a long way with them. As it is, whenever they let the word drop out, especially when they are making comparisons between some other political regime and ours, I instinctively ask “How come?” and proceed to put the questions stated in the first part of this paper. Often, too – in fact, pretty regularly – I am moved to look around for symptoms of some deeper interest which the term may be covering – an interest in trade, in oil, in silver, or something of the kind – and I am bound to say I usually turn up a good strong scent of something much more substantial than the “democratic ideology.” In about nine such cases out of ten, on close inspection, “democracy” smells to me pretty much as “patriotism” did to Dr. Johnson.

If the ninety-four memorialists had come out plump and plain, and said to the President, “We don’t like the German regime, and are afraid of it; it affronts our sense of decency, honor, integrity, and fair play; we think its methods of government are inhuman and monstrous, and they are so repugnant to us that we don’t think you ought to run any chance, however remote, of bringing us into any closer relations with such people” – if they had put their case in terms like these, it would have been a sound one, and I for one would have signed that much of their memorial *ex animo*. If they had added that they thought the German influence in Spain may be the means of ultimately doing us out of a lot of South American trade, I should still respect their view, although I do not

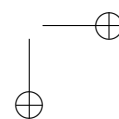
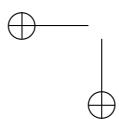




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share it. One can have a great deal of sympathy with the general sentiment that our editors and publicists and the ninety-four memorialists express, insofar as they are honest about it and are content to stay on the solid ground of fact and common sense.

But when they set up the poor old tattered scarecrow of "democracy," and try to make us believe not only that it is a real live figure but also that it is peculiarly and preciously our own, they are, as I said, promoting either a piece of profound and lamentable ignorance, or of gross and egregious fraud.





COLLEGE IS NO PLACE
TO GET AN EDUCATION

February, 1939

The word has gone out lately that in one of our great educational institutions the students are dissatisfied with their instructors. In principle there is nothing new about this, for it is an immemorial privilege of students everywhere to carry on a sort of Fabian warfare against the authorities. In this particular instance, however, there are some unusual circumstances which make it interesting. The students are not in a mood of juvenile rebellion; quite the contrary, their mood is one of simple criticism rather than complaint, and quite respectably mature criticism, at that. Nor, as I understand it, are they dissatisfied with the formal instruction they get, or with their official treatment in the lecture-room. They say only that while their instructors may be very well up on their subjects and may be capable of teaching those subjects effectively enough in the way of technical rou-





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tine, they are not men of all-round high culture or even of first-rate intelligence, and that when the institution is picking its instructors it ought to do better.

It seems that some time ago this institution, like most of our colleges and universities, became infected with the Elk-Rotarian notion that students should have closer social contact with the master-minds on the faculty, and it made arrangements accordingly. We all remember how this idea swept the country, and the preposterous length to which it was carried. It reached its perfect expression in an instructor who was utterly devoid of natural dignity and capable of any amount of meretricious hobnobbing with his students, both in hours and out of hours; capable, in short, of thoroughly vulgarizing his status. It reached no such length in the institution I refer to. The students there were made to understand, however, that informal association with the great minds on the faculty was an important factor in their education, and that the way to it lay open; so wide open, indeed, that it could hardly be avoided without effort – and now those who accepted this situation are saying in all frankness that the great minds are simply not there, and that association with such minds as are there is pretty much their idea of wasted time.

This raises at once the question, if social contact with first-class men is so important, why do not our institutions scratch up more first-class men to bring into contact with their students? If it be said that they cannot be got, which is clearly true, this only leads to the further question why this should be so. There is no doubt about the fact. Shaw's bitter jest, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach," has only this much of truth in it, that





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while the profession has now more capable routineers than ever before, more trained reporters, more facile expositors, its great men are few indeed. It has plenty of economists as literate as Sumner, for instance, but no one I know of who could come anywhere near filling Sumner's bill as an all-round source of inspiration to young men. It has as good grammarians as Gildersleeve, Warren, Lane, Humphreys, but their total effect upon the juvenile intellect, imagination, and character is not at all the same. It has plenty of men as well up on English literature as Beers, Child, Gummere, but when one has said that, there is nothing more to say. For some reason, men of that quality seem no longer to be attracted into the profession of teaching; and yet, if "social contact with one's instructors" is so valuable, it is such men and no others who give it all the value it has. The attitude of the students at the institution I speak of seems to prove this conclusively. What then has happened which makes it difficult for our institutions any longer to get the type of instructor which admittedly is most desirable for the purpose contemplated?

I think that unofficially they would be glad to get them, but what they can do about it officially is another matter. In the old days before education was organized on trade-unionist lines, Harvard gave professorships to Holmes, Longfellow, Lowell, Norton, and Henry Adams at a time when they were not much more than promising young men. I doubt that Harvard feels able to take a chance like that now. They were all fairly good in their lines, no better than many of our modern specialists – not nearly so good, in fact – but they were wonderful men to have around. As a demonstrator of anatomy,





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Oliver Wendell Holmes did well enough, nothing to brag about; but he was a highly civilized man, and any kind of “contact” with Holmes, whether social or official, was most infectious. Harvard knew that this was so, and therefore kept him on. As I said, I believed that unofficially Harvard would be glad enough to take him on now, or to take on Norton, Longfellow, Lowell, Adams. The trouble is that not one of these men could qualify by present-day trade-union requirements. None of them carried the union-card of a Ph.D., and as for having taken courses in pedagogy, the psychology of adolescence, and all that sort of thing, not one of them would even know what those are. Harvard today might risk getting into trouble with the union by taking on conspicuous scabs like Holmes and Lowell – I don’t know – but I think it is highly improbable.

Our institutions are right enough in their idea that “social contact” has educational value. It is a sort of blind, fumbling recognition of the fact that education is largely a matter of simple contagion. Abraham Flexner once put it very well to me that “if you want to catch measles, you must go where measles is; if you do, you’ll catch it – no need to do anything more about that, you’ll catch it – but if you don’t, you’ll never catch it.” The old and sound type of university was based on this principle; the modern type has departed from it, and is now trying to get the same results by a purely mechanized process, which cannot be done. You can’t assemble a group of first-class, well-trained, highly-specialized instructors, all union members in good standing but not a case of measles in the lot, and get results by exposing your students to them socially or officially or in any way. It is not a





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matter of mechanics. No ingenious grouping of new-style buildings or devising of new-style “systems” will do the trick. There must be measles somewhere around, or the thing will be a failure – worse than a failure, indeed, for all you will get is a meretricious backslapping, hail-fellow kind of familiarity which encourages a student to address his instructor by his first name and call him a good old scout.

This is what the students in the institution I spoke of seem to perceive, and it is all to their credit that they resent it as senseless and objectionable. I greatly doubt that an old-time student at Harvard would have regarded the privilege of slapping Longfellow’s back and calling him Hank as conducive to an education or as likely to stimulate the desire to become a civilized man; and apparently these students hold similar views.

II

One reason, then, why the profession is short of the type of instructor which is most desirable from the serious student’s point of view is that our institutions must perforce think twice about employing non-union men; and by that I mean men who are not only scabs in fact, but are thoroughgoing scabs at heart, utterly unwilling ever to submit their ideas, opinions, methods, or liberties to the judgment of a trade-unionist court-martial. Another reason is that such men naturally fight shy of a profession dominated by the trade-unionist spirit. They could not work well or feel at home in a situation where they would be meeting that spirit’s exactions, pretensions, jealousies,





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slights, and detractions at every tack and turn. They would have the continual sense of frustration and embarrassment which Henry Ford might feel if he were sitting in on the directorate of the CIO. I know four men, still young, highly accomplished, who are everything a student should want. They were university-instructors for a year or two, most successfully as far as their students were concerned, and then gave it up. For curiosity I asked them how they would feel about going back to it again. One said he would beg first, go on Relief, or even starve. Another said that of course if it were a matter of getting bread for his wife and children, he would go in for white slavery, burglary, or anything; but nothing short of that could possibly get him back into institutional life as it is now organized.

A third reason is that our present system throws the burden of education on the instructor, whereas formerly it was on the student. Fully 90 per cent of our whole student-population, above the primary grades, are ineducable; they are mostly capable of some kind of *training*, capable of being made ready for some more or less useful pursuit, but they are wholly incapable of *education* in any proper sense of the word. Nevertheless, there they are, cluttering up our institutions in prodigious numbers; and an instructor, instead of shoveling them out to seek a proper training for some pursuit that is within their competence, is obliged to go through the motions of doing something for them which cannot be done; that is, to educate them. He is supposed to “interest his students,” and it is held against him if he does not “present his subject in an interesting way”; which in practice means that he does the student’s work for him. Formerly it was





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distinctly up to the student to furnish whatever interest was needed, and if he did not furnish enough to keep himself going, he heard about it from the authorities.

Another discouragement which tends to keep first-class men out of teaching is that education is no longer officially regarded as an end in itself. Vocationalism has run to such riotous excess throughout our system that our institutions beyond the eighth grade are virtually training-schools, with education, if any, strictly on the side. Americans and Englishmen have the naive idea that by changing the name of a thing you can change its character. Training will become education if only you keep on calling it education long enough and earnestly enough. Call a training-school a college or university, and it will become one. Train a youth in journalism, poultry-raising, plumbing, commercial art, electrical engineering, the practice of law or dentistry, give him an academic degree, insist that he is an educated man, and he will be an educated man. These debaucheries of vocationalism have been so effective that if a man shows signs of an education, properly so called, Americans instinctively assume, first, that he got it in Europe, and, second, that he is in some way making money out of it.

Our university students have the bleakest prospect of all, so far as education is concerned, because vocationalism has caused our universities to degenerate into *teaching*-institutions, which they should not be – institutions with stated courses leading to advanced degrees employable for vocational purposes. Thus their faculties are not primarily an assemblage of scholars who have no responsibility whatever for students, but an array of pedagogues whose first business is to put students





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through a series of stated jumps. I know of but one institution in the country, a new one and fortunately a rich one, which seems to be organized pretty much on the plan of the medieval university. It does no teaching, confers no degrees, and undertakes no responsibility for students. If a young man wishes to go there and hang around for the sake of picking up what he can, they are probably willing he should; they do not encourage him particularly, nor yet do they discourage him. On such terms precisely did young men go into a huddle around Peter Abélard, and stand Bernard of Clairvaux up on the carpet while they proceeded to pitch eager questions into him on one or another point of scholastic philosophy.

Mark Hopkins sitting on one end of a log and a student on the other is still the only sound formula for education; but you have to have a genuine Hopkins and a genuine student. If you have these, it does not much matter what kind of log they sit on. In other words, the organization and mechanical apparatus of education, which we have made so impressive, actually count for very little. As John Erskine has so well said, we found that we could not organize Hopkins or organize the student, so for fifty years we have spent all our energy on organizing the log, with most unsatisfactory results. One inquiry and investigation after another has considered our system, and reported unfavorably. New York State spent half a million dollars on a three years' study of its system by a commission including thirty men of national reputation and seven college presidents; and the report made public on the day I write this shows that while New York's system is as good as any in the country, or even better, it is for all essential purposes virtually a total failure.





COLLEGE IS NO PLACE TO GET AN EDUCATION

It is a failure for the same reason that the American educational system is everywhere a failure; it fails because it is condemned to the fantastically impossible task of making silk purses out of sows' ears. The commission did not report this fact, probably because it is fundamental, insuperable, and unpleasant. All similar investigations have blinked it, no doubt for the same reason; but the naive policy of the ostrich will not alter facts, and this is the primary fact of the situation.

Our system will never work one whit better than it is working now until we fairly and squarely face the fact that *90 per cent of our children are ineducable*, and that the time, energy, and resources spent on trying to educate them are viciously wasted. Not until this fact is faced will we be able to draw a clear, permanent line between education and training. Then, and not until then, will our training-schools become avowedly what they are, not pretending to do anything whatever with education beyond the old-fashioned three Rs. They will give up the absurd affectation of an academic character, and desist from the atrocious blasphemy of conferring academic degrees. Then, too, and not until then, will our colleges and universities become true and proper educational institutions instead of the preposterous hotch-potch which vocationalism and trade-unionism have made of them; and eligible students will seek them out as such. Students will not frequent them for fun, fashion, or football, or be sent there to get them out from underfoot at home, to put off the evil day when they must go to work, to make profitable social contacts, or to be somehow helped to a job; they will go there for the one purpose of educating themselves, and the pukka student may pretty





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well assure himself of finding a pukka Hopkins on the other end of the log when he arrives. Facing the fact of an immense ineducable majority is unpleasant and depressing, but there the fact is, and merely blinking it does not get it out of the way, or lessen its force; nor, which is most important, does it decrease the penalty imposed by Nature upon the refusal to recognize any vital fact and to shape our procedure in accordance with it. Facing this fact makes havoc of our accepted ideas of democracy and of equality; it plumps us squarely against the further fact that those ideas are false and fantastic and should be revised – must be revised, indeed, if we are ever to get on.

So there the matter stands. If the American people prefer to keep to the ideas of democracy and equality which are the foundation of our educational system, one can only point out that so long as they do so, one generation after another will be sacrificed. If, on the other hand, they choose to sacrifice those ideas and replace them by sound ones upon which they can base a sound educational system, they will be doing the best thing possible for the future of their country, no matter how disagreeable and embarrassing the act of sacrifice may be.





THE CRIMINALITY OF THE STATE

March, 1939

As well as I can judge, the general attitude of Americans who are at all interested in foreign affairs is one of astonishment, coupled with distaste, displeasure, or horror, according to the individual observer's capacity for emotional excitement. Perhaps I ought to shade this statement a little in order to keep on the safe side, and say that this is the most generally-expressed attitude.

All our institutional voices – the press, pulpit, forum – are pitched to the note of amazed indignation at one or another phase of the current goings-on in Europe and Asia. This leads me to believe that our people generally are viewing with wonder as well as repugnance certain conspicuous actions of various foreign States; for instance, the barbarous behavior of the German State towards some of its own citizens; the merciless despotism of the Soviet Russian State; the ruthless imperialism of the Italian State; the murders and executions of the Spanish Red State; the bombings of civilians by the Spanish





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Fascist State; the “betrayal of Czecho-Slovakia” by the British and French States; the savagery of the Japanese State; the brutishness of the Chinese State’s mercenaries; and so on, here or there, all over the globe – this sort of thing is showing itself to be against our people’s grain, and they are speaking out about it in wrathful surprise.

I am cordially with them on every point but one. I am with them in repugnance, horror, indignation, disgust, but not in astonishment. The history of the State being what it is, and its testimony being as invariable and eloquent as it is, I am obliged to say that the naïve tone of surprise wherewith our people complain of these matters strikes me as a pretty sad reflection on their intelligence. Suppose someone were impolite enough to ask them the gruff question, “Well, what do you expect?” – what rational answer could they give? I know of none.

Polite or impolite, that is just the question which ought to be put every time a story of State villainy appears in the news. It ought to be thrown at our public day after day, from every newspaper, periodical, lecture-platform, and radio-station in the land; and it ought to be backed up by a simple appeal to history, a simple invitation to look at the record. The British State has sold the Czech State down the river by a despicable trick; very well, be as disgusted and angry as you like, but don’t be astonished; what would you expect? – just take a look at the British State’s record! The German State is persecuting great masses of its people, the Russian State is holding a purge, the Italian State is grabbing territory, the Japanese State is buccaneering all along the Asiatic Coast; horrible, yes, but for Heaven’s sake





THE CRIMINALITY OF THE STATE

don't lose your head over it, for what would you expect?
– look at the record!

That is how every public presentation of these facts ought to run if Americans are ever going to grow up into an adult attitude towards them. Also, in order to keep down the great American sin of self-righteousness, every public presentation ought to draw the deadly parallel with the record of the American State. The German State is persecuting a minority, just as the American State did after 1776; the Italian State breaks into Ethiopia, just as the American State broke into Mexico; the Japanese State kills off the Manchurian tribes in wholesale lots, just as the American State did the Indian tribes; the British State practices large-scale carpet-baggery, like the American State after 1864; the imperialist French State massacres native civilians on their own soil, as the American State did in pursuit of its imperialistic policies in the Pacific; and so on.

In this way, perhaps, our people might get into their heads some glimmering of the fact that the State's criminality is nothing new and nothing to be wondered at. It began when the first predatory group of men clustered together and formed the State, and it will continue as long as the State exists in the world, because the State is fundamentally an anti-social institution, fundamentally criminal. The idea that the State originated to serve any kind of social purpose is completely unhistorical. It originated in conquest and confiscation – that is to say, in crime. It originated for the purpose of maintaining the division of society into an owning-and-exploiting class and a propertyless dependent class – that is, for a criminal purpose.





THE STATE OF THE UNION

No State known to history originated in any other manner, or for any other purpose. Like all predatory or parasitic institutions, its first instinct is that of self-preservation. All its enterprises are directed first towards preserving its own life, and, second, towards increasing its own power and enlarging the scope of its own activity. For the sake of this it will, and regularly does, commit any crime which circumstances make expedient. In the last analysis, what is the German, Italian, French, or British State now actually doing? It is ruining its own people in order to preserve itself, to enhance its own power and prestige, and extend its own authority; and the American State is doing the same thing to the utmost of its opportunities.

What, then, is a little matter like a treaty to the French or British State? Merely a scrap of paper – Bethmann-Hollweg described it exactly. Why be astonished when the German or Russian State murders its citizens? The American State would do the same thing under the same circumstances. In fact, eighty years ago it did murder a great many of them for no other crime in the world but that they did not wish to live under its rule any longer; and if that is a crime, then the colonists led by G. Washington were hardened criminals and the Fourth of July is nothing but a cutthroat's holiday.

The weaker the State is, the less power it has to commit crime. Where in Europe today does the State have the best criminal record? Where it is weakest: in Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Luxemburg, Sweden, Monaco, Andorra. Yet when the Dutch State, for instance, was strong, its criminality was appalling; in Java it massacred 9000 persons in one morning, which is



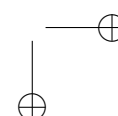
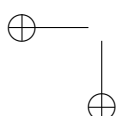


THE CRIMINALITY OF THE STATE

considerably ahead of Hitler's record or Stalin's. It would not do the like today, for it could not; the Dutch people do not give it that much power, and would not stand for such conduct. When the Swedish State was a great empire, its record, say from 1660 to 1670, was fearful. What does all this mean but that if you do not want the State to act like a criminal, you must disarm it as you would a criminal; you must keep it weak. The State will always be criminal in proportion to its strength; a weak State will always be as criminal as it can be, or dare be, but if it is kept down to the proper limit of weakness – which, by the way, is a vast deal lower limit than people are led to believe – its criminality may be safely got on with.

So it strikes me that instead of sweating blood over the iniquity of foreign States, my fellow-citizens would do a great deal better by themselves to make sure that the American State is not strong enough to carry out the like iniquities here. The stronger the American State is allowed to grow, the higher its record of criminality will grow, according to its opportunities and temptations. If, then, instead of devoting energy, time, and money to warding off wholly imaginary and fanciful dangers from criminals thousands of miles away, our people turn their patriotic fervor loose on the only source from which danger can proceed, they will be doing their full duty by their country.

Two able and sensible American publicists – Isabel Paterson, of the New York *Herald Tribune*, and W. J. Cameron, of the Ford Motor Company – have lately called our public's attention to the great truth that if you give the State power to do something *for* you, you





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give it an exact equivalent of power to do something *to* you. I wish every editor, publicist, teacher, preacher, and lecturer would keep hammering that truth into American heads until they get it nailed fast there, never to come loose. The State was organized in this country with power to do all kinds of things *for* the people, and the people in their short-sighted stupidity, have been adding to that power ever since. After 1789, John Adams said that, so far from being a democracy or a democratic republic, the political organization of the country was that of “a monarchical republic, or, if you will, a limited monarchy”; the powers of its President were far greater than those of “an avoyer, a consul, a podesta, a doge, a stadtholder; nay, than a king of Poland; nay, than a king of Sparta.” If all that was true in 1789 – and it was true – what is to be said of the American State at the present time, after a century and a half of steady centralization and continuous increments of power?

Power, for instance, to “help business” by auctioning off concessions, subsidies, tariffs, land-grants, franchises; power to help business by ever-encroaching regulations, supervisions, various forms of control. All this power was freely given; it all carried with it the equivalent power to do things *to* business; and see what a banditti of sharking political careerists are doing to business now! Power to afford “relief” to proletarians; and see what the State has done to those proletarians now in the way of systematic debauchery of whatever self-respect and self-reliance they may have had! Power this way, power that way; and all ultimately used *against* the interests of the people who surrendered that power on the pretext that it was to be used *for* those interests.





THE CRIMINALITY OF THE STATE

Many now believe that with the rise of the “totalitarian” State the world has entered upon a new era of barbarism. It has not. The totalitarian State is only the State; the kind of thing it does is only what the State has always done with unfailing regularity, if it had the power to do it, wherever and whenever its own aggrandizement made that kind of thing expedient. Give any State like power hereafter, and put it in like circumstances, and it will do precisely the same kind of thing. The State will unfailingly aggrandize itself, if only it has the power, first at the expense of its own citizens, and then at the expense of anyone else in sight. It has always done so, and always will.

II

The idea that the State is a social institution, and that with a fine upright man like Mr. Chamberlain at the head of it, or a charming person like Mr. Roosevelt, there can be no question about its being honorably and nobly managed – all this is just so much sticky fly-paper. Men in that position usually make a good deal of their honor, and some of them indeed may have some (though if they had any I cannot understand their letting themselves be put in that position) but the machine they are running will run on rails which are laid only one way, which is from crime to crime. In the old days, the partition of Czecho-Slovakia or the taking-over of Austria would have been arranged by rigamarole among a few highly polished gentlemen in stiff shirts ornamented with fine ribbons. Hitler simply arranged it the way old Frederick arranged





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his share in the first partition of Poland; he arranged the annexation of Austria the way Louis XIV arranged that of Alsace. There is more or less of a fashion, perhaps, in the way these things are done, but the point is that they always come out exactly the same in the end.

Furthermore, the idea that the procedure of the “democratic” State is any less criminal than that of the State under any other fancy name, is rubbish. The country is now being surfeited with journalistic garbage about our great sister-democracy, England, its fine democratic government, its vast beneficent gift for ruling subject peoples, and so on; but does anyone ever look up the criminal record of the British State? The bombardment of Copenhagen; the Boer war; the Sepoy Rebellion; the starvation of Germans by the post-Armistice blockade; the massacre of natives in India, Afghanistan, Jamaica; the employment of Hessians to kill off American colonists. What is the difference, moral or actual, between Kitchener’s democratic concentration-camps and the totalitarian concentration-camps maintained by Herr Hitler? The totalitarian general Badoglio is a pretty hard-boiled brother, if you like, but how about the democratic general O’Dwyer and Governor Eyre? Any of the three stands up pretty well beside our own democratic virtuoso, Hell roaring Jake Smith, in his treatment of the Filipinos; and you can’t say fairer than that.

As for the British State’s talent for a kindly and generous colonial administration, I shall not rake up old scores by citing the bill of particulars set forth in the Declaration of Independence; I shall consider India only, not even going into matters like the Kaffir war or the Wairau incident in New Zealand. Our democratic British cousins





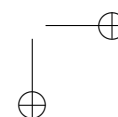
THE CRIMINALITY OF THE STATE

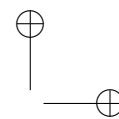
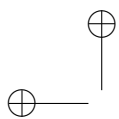
in India in the Eighteenth Century must have learned their trade from Pizarro and Cortez. Edmund Burke called them “birds of prey and passage.” Even the directors of the East India Company admitted that “the vast fortunes acquired in the inland trade have been obtained by a scene of the most tyrannical and oppressive conduct that was ever known in any age or country.” Describing a journey, Warren Hastings wrote that “most of the petty towns and *serais* were deserted at our approach”; the people ran off into the woods at the mere sight of a white man. There was the iniquitous salt-monopoly; there was extortion everywhere, practiced by enterprising rascals in league with a corrupt police; there was taxation which confiscated almost half the products of the soil.

If it be said that Britain was not a sister-democracy in those days, and has since reformed, one might well ask how much of the reformation is due to circumstances, and how much to a change of heart. Besides, the Black-and-Tans were in our day; so was the post-Armistice blockade; General O’Dwyer’s massacre was not more than a dozen years ago; and there are plenty alive who remember Kitchener’s concentration-camps.

No, “democratic” State practice is nothing more or less than State practice. It does not differ from Marxist State practice, Fascist State practice, or any other.

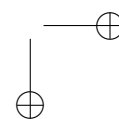
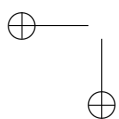
Here is the Golden Rule of sound citizenship, the first and greatest lesson in the study of politics: *you get the same order of criminality from any State to which you give power to exercise it; and whatever power you give the State to do things for you carries with it the equivalent power to do things to you.* A citizenry which has learned that one short lesson has but little more left to learn.





THE STATE OF THE UNION

Stripping the American State of the enormous power it has acquired is a full-time job for our citizens and a stirring one; and if they attend to it properly they will have no energy to spare for fighting communism, or for hating Hitler, or for worrying about South America or Spain, or for anything whatever, except what goes on right here in the United States.





CULTURE MIGRATES TO THE USA

April, 1939

The world is full of events which we believe are making history and are therefore important. Franco is making history in Spain, Roosevelt in America, Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Chamberlain in England, Stalin in Russia. Wars threaten, political tangles tighten, armies are shifted about, "men of the hour" pop up here and there, the currents of trade are turned into new channels, exchange moves from one center to another; and all this is important because it makes history.

But does it? I am not so clear about the answer to that question as others seem to be, but I am open to conviction. I know what the immediate effect of these events is. I know, for instance, how Mr. Roosevelt's history-making affects me and the people around me, and I have a fair notion of how the other contemporary efforts at history-making will affect the world for the next few years, say fifty or so at the most. But fifty years is a short time in the life of the race. There is certainly nothing





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new about the kind of events we are witnessing; they are only what has always gone on and apparently always will. They seem doomed to impermanence, and if history be defined as a record of actual human achievement rather than as a mere chronology of events, I hardly see how history can afford to make much of them.

We know, at any rate, that when history has tried to make much of such events hitherto, it has succeeded only in making itself as dull and uninforming as a newspaper. Thoreau said that only once or twice in all his life did he get any news out of a newspaper. One fire, one murder, one burglary is in principle just like another, and when you have once established a principle, what news is there in a simple repetition of examples? Suppose lightning strikes a shelter and kills a hundred persons; all you learn from a report of the calamity is that electricity follows the path of least resistance, and you already knew that – everybody knows it. Similarly the course of political rivalries, ambitions, enterprises, collisions of interest, all that we classify under the name of “public affairs,” follows a set pattern – one might put it that political rascality, like electricity, always follows the line of least resistance – and is therefore easily predicable in any given circumstances. The upshot of it is invariably the same and is arrived at by the same methods. What, then, can history make of it beyond a mere catalog?

It is interesting to observe that, as a matter of fact, the human spirit, the self-preserving instinct in humanity, has established this very ground of discrimination between the persons and movements that have actually made history, and those which have seemed to be making it. We look at the catalog – some of us have had





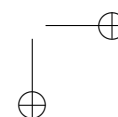
CULTURE MIGRATES TO THE USA

it rammed down our throats in school – and see that it is no true record of progressive human achievement, we see that there is nothing in it worth informing us about, and so we lose interest and forget it. We do not forget other men and movements of the same period, because they are vital *to us*. No more does the human race forget them, because they are vital to the race, permanently so. They bear directly upon the best reason and spirit of man, while the others do not.

Try it by the simple test of a half-dozen names. Who made history in France after 1851? Persigny, de Morny, Maupas, de Gramont, Walewski, Ollivier – how many of them have you even heard of? Ernest Renan, Delacroix, Gounod, George Sand, Turgenev, Offenbach – how about those? Lump together all the nobodies who have misgoverned France since 1870, and put them against the two names of Curie and Pasteur – how about that? Is it not at least conceivable that two hundred years from now the name of Hitler will be remembered only as belonging to somebody or other who ran Albert Einstein out of Germany?

II

I speak of all this because there is taking place in this country a movement which is making real history, and which I think is perhaps not fully recognized as so doing. We all know it is going on, but I doubt that we have taken its measure as the most important movement of our time – infinitely more important than the whole sum of intrigues, connivings, threats, lies, and general





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swineries which are the “news” of the period, and which we regard as making up the history of the period. I refer to the great westward migration of European culture, and the effort to transplant it in this hemisphere.

Such a movement is strictly historical; it takes place not once in a decade or a century, but once in an epoch. At long intervals – long as the life of men or nations goes – the center of culture has regularly shifted from region to region, from place to place, in deference to two basic human wants, one spiritual and one economic; the proponents of culture want to exercise their several arts and practices in peace and freedom, and they also want to eat. In time past, as now, economic and political pressure has repeatedly destroyed their centers of activity and squeezed them out to form another center somewhere else. Thus the center of culture moved from Babylonia to Assyria, from Asia to Europe, from the Near East to Greece, from Greece to Rome, and so on. In the last century culture established its headquarters on the Atlantic seaboard; and now, apparently, its next general establishment will be on this side the Atlantic, unless conditions forbid its taking root here.

This migration is probably the most numerous of all that have taken place hitherto, because a larger cultural area in Europe has become disaffected. Hardly anywhere in Europe can the pursuit of culture go on at the present time, and the prospects are that it must remain in abeyance for quite a while. In some European countries, as we all know, culture is officially outlawed; the individualism and intellectual freedom which are the primary essentials of its existence, are proscribed. In other countries the pressure of preoccupation with matters of





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the moment – poverty, fear, exhaustion, discouragement – is so overwhelming as to leave little energy for the pursuit of culture.

Culture's refugees, therefore, come from all Europe – to our universities, our press, our urban centers of creative activity. They come out of all peoples, nations, and languages, bringing their big and little hoards of cultural experience and creative intuitions and artistic energies. In our country they see, or think they see, a refuge where they may be safe from the cruder forms of repression and persecution, and where they may find the chance to maintain themselves. They are aware that the USA is vast, rich in nature's resources, and possesses a certain factitious homogeneity. If they cannot come physically, then the products of their Western culture come to us anyhow, because we have the money to pay for it, a population not only able to read but able to buy reading matter, and margins of wealth for acquiring pictures and statues, opera stars and scientific brains.

Creative European minds are sensing, too, that America has numerous centers of commercial and industrial activity, each of which may be a potential focus of culture as well. In Austria there was but one Vienna – its demise, culturally speaking, is almost a symbol of the decline of the Old World. In France, Paris had few and puny cultural competitors. In pre-war Germany, true, the geographical distribution of culture was extraordinarily wide; there were many centers, all eminent, all contributing to make the most highly-civilized country in Europe – but that seems in a distant past. There is but one Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm, Prague, Buda-Pesth in their respective countries. In the United States, on





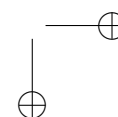
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the other hand, there are perhaps as many as twenty cities, all American, and each one possibly susceptible of development into a cultural capital with an extremely long effective range of influence.

For these many reasons, great numbers of Europe's practitioners of culture – one might say virtually all of them who can see their way to get here – are either here now or are on their way. Hence my belief is that the philosophical historian – I am careful not to say the professional historian, but the historian of civilization, the forthcoming Guizot or Henry Adams who really knows what makes a nation great and its life memorable – will find this wholesale migration of culture the most important thing that has happened in our time. Contentedly letting the dust deepen on the memory of a dozen Roosevelt, Stalins, Hitlers, and all their misfeasances, he will carefully examine this most impressive redistribution of culture, and will pronounce his judgment on what came of it.

III

What will come of it is, of course, quite beyond prediction. The long and short of the situation seems to be that we are fast falling heir to a couple of thousand years of civilization, whether we will or no. The legacy is being dumped in our lap without so much as a by-your-leave. We have, then, the responsibility of choosing whether we shall welcome it as a windfall or resent it as alien and un-American. The latter has been our traditional attitude, and whether we have modified it appreciably remains to





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be seen. Our whole educational system stiffens us in this attitude. Our literature, our theatre, our social life, our system of manners, all reflect it. Our institutional voices are all united in a perfect harmony of loud assurance that this attitude is the only one proper for us to maintain. Under these conditions it is far from clear how well this implantation of culture can succeed in taking root in our society, and its chance of ultimately making itself prevail over our traditional views of life and demands on life – views and demands which are essentially barbarous and therefore inimical to culture – is quite unpredictable.

In the society of Rome, culture remained always an exotic; it never, as we say, “struck in.” It remained encysted, like a fly in amber, preserved from decomposition, but having no effect upon the society around it; and that society, we may well remember, was perhaps more like our own than any other that ever existed. The character and qualities of the average Roman of the Empire can best be imagined by posing him as a composite, say, of Henry Ford, Herbert Hoover, and Charles Evans Hughes – resourceful, pushing, dogged, matter-of-fact, unscrupulous, unintelligent, legalistic, grasping. Similarly in England the high culture of many individuals, the culture promoted by institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, has not in four hundred years succeeded in pervading and tempering the essentially middle-class prejudices, opinions and ideals of British society; and ours, too, is and has always been, a strictly middle-class society, but with Oxford and Cambridge left out.

It seems, then, that the closest historical parallels we can draw are hardly encouraging for the outlook of culture in America.





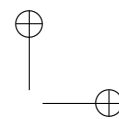
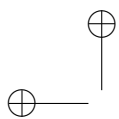
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Still, in another view, by showing us so clearly what must be met and overcome in order to better that outlook, these parallels may serve as red lights to keep us safe in the road which leads to the transformation contemplated by culture, which is nothing less than a transformation of the whole man. The trouble is that the transformation is so difficult, the road to it is so steep and arduous, while simply remaining as we are is so very easy. Culture is knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world. Its purpose is to transform the raw and crude individual by setting up in him an overmastering *feeling* for the best; and this not only in the realm of intellect and beauty, but in the realm of morals and conduct as well. In short, the aim of culture is to transform the individual by inculcating a controlling sense of all spiritual values, a sense of what is right, just, fair, honorable, as well as of what is beautiful, dignified, graceful, and becoming.

Thus culture is opposed to all that has its root in the spirit which is dominant at the present time. In Renan's great phrase, culture has but one enemy, which is *le matérialisme vulgaire, la bassesse de l'homme intéressé*. What else but this is the spirit which appears in public life as fascism, New-Dealism, Nazism, communism, "democracy" – movements which merely liberate and glorify *la bassesse de l'homme intéressé*, and bid it run rampant? The practical question for us now is whether it is worthwhile to apply the solvent of culture to this spirit's works and ways.

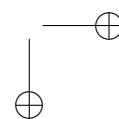
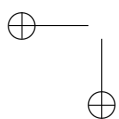
The center of culture has moved westward once more, and is landing on uncommonly arid soil; so much is certain. Certain it is also that enabling it to establish itself to any good purpose here will be grueling hard labor;

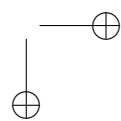
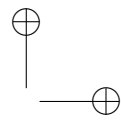




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and our immediate responsibility is that of looking over the prospects carefully and deciding whether the results will ever pay out the investment of work and time and patience. Do we really want to be any different sort of beings from the sort we are? – that is the sum of it. If we do, here is the greatest chance that has ever come to any people.







LIBERALISM HAS SOLD OUT

May, 1939

In Brussels five years ago I was talking with a friend, a Belgian engineer, about Hitler's regime in Germany, which was then just getting well under way. My friend was very much a man of the people, not too well educated, not at all well read. As soon as I mentioned the new regime, he said, "Oh, that's only Statism. We went through that years ago. It is the same thing as in Italy and Russia. You are getting it in your country, too."

I thought at once what a fine thing – what a saving thing – it is for any country to have such an experienced people that practically the first man you pick up on the street can cut straight through a web of humbugging names and forms woven around a political regime, and show you at once what it actually is. Nazism meant nothing to my Belgian friend, because it is only a trade-name, and ought not to mean anything to anybody. Words like fascism, Marxism, totalitarianism, New Dealism, dictatorship, which seem to mean so much to Americans,





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would slide off my Belgian friend like water off a duck's back, nor would he think he was doing anything especially clever in letting them slide. If asked, he would probably say that anybody ought to be clever enough to know they are merely different trade-names for the same product.

I wish our people were clever enough for that. It is not fair to expect that they should be, nor is it fair to draw an invidious comparison between the average of them and the average of people like my Belgian friend. The Belgians have had 2000 years of political experience, so it is natural to suppose that by this time the average of them would be born knowing enough about Statism to be able to recognize it at sight, under any disguise it might put on. Such long experience enables a people to *understand* political history, which is a very different thing from knowing political history. Americans have had almost no experience, and however much history they may know, very few of them understand any of it.

What, then, is this Statism? The political organization of society is based on either one of two systems: a system of compulsory co-operation or a system of voluntary co-operation. A perfect example of the first system's typical structure is seen in a band of convicts working under a sentence of forced labor, or in a company of conscript soldiers taking part in a battle. Their co-operation is involuntary; it is enforced upon them by the State. If they do not co-operate as they are ordered, the State punishes them. Statism is the policy of indefinitely extending the system of compulsory co-operation into all departments of human activity. When this policy is worked out to the full, the individual's power of self-





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direction is completely confiscated; he plants, sows, reaps, under orders; conducts his business under orders; even his amusements and the conduct of his domestic life, his education and cultural processes, are prescribed and supervised by the State; even his personal relations with others, his friendships and sentimental attachments, all are subject to State control.

As to the second system, the system of voluntary co-operation, an example of its typical structure is seen in a business house engaged in the production and distribution of goods, operating only under the obligations of contract, freely and voluntarily undertaken. Individualism, which is the antithesis of Statism, is the policy of indefinitely extending this system of voluntary co-operation into all departments of human activity. Carried to its full length, it would reduce State action to the performance of a very few, very simple, and very inexpensive functions.

Individualism, like democracy and many other terms in common use, is a term which has been so greatly perverted by ignorant persons and scoundrels that when a man speaks praisefully of individualism – especially rugged individualism – you are pretty safe in putting him down provisionally as either one or the other. Nevertheless its true meaning is perfectly clear. If you believe that society ought to be organized on the system of voluntary co-operation, and believe that this system should be indefinitely extended, you believe in individualism. If you believe that society ought to be organized on the other system, and believe in the indefinite extension of that system, you believe in Statism. Whether you call this fascism, Nazism, communism, or socialism is immaterial.





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There seems to be no practicable middle ground between these two systems. A society which tries to organize itself on a policy of betwixt-and-between, part Statism and part individualism, always winds up on one of pure Statism. The political history of this country is a striking example of this invariable tendency; we are an example of the kind of republic which Guizot said “begins with Plato and necessarily ends with a policeman.” My point is that the self-styled liberals of the present day seem quite unaware of this tendency, and are acting as if it did not exist; and this goes far to make them the most dangerous people of all who have to do with our public affairs.

Liberals originally, as the name implies, like the earlier Whigs, believed in the policy of voluntary co-operation. Their political philosophy rested on the basis of the right of individual liberty, limited only by the equal rights of others. Consequently their test of each and every State interference with individual freedom was whether that specific interference was strictly and absolutely necessary in order to maintain the equal freedom of others. They had no respect whatever for the principle of immediate expediency in questions of State interference. While it might be ever so expedient for the State to step in on this-or-that situation and take charge of it; while there might be a good deal of inconvenience and trouble accruing if the State did not step in; nevertheless, unless it were proven *necessary* for the State to step in for the maintenance of equal freedom, they were against its doing so. Their root-principle was that when it is not *necessary* for the State to act, it is necessary for it *not* to act.





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They worked out this philosophy, and formulated it in an extended and complete system, proving that while in all cases State intervention might give quick results, in the long run it always breeds more difficulties than it solves, and gives rise to far more serious disorders than it cures. It also proved, on the other hand, that sticking to the policy of voluntary co-operation, and resolutely refusing the quick and easy shortcut of State interference, will bring about a sure and safe cure, though the process of convalescence be long, troublesome, and attended by a good deal of temporary suffering. It showed – and this was its most important point – that natural law is as fully operative in the realm of human relations as it is elsewhere; and that it is the only agency competent to settle permanently and in the best way the difficulties arising in that realm.

In the field of business, for example, this philosophy whittled down the legitimate range of State activity to punishing fraud, enforcing contractual obligations, and making justice costless and easily accessible. It proved that no further interventions were necessary for the maintenance of equal freedom; and any unnecessary interventions were *ipso facto* pernicious. Therefore in all its operations outside the area thus covered, business should be left free to skin its own cels and bury its own dead. It would undoubtedly get into horrible messes through greed, mismanagement, incompetence, and other causes; but all concerned, including the public, would come out far better in the long run if those messes were left to be cleaned up through the slow remedial and punitive processes of natural law than if they were taken in hand by special opportunist action of the State.





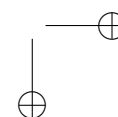
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The political tactics indicated by this philosophy were those of wholesale repeal. The early liberals were never strong for law-making, but always strong for law-repeal. They kept pointing out the significant fact, which nobody could deny, that all the actual reforms ever effected in Europe or England – all the reforms that ever stayed put and really worked – did not come about through making new laws, but through repealing great batches of old ones. The early liberals had sound history with them on this point, as well as sound philosophy. The thing was to make the State retreat from one after another of the positions of usurped authority which it had progressively taken over and dug itself into; and it was to this task that early liberalism devoted itself.

Such were liberals in the first half of the Nineteenth Century and they profoundly influenced the course of thought and social action throughout the Western world.

II

Summing up in a word, then, the historic aim of liberalism has been to resist and cut down the coercive power of the State over the individual; and right nobly for fifty years did it make good on its aim. But in the middle of the last century it turned tail, abandoned its philosophy, and went over, bag and baggage, to Statism, which has for its aim the maintenance and increase of coercive State-power over the individual. The interesting thing about this *volte-face* – and it cannot be too carefully considered – was that it came about as the result of an attempt, conceived in sheer impatience, to find a practi-





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cable middle ground between Statism and individualism. The new philosophical principle of the liberals was that coercive State power should be maintained and increased wherever they thought its exercise was immediately or ultimately good for the individual – good for the society of which he is a member, and therefore in the long look, presumably good for him – and decreased wherever they thought its exercise was correspondingly bad; and this curiously simple-minded and fantastic notion has been the mainspring of liberalism ever since.

Once possessed of this remarkable compromise-principle, liberalism promptly forgot all about its historic method of procedure by law-repeal, and went off on a high old spree of lawmaking, scattering philanthropic statutes hither and yon with the reckless prodigality of a drunken sailor. It would take a dozen issues of this magazine to give a précis of the legislative measures propounded or enacted in the name of liberalism in the last seventy years, but all I am concerned with remarking is that each and every one of them increased the coercive power of the State, and that therefore since 1850 the most energetic and effective proponents of Statism have been those who called themselves liberals.

Certainly no Englishman, bewildered as he now must be under the avalanche of coercive legislation which seventy years have launched upon him, could dispute this. All one need do is ask him what has become of the policy of voluntary co-operation in England, and who made it walk the plank. For a specimen exhibit, take the one line of coercive “social legislation” starting, say, with the Factory Acts of 1860–61, and running on to the present time – who were the chief moving spirits behind





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all that? No doubt Hitler is a fearful fellow for Statism, but with liberalism's record in the 'nineties being what it is, it does not lie in Mr. Lloyd George's mouth to say so.

As for the last half-century in this country, who have been most eager, and have done most, to decrease voluntary co-operation and increase compulsory co-operation? Who are responsible for the greatest amount of coercive legislation? Who have shown themselves most adept, as James Madison said, at "turning every contingency into a resource for accumulating force in the government?" Was it the hardboiled old Tories, the princes of privilege, the economic-royalist McKinleys, Hannas, Smoots, Aldriches? Indeed it was not. There was more genuine historic liberalism in Elihu Root's little finger than in all the Wilsons, LaFollettes, Roosevelts, put together. Who was the one man in all my lifetime who worked hardest, spoke plainest and loudest, for the old sound liberal procedure of wholesale repeal? Was it a newfangled liberal lawyer of the Holmes-Frankfurter type? No, it was William H. Taft; and if modern liberals rose up whooping as one man, and flocked to his support, I must have been away somewhere when it happened, for I never heard of it.

Sometimes nowadays one hears talk of liberals going over to fascism, communism, Nazism, or what-not, as if it were something strange and deplorable. Once away from these misleading names, you see that such talk is trivial, because liberalism went over to Statism ages ago, and has been there ever since.

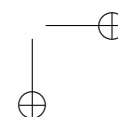
Our present crop of liberals were born and bred in Statism, and know nothing else. Mr. Roosevelt and his entourage are all self-styled liberals; does their regime





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show that they favor voluntary co-operation or compulsory co-operation? We all know the answer; they are dead against every principle and policy that liberalism expressed when it was a power in the world. They, in company with all those who now call themselves liberals, are solidly against individualism, solidly for Statism. As far as true philosophical liberalism is concerned, they can be charged off to profit-and-loss. There are younger minds coming on, however, which are becoming conscious of the anomalous and fraudulent character of the kind of thing offered them in the name of liberalism; and it is to these I suggest that a little independent study of liberalism's original philosophy and history might come in uncommonly handy for them at the present time.







COLLEGE MEN AND THE STATE

June, 1939

In a recent issue of *Harper's*, John Chamberlain wrote, "An academic scout tells me that the youngest generation of college radicals is anarchistic and anti-State in its general outlook. Joe Stalin and Leon Trotsky are ceasing to exercise their old lure." This strikes me as the most important piece of political news that I have read in many years. If the scout is right, it is a sure sign that spring has come. Even if he is not exactly right, he has evidently seen something which shows that spring is on its way. In the last twenty-five years of steady winter weather it has often been hard to remember that spring always has come, and therefore is likely to come again. If this scout has actually seen a crocus or two pushing up, it is no more than you might expect.

The anti-State reaction would be perfectly natural to fresh minds which have not as yet been overstuffed with nonsense and addled by false hopes. Looking at the performance government has been putting on the world's





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stage for twenty-five years, they would naturally call it a middling rotten show. Nowhere is there any choice of acts or actors; the whole thing is an all-round flop. Acts and actors all look alike – all bad. The French and German shows are as smelly as the American, English, Russian, Italian, or any other show now before the public, no matter what the press-agents say. The handbills and posters are got up in flaming style, but the show is the same old kind of hokum done by the same old hams and barnstormers. This being so, the natural reaction is to tell the stage-manager to get the hook.

Unless I am much mistaken, also, the “youngest generation” is not looking at all this from the standpoint of “ideology” or of morals, but from the standpoint of results. Ideologies and morals are all right on the posters, but the show is what interests them, and the show just isn’t there. Posters don’t get results, and results are what count. In other words, I should not be surprised if the youngest generation were taking a realistic view of politics. They are probably looking at government simply as a gadget, and deciding that the trouble with it is nothing but the old notorious trouble with gadgets – which is that they mostly don’t work. The scout’s young men may be taking the practical, hard-boiled view that government is a gadget which is meant to work for the good of society while you sleep, and is not doing it. This is a good sound view.

Looking at government as a gadget, here are a few questions which come up. I recommend them to Mr. Chamberlain’s youngest generation of college radicals, hoping they will thresh them out as thoroughly as they can. First, then, since the governmental gadget is sup-





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posed to work for the good of society, how can it best do that?

Some say by protecting the country from invasion, and by protecting the individual and his property against assault and molestation. Nothing but that. After that, government should let society strictly alone to settle its messes as best it can, by its own co-operative efforts in accordance with the operation of natural law. It should also let the individual citizen strictly alone to deal with his own private messes in like fashion. It should interfere with the individual only for acts which lawyers call *malum in se* – acts which are branded as criminal by what the Scotch philosophers called “the common sense of mankind,” such as murder, assault, fraud, theft, arson. It should do nothing about the *malum prohibitum*, nothing about acts concerning which the common sense of mankind is divided, such as selling whiskey, possessing gold, or growing potatoes in one’s garden. Under this theory of social good, in fact, the *malum prohibitum* would not exist; there would be no such thing as a *malum prohibitum*.

Another school of thought holds that government should do everything for society which it can do easier and quicker than society can do for itself. Natural law is too slow. Evolutionary processes take too long and involve too much inconvenience and suffering. If society gets in a mess, government can pull it out easier and quicker than society can work itself out. Hence it should. Again, government can make easy short-cuts to many good things which otherwise society could get only by long and painful effort. Hence it should. Government, with its privileged position, immense resources, and close





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organization, can do almost everything for society – some say everything – easier and quicker than society itself can do. Hence it should.

The question, then, is whether it is better to have as little government as possible, or as much. What are the pros and cons of this? Natural law works slowly, no doubt, but on the other hand, when it settles a mess, that mess is settled right, and settled forever, which the quick and easy method of governmental interference seldom does. While natural law is settling a mess, it does not breed more and worse messes – all kinds of unsuspected messes – which the quick and easy method usually does. Trusting to natural law means facing a great deal of trouble and suffering which seems unnecessary, but on the other hand, trusting to governmental interference to escape these evils usually means laying up much more pain and trouble for the future. There is plenty of experience to show that government’s quick and easy interferences for the present well-being of society are practically certain to insure its future ill-being.

Between these two theories of what government can best do for society’s good, which is the one to choose? A third school of thought says to choose neither, but compromise between the two; and since this school includes pretty nearly everybody, it has always carried the day.

So let us examine the position of this third school and ask a few more exploratory questions. Should government run the post office or leave it to private enterprise? Should it issue currency, standardize weights and measures, fix tariffs, give franchises, land-grants, subsidies? If we can say “Yes,” then should government control the practice of banking, medicine, surgery, dentistry, agricul-





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ture? If we say “Yes,” then should it administer charity, provide education, maintain schools and colleges? Should it concede that the State owes everybody a living, and proceed accordingly? Should it take on a full program of “social legislation,” with housing, pensions, doles, and all other measures of “social security?” Finally, should it take complete control and direction of all social and individual activities?

The question is obviously where your compromise is going to stop, and why it should stop at one point in this progression rather than at some other point. The answer must obviously be made from the long-time point of view. Will society be better served *in the long run* if you stop at this point rather than at that point? If you stop here rather than there, are you taking care of society’s proximately-good at the expense of its ultimately-good? Admitting, for example, that if you let government “help business” you do something for society’s present well-being, yet you at once put it in the position of an auctioneer, throw open the way for pressure-groups, and thus directly bring about a monstrously disproportionate state of permanent ill-being. If you let government administer charity, you may keep society out of a painful temporary mess, but as we are now seeing, the permanent political and social consequences make up an extortionately high price to pay for the good you do.

Again, can you be sure that you could make any compromise stop where you want it to stop? This question will bear a great deal of probing. Why should conceding a new function to government always be like starting a snowball down hill? Why should government always be reaching out for new powers and functions, always con-





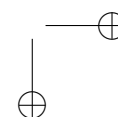
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solidating what it gets, never giving up any except under life-and-death pressure? Why should it seek always to aggrandize itself, never be content with the importance assigned it? If its function is to serve society, why does it always seek to graduate out of the status of a servant and become society's master? Is it in the nature of any compromise you could possibly make, that this should be so – that if you give government an inch it will take an ell?

II

I suggest that Mr. Chamberlain's young men go through these questions with a fine-tooth comb and mull them over thoroughly, and then decide whether any compromise between the two schools of thought is practicable. If they do this, I think it may help them to clarify their anti-State outlook. They should be able to turn up all the books they need out of their college libraries. Statist literature of all kinds – communist, fascist, totalitarian, or what-not – is lying about so thick everywhere that there is no need to recommend any of it by name – one can't miss it, and can't very well go wrong. Literature of the opposing school is scarce and harder to find. It is headed by Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* and his essays called *The Man Versus the State*. Compromise-literature is plentiful; probably Professor Laski's *The State in Theory and Practice* would do well to start.

I take it that these young men are open to suggestions which may help them to interpret their own experience and observations. Everywhere they are seeing society





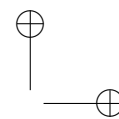
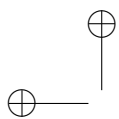
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go down hill pretty fast. In their own country they see that decent Americans are all poorer, more discouraged, harassed, and unhappy than they were ten years ago. They see the way of life made unnecessarily hard by the very agency which is supposed to make it easier, and by that agency alone. Hence most naturally they are feeling, as the Declaration puts it, that when government makes such a dreadful botch of its business, "it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

Precisely so – and these young men are those who will have a hand in the forthcoming business of altering or abolishing, of making a new start. Therefore it is important that they should make up their minds on what "such principles" are. They see that totalitarian principles are not the thing; they see that compromise principles are not the thing either – they are distinctly not delivering the goods. They see that in the countries where compromise principles have been longest in force and most thoroughly worked out, they seem to deliver less goods than in countries where they are relatively new. The third set of principles has not yet been tried, so experience can say nothing about it.

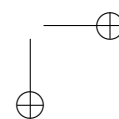
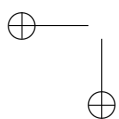
In their present frame of mind, it seems that the thing for these young men to do is to look into the three sets of principles which I have mentioned – the individualist set, the Statist set, and the compromise set. My questions may be of some help to them in this; they were meant to be, and I hope will be.





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I suggest that the young men read up carefully on all three sets of principles, talk them over thoroughly among themselves, and thus get a provisional idea of the scheme of governmental organization which “to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” If their idea is sound and workable, it will come in uncommonly handy someday, and the sooner they get it put together, the better.





THE TRIUMPH OF THE GADGET

July, 1939

I have lately been puzzling over Dr. Alexis Carrel's observation that "men cannot follow modern civilization along its present course, because they are degenerating." I hardly know what to make of it, and therefore perhaps ought not to write about it, because I cannot put on the air of profound and confident certainty which American readers seem to like their writers to assume in dealing with all public questions. The statement, however, gives rise to a good many thoughts and conjectures which are worth writing about, even if one is not quite certain of them.

It is pretty evident that men cannot follow modern civilization along its present course. That much is clear. They are following it, but only in the sense that a man clinging to the tail of a wild bull may be said to follow. It is running away with them as fast as it can go. Some of them are hanging on and at the same time trying to see which way the bull is going, and why, and how





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far, and what is likely to happen on the way. The great majority, on the other hand, seem simply to be hanging on; inert, not trying to see or know or guess at anything – just helplessly hanging on.

It is evident also that the hangers-on cannot hang on much longer, nor can the followers, if any, follow much farther. It therefore looks as if the course of modern civilization will soon be littered up with a huge amorphous mass of general and rather hopeless exhaustion. This is a most disagreeable prospect to face, but there seems no way out of it. On his first point, then, one would say Dr. Carrel is right. Men cannot follow indefinitely, nor can they hang on indefinitely. His second point will stand a little sifting. Are men degenerating? What is the evidence that they are?

Some authorities say they find no evidence that the general run of mankind has degenerated noticeably up to the present time, or that it has noticeably improved. According to all they can find out about man's earlier nature and condition, they think that, by and large, "the average civilized man" is now just about what he was 6000 years ago. He is a little better off in health, probably, his span of life is longer, and his chances of surviving infancy are better but his moral constitution and his intellectual capacity seem to have undergone no significant change.

One reason why it is easy to believe that civilized man is degenerating is that he has, so far, bitterly disappointed the expectations put upon him by philosophers of the Eighteenth Century. Putting it roughly, they thought that all the average civilized man needed was a better chance, and his moral and intellectual qualities





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would improve indefinitely. Give him better education, better surroundings, more leisure, full political and social responsibility, and above all give him more independence and freedom of action, and the great natural good in him would immediately flow out.

So far, it has not worked out that way. Perhaps he still has not had chance enough to show what is in him; some social philosophers think so, and are all for his having more; and of course, in spite of appearances, they may be right. Whether so or not, his distinct failure, so far, to make good on the Eighteenth-Century estimate is no argument that he has degenerated. At most, it is presumptive evidence, perhaps taken prematurely, that those expectations were extravagant. It may be that he simply hasn't it in him to amount to more in an intellectual, moral, or spiritual way than he amounted to 6000 years ago. So while undoubtedly men cannot follow the course of modern civilization, it is not quite clear that the reason Dr. Carrel assigns for this is the right one. Perhaps that course is utterly impracticable for any but a superhuman race.

Nevertheless, Dr. Carrel gets support from the fact that certain tribes, even races, degenerated promptly and swiftly on contact with modern civilization of the Western type. They were guinea-pigs; the benefits of that civilization were such as they could not appropriate and use, and the only influences to which they could react were deteriorating. Measles, missionaries, "education," and commercial buccaneering practices ruined the Polynesians, for example. Their selective power was not up to the task of picking out from the jumble of new





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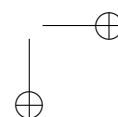
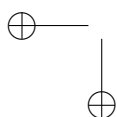
influences what was good for them, and resisting the rest.

We may now be seeing the same thing taking place on a larger scale; if so, it would show conclusively that Dr. Carrel is right. Modern civilization presents a stupendous jumble of new influences, and many of them – most of them, by far – are deteriorating, and withal insidious. It presents these not only to the heathen sitting in darkness, but most persuasively to its own people. Now, whatever may be said about the average man's capacities in the past or in the future, ordinary observation shows beyond any chance of doubt that, like the Polynesians, his selective power is preposterously incompetent at the moment to deal with this irruption of depraving influences.

Hence there would be little question *a priori* that Dr. Carrel is right to the extent that men of the Western civilization must be degenerating, and in the absence of some supervening factor, as yet unforeseen, they must continue to do so.

II

Illustrations of the Western man's incompetence in selective power are perhaps best seen in small matters. A novelist once described the destruction of a race by the agency of microbes. Similarly a romancer who had a cynical turn might foreshadow the collapse of Western civilization, and call it *The Triumph of the Gadget*. In all probability the emergence of the gadget has had a vast deal to do with the degenerative process. During the last





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fifty years there has been invented almost every conceivable labor-saving device, with the consequence that the average man is in a state of utter manual incompetence. This is well-known and is often commented upon. But what is not so often observed is that these gadgets are not only labor-saving but brain-saving, thought-saving; and it seems an inescapable conclusion that a correlative mental incompetence is being induced.

A certain amount of resistance seems necessary for the proper functioning of mental and moral attributes, as it is for that of physical attributes. In any of these three departments of life, if you can get results without effort, and habitually do so, the capacity for making the effort dwindles. Whatever takes away the opportunity for effort, whatever obviates or reduces the need for making it, is therefore to some degree deleterious. It needs a bit of brains to manage a furnace-fire successfully; an automatic heater needs none; hence many householders today could not manage a furnace-fire to save their lives. It needs some brainwork to add up a column of figures; running an adding-machine needs nothing but attention; consequently there are many book-keepers and bank-clerks now who not only do not add but cannot. As we all have frequently had occasion to observe, shopkeeping now seldom requires any more strenuous mental exercise than is involved in consulting a price-list. Cooking is a great art, requiring a lot of brain-work; running the modern kitchen requires far less.

Animals having organs which, on account of changes in their environment, they no longer use, turn into a species which has only vestigial remnants or rudimentary forms of these organs, sometimes amounting to no more than





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mere vague suggestions, like the *os coccygis* in human beings, which vaguely suggests a remote ancestral tail. There is much in “the course of modern civilization” which strongly intimates that this may be happening to the mental and moral powers of Western man. The trouble with arm-chair-and-push-button Utopias like the one so attractively sketched for us by H. G. Wells, is that they carry brain-saving to the point of complete disuse. Even at present, judging by what one sees, hears, and reads, great numbers of Americans seem pretty well to have reached that point already.

Americans are the world’s foremost gadget-users, and unquestionably the leisure gained in this way is used chiefly for further brain-saving – a substitution of play-gadgets for work-gadgets; motion-pictures, automobiles, radio-music, as an alternative to adding-machines, price-lists, fireless cookers. One could make out a very reasonable case for the statement that Americans at large have given up using their brains for purposes of thought, and use them only for purposes of attention and contemplation. If this be so, then with the field of gadgetry steadily enlarging and brain-power proportionately dwindling, one might plausibly forecast a generation of American children born without any brains at all, but only with vestigial faculties of attention and contemplation, no more highly differentiated – perhaps even less highly – than those which are common to extremely low forms of animal life.

Dr. Carrel goes on to remark how the aspect of public affairs bears out his thesis of human degeneration; and here it is especially hard to refute him. “In practically every country,” he says, “there is a decrease in





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the intellectual and moral calibre of those who carry the responsibility of public affairs." Again, a little farther on he observes that "it is chiefly the intellectual and moral deficiencies of the political leaders, and their ignorance, which endanger modern nations." All this is unfortunately true, at least as far as this country is concerned, and it is apparently true elsewhere; and there is also the coincident truth to be considered, that such leaders are precisely what a brain-saving people would be most likely to choose.

Looking at the other major Western Powers also, there seems almost certainly to be something in what this savant says. Degeneration in leadership appears to be simply an index of degeneration in those who choose that leadership. Looking at our own country, however, there can be no shadow of doubt about it. At one time we had the name of being a nation of practical, common-sense people, hard-headed, and above all, resourceful. Whether we ever were quite that or not, there were enough such among us, and they were prominent and influential enough, to give us that reputation. But today apparently we are the easiest of easy marks for any peruna, even the most nauseous, that any persuasive quack sees fit to dose us with. Think of the ruinous dope we have swallowed in the last twenty-five years: British propaganda by the shipload; making the world safe for democracy; the "new economics" under Coolidge; progressivism; prohibition; technocracy; borrowing yourself out of debt, and spending yourself rich; cursing Statism and corporatism abroad, and applauding them at home; social security; saving democracy in Spain and South





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America; the new liberalism; Townsendism; and heaven knows what-all beside.

So there it is. I suppose the only actual certainty in the whole matter is that Dr. Carrel is an extremely disagreeable fellow. We don't like to think he is right, but he has so much to say for himself that we can't be quite sure he is wrong. So probably what we shall do is to follow the good sound American procedure in such case made and provided; we shall promptly forget him, and turn on the radio for the latest thing in swing music. Thereby again demonstrating the triumph of the gadget.





AMERICA'S TOO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

August, 1939

The blight of the depression has set in on our public libraries. The great library at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, which New Yorkers have so long shown with pride to visitors, is a conspicuous example. Its endowments have shrunk to the point where they can no longer take care of its upkeep. As I write, the announcement is made that certain of its reading-rooms are to be closed earlier on week-days and all day on Sundays to save the cost of lighting and attendance. The city's funds are so heavily mortgaged to other purposes that nothing can be spared for the library. Private contributions may be forthcoming, but this is uncertain, and with present affairs as bad as they are, and the prospects no better, it seems unlikely.

New York's case is not exceptional. Endowed libraries are everywhere in a bad way because their endowments have depreciated, and those which are wholly or partially dependent on subsidies from cities or states have





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had their subsidies cut off. Nor does it seem that the circumstances which are crippling our libraries are going to improve; and that being so, the whole policy of our free public libraries will have to be radically revised.

This change of policy ought to aim at saving money – that is obviously necessary – but it also should aim at expressing a better idea of what a library is for, and how it ought to be operated. In line with such a policy I suggest that we have been overdoing the idea that libraries are here to give something for nothing. We have been making our libraries altogether too free and too public. Andrew Carnegie’s idea of a free public library was very fine and generous, but I don’t believe it was sound; and since all our libraries are operated on that idea, I think now is the time for it to be reconsidered.

Our notion of a public library is that of a place where anybody can go and use any book he wants, and either take it away to read, or sit in the reading-room and read – all for nothing. The library is supposed to stock reference-books and classics, but it is also supposed to stock all sorts of current publications, novels, children’s books, periodicals, and newspapers. That was Andrew Carnegie’s idea, and it is the idea we all have. Is it reasonable? I doubt it. I can understand why there should be a place where a serious reader may get the use of serious books which he cannot be expected to have the use of otherwise – they may be too rare, too expensive, or special, technical works which one consults only occasionally. I see no reason, however, why such a place should be either free or public. Still less do I see why it should stock the current best-sellers or any of the ephemeral stuff which our presses turn off in quantity,





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and which is of no conceivable value to anybody, except as a pastime. Aside from the bookclubs, which do a pretty good business in that sort of literature, we have no end of circulating libraries which furnish ephemera at a very cheap rate, not much more than it is worth. If a person wants something to read merely to waste his time, I cannot see why he should have it at public expense.

It strikes me that we might very profitably consider the European idea of a library. There are eighty libraries in Paris, not one either free or public. The National Library, for instance, is probably the greatest in the world. Can you wander into it at your own convenience and paw over what they have? You have to go through all sorts of motions before you are furnished with a card of admission, and the card does not come free. You pay only a few pennies for it, but it isn't free.

Then when you are in, can you pick up the *Vie Parisienne* or the *Sourire* or the latest effort of the budding proletarian romancer, and settle yourself for a nice long spell of "light reading"? No. Ask the attendant for something good in current fiction, and he will tell you they aren't running a newsstand. It is a no less formal job to get into the Mazarine, still more so at the Thiers, where you have to be certificated by two members of the Institute of France. The Royal Library at Brussels is equally coy and choosy about you; while the amount of supplication and certification necessary to get you into the reading-room of the British Museum is enough to make a sinner's peace with God. I am convinced that these people have a much sounder idea of what a library is for, and how it should be used, than we have. The difference between the European system and ours is that





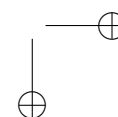
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they do not think it is any part of a library's function to provide entertainment, and if free entertainment is what you are looking for they don't want you around.

Our system not only wastes money, but it breeds disrespect for books. If you make anything cheap and common, you can't blame people for thinking it worth nothing. Between the libraries and the activities of publishers, America's disrespect for books has become boundless. It is hard to see that either the libraries or the publishers are especially to blame for this result, but the result is nonetheless bad. The libraries are honest enough in their idea that they are doing a great social service, and the publishers are honest enough in trying to keep out of bankruptcy by the only practicable means they have. The publishers cannot change their policy materially. Our libraries, however, can change theirs, and I believe they should.

II

I suggest, first of all, that everyone interested in the plight of our libraries should do all he can to disabuse people of the idea that a free library is good. The franc or two that you pay for your card of entry to the Bibliothèque Nationale is not an important sum, but the fact that you have to pay it is important. It marks the difference between a self-respecting person who is willing to pay for his cultural advantages, and a cadger who is after cultural handouts. The amount paid is of little consequence; the fact that you must pay puts you and the library on an entirely different footing. Then, secondly, I think all of





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us who are interested should do what we can to spread the idea that a public library, in our sense of the term, is not a good thing. At present, the library's only concern with a visitor is that he shall behave decently and not steal books or deface them. This is not enough. Before a person is privileged to take up space in a library, he should show cause; the library should know at least a little something about him, what brings him there and why. This would impress him with the sense that he is approaching a treasury of highly valuable objects, and that the keepers know and respect their value, and that he also is expected to show a few symptoms of similar knowledge and respect. If I am expected to approach an American library as I would approach a free public golf-course or skittle-ground, it is not good for either of us.

This, then, is what we all can do to help the libraries towards a change of policy. We can take every opportunity to discourage the pernicious notion that a library ought to be a charitable institution, giving something for nothing, and we can also take every chance to break down the idea that we have the right to use a library without giving some sort of account of ourselves.

Libraries can do a great deal to strengthen this sentiment if they frankly take the position that this radical change of policy ought to be made. There are also certain practical steps which they might take in the direction of this change. I see no reason why the facilities for pure entertainment might not be cut off at once, and stay cut off. Why run a department to amuse children? Why spend money on any kind of material for "light reading" to amuse adults? If I were in command of a library, I





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would make a hard-and-fast rule that never should a book be bought which had not been on the market for at least a year. That would give time, in the first place, for a merely sensational vogue to die down without leaving the library with a mess of trash on its hands; and in the second place, it would give time for someone in the library to read books carefully enough to decide whether they are worthwhile.

These few and short steps would at least be in the right direction, and I see no reason why they might not be taken now. They would save a great deal of money, and they would also introduce a new idea – brand new to this country – of the proper function and use of a library. They would cause dissatisfaction among people who like to get something for nothing, but they can be fully justified on the ground of hard times; and even if times were not hard, self-respecting people would still justify them on the ground of sound public policy – a policy of reason and common sense. Nobody would lose anything by them that is worth keeping, or anything but what he can make up for in other ways if he cares enough for it to take the trouble, and in the long run they would do at least a little something to put the use of cultural opportunity on a basis of self-respect all around. They would help to lift the library's status a little above that of an almshouse, and they would make the reader feel a little less like a panhandler.





POSTSCRIPT ON THE ROYAL VISIT

September, 1939

The visit of the British royal couple has now receded into perspective. Socially it was an immense success, reflecting no end of credit on everyone concerned. The King and Queen were model guests; they played a hard and trying part faultlessly. Coming to us as they did after six weeks of intensive travel, appearing on a continuous run of matinees and one-night stands, they might have gone through their role in a dull and perfunctory way, from sheer exhaustion. On the contrary, they used every opportunity to show themselves interested, gracious, and charming, and left us with a lasting impression of delightful agreeableness and courtesy. As for our part, I think we may fairly say in our own homely Yankee phrase, we did ourselves proud. Stage managing a royal tour is a delicate business, and rather out of our national line. We have had royalty here before, of course, but never in such formal, full-dress style. Our program-making seems to have been considerate and our mechanical management





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worked out well; our people showed about as good a spirit of hospitable civility as our guests might expect to encounter in any country not their own. Considering the occasion simply as a courteous attention to a friendly people, the royal visit was a great success all round.

Unfortunately, however, such visits always bear a state as well as a social character. They are always undertaken for a state purpose, and one invariably so obvious as to give a disagreeable aftertaste to the whole enterprise. It is so in this instance. The taste of the visit, while it was going on, was exceedingly good; but its aftertaste is not good. However favorably impressed an intelligent American may be, he cannot be unaware that this unusual and striking gesture would not have been made unless it were hoped that something might be got by it; and this is a most disturbing reflection. When your neighbor in private life makes a sudden great show of friendliness under circumstances which leave no doubt that he wants to get something out of you, you are annoyed and embarrassed. It is exactly this annoyance and embarrassment which must, and should, make the aftertaste of the royal visit so unpleasant to the intelligent self-respecting American.

Delightful affairs socially, these state visits are, from the political point of view, simply so much high-grade panhandling. They are sanctioned by custom; are one of the many disagreeable duties which every ruler must be prepared to take on whenever occasion requires. When Queen Victoria visited the French emperor, she was cadging. When Edward VII went the rounds in the early nineteen hundreds, he was cadging with a vengeance. When Albert of Belgium visited us during the War, he was cadging – and he was a dreadful washout at it, by





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the way, not having been properly trained for that sort of thing and not being at all the sort of man to take to it naturally. In making this recent visit to Canada and the United States, the King and his consort were doing something which is all in the day's work for royalty, and has never been anything else. The polite name for these errands is "good-will visits." They have one or both of two objects in view. One is to stimulate trade, and the other is to get political support.

As far as our country is concerned, however, the matter of trade does not cut any figure. The serious side of the royal errand in the United States was not especially the promotion of trade, nor yet apparently was it so in Canada. In fact, good-will visits in behalf of trade are mostly window dressing. To some extent they are useful in engineering favorable tariffs, trade-regulations, and such-like, but they do not go much beyond this, nor does the sentiment they arouse affect the course of trade particularly. They have to be backed up by something substantial in the way of price and quality. For instance, the King and Queen were just about embarking for their return voyage when I saw by a Montreal paper that a Canadian concern had bought \$300,000 worth of German machinery. A week later, while the royal party was still on the ocean, I saw that the Canadian fish-packers were in a dreadful dither because English importers had closed a deal for \$8,000,000 worth of Japanese canned fish, and nothing could be done about it. *Geschäft ist Geschäft*, and no sentimental pressure of good-will visits can make anything else of it.

The King's serious errand with Canada and with us was wholly political. What the British Government





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wants is to be able to count on North America as a whole for moral and material support in its Continental adventures. It wants able-bodied help, in short, in pulling some very hot chestnuts out of the fire. That is the plain and obvious fact underlying all the impassioned volubility about democracy and international morality being sluiced around us by the combined forces of press, radio, pulpit, and forum. The purpose of the royal goodwill visit was to influence American sentiment in favor of this propaganda, and thus maneuver us into taking the British point of view on European affairs.

England, I believe, is in no danger of attack, if she minds her own business. But if she does mind her business she promptly loses her status as a first-class power. It is that sorry alternative which worries the British government at this moment, and no one can blame it for doing all it can to keep its head above the water.

II

I have not the faintest idea how the British colonies feel about all this. I do know, however, how they might conceivably feel about it with an eye to their own future, for *Geschäft ist Geschäft* in politics as well as in trade; sentiment counts for little in the long run. As a world power, England has led a petering-out existence for the last fifty years; say, ever since the Boer War. So has France ever since, say, the fall of the Second Empire. England lived for years on her foreign trade; when that dwindled, she lived on her savings; and now she is living mainly on the production of armaments – the Government is





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spending every penny it can scrape up on the production of objects which have not the slightest capital value, and the end of this is in plain sight. France is no better off. From the long-time point of view, then, it seems clear that leadership in affairs on that side of the world is bound to pass into other hands. Allowing for whatever setbacks and postponements may take place, one can hardly doubt that all the future Europe has will fall to younger and more vigorous peoples. It is possible, then, that colonial offshoots of France and England which are on their own feet may decide that it would be money in their pockets to be on terms with the rising tide, rather than with the ebbing tide.

Whether so or not, it is distinctly the business of the United States to take a season ticket for the grandstand, and watch the game as a disinterested spectator until it is played out. We should be polite and pleasant about all the good-will visits and other overtures which may come our way, but we should turn the fishy eye and the marble heart on any attempt to cash in on them. As Old Gorgon Graham told his son, it is all right to be nice and mellow in these matters, but we should never forget that mellowness carried too far becomes rottenness. Bolstering up the ramshackle status of Britain and France as first-class powers is all very well for anybody who wants to do it, but it is not our pigeon.

As I write this, the Russo-British conferences are in their tenth week and still unfinished, so there is no telling how they will finally turn out, but to date Russia has certainly set us a good example. It would seem that the Russian Government is no keener on a British-French alliance than we ought to be, and possibly for the same





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reason – that it doesn't care a picayune whether Britain and France keep their places as first-class world powers or shrink down into fourth-class powers. Russia, like ourselves, is in the best of positions to feel that way; and as far as the negotiations have gone, something of the sort might be inferred from the fact that Comrade Molotov has been steadily giving Mr. Chamberlain's emissaries the run-around.

Whatever Russia or any other country may do, our people should get it clearly into their heads that what England really wants of us is that we should prop up a busted and decrepit imperialist hegemony. Then, in my opinion, our people should decide firmly that this is not worth doing, and that even if it were ever so well worth doing, it isn't our job. Finally I would suggest that when our alien star-boarders and our "home-grown missionaries," as Dr. Beard so well calls them, try to tell us about our sacred duty to world democracy, they should be listened to calmly and politely to the finish, and then dismissed with three loud Bronx cheers. Let the Anglophiles and the Francophiles blow off all the steam they like, along with the Comrades and the Bunds and the fellow-travelers – that is their constitutional privilege – but let us remember that as free-born American sovereigns we have the priceless right to thumb our noses at them.



