

Let's Keep It Clean

FIVE years ago, come next month, I slapped *analysis* on its hopeful rump and the birth-cry sounded like "anti-statism." It was a strange sound, those days. The war was going strong, and everybody seemed anxious to give the State, as represented by Mr. Roosevelt, anything it wanted in the way of economic and political power. That was hardly the time to find fault. To suggest that Mr. Roosevelt's demand for "unconditional surrender" was indirectly aimed at Americans, not Germans, was highly unrespectable; our concern with bonds and bullets obliterated the fact that we were unconditionally surrendering to the State whatever was left of the rights we had cherished, that the power it was garnering under cover of war would never be relinquished.

The new-born brat yelled "anti-statism."

The handful who had godfathered *analysis* gave heed; they understood. But the word "statism" was strange to American ears. In 1935, a man of wisdom had clearly defined it in a little book, *Our Enemy the State*; but that too was a time of "emergency," always propitious to the purposes of the State, and only the few who are at all times able to keep their wits paid any attention to Albert Jay Nock.

Fifteen years after the appearance of that book,* five years after the birth of *analysis*, a politician—of all people—appropriates the word. There are rumors that the Republican Party is considering its value as a vote-getting slogan. That is unfortunate, for it is a certainty that in the hands of office-seekers the meaning of "statism" will be distorted and perverted. It will be turned into a derogatory epithet and its content will be lost in the billingsgate of political campaigns. The Republicans will use it, in referring to the Democrats, just as Communists

smear their opposition as Fascists, diverting attention from the fact that they are essentially alike in character.

STATISM is a socio-political doctrine, as distinguished from a particular scheme of government. It is the pattern of thought underlying both Fascism and Communism, New Dealism and National Social Democracy, Monarchy and all planned economies. It starts with the postulate that the individual is a means to an end, not an end in himself. He lives and works not to enjoy the years allotted to him but for the glory of the hive. Over and above the mortal individuals is the transcendent State, the only permanent reality, to the purposes of which his life is consecrated.

It follows from this postulate that the concept of inherent rights is negated. Though God may be the author of the individual's life, the State has first claim on it; military conscription is quite definitely a denial of the right to life. The right to property, which is correlative to the right to life, is denied by the institution of taxation; the State thus establishes its prior lien on all that its subjects produce.

That, in a nutshell, is the tap-root of all Statist thinking. Out of it grows a philosophy which lends moral justification to procedures and behavior that in an individual we can only describe as skulldug-

gery. But, when we brush aside this protective mumbo-jumbo and examine the State as a functioning institution, we find that it is a predatory instrument, pure and simple; it is a device whereby a few better their circumstances at the expense of producers. This is true of any State, regardless of its ideological coloration; and when we look into the history of any State, operating or dead, we see that it began in conquest and developed along the same lines.

There are two ways of making a living: one, by applying labor to raw materials; two, by appropriating the production of others. The first is called the *economic means*, the other the *political means*. The State is concerned with the latter only. It is entirely incompetent in promoting the economic means, and is interested in it only as a source of tribute. The State is neither labor, nor land, nor capital, the three factors of production; it is a group of men in command of the physical means to impose their will on others, so as to induce behavior that would not otherwise occur. The purpose of political power is to acquire economic goods without the expenditure of labor.

That is Statism.

CAN a politician, regardless of his hue, repudiate the doctrine of Statism—the doctrine by which his business flourishes? Can he oppose the practices that grow out of it? Let us get down to cases. Just what powers acquired by the State during the Democratic regime, not to go back further, would the Republicans give up? These powers have been centered in self-sufficient, tax-consuming bureaus; does the Republican Party propose to abolish them? If it does, how will it reward its own loyal horde?

Let us ask for a few specific details from those who hurl the charge of "statism" at their opponents. What will you do about relieving us of taxation? Will you repeal the Sixteenth Amendment? Will you outlaw conscription? Will you rescind the laws by which the State intervenes in the marketplace? Will you refrain from passing new laws?

The fact is that even if the Republican Party were to offer a program of political retrenchment it could not keep its promise, not only because the practical politician is incapable of a suicidal course, but because too many Americans are involved in the political means to permit retrenchment. The whole thing is silly. A politician running on an anti-statist platform is analogous to a practicing physician preaching Christian Science, and he could not be elected anyway.

The State achieves power by sharing it. It creates partnerships in the political means by doling out special privileges to various groups, who, in turn, support it in its purposes. To campaign-contributing manufacturers it gives tariff protection so that they may profit by the elimination of foreign competition; to veterans it hands out gratuities and buys patriotism; it wins the support of labor union leaders by instituting laws favorable to their rackets; it undermines the individualism of the farmer with subsidies; it robs transportation companies and their bankers of any inclination to integrity with subventions and franchises; it makes wards of the unemployed and aged with "social security."

Every privilege increases the power of the State, over those who enjoy the privilege and over those who are taxed to support it. The multiplication of privilege in time saps the economy to the point where productive effort is meaningless; alms-taking becomes a necessity of existence and even the thought of opposing the State disappears. At this point, under cover of war, the State takes over and monopolizes all privileges; it becomes the sole boss.

At the present moment in American history there are so many snouts at the public trough, and such an urgency to get at it, that a policy of retrenchment is unthinkable; there is no will for freedom. The best that can be expected of the advertisement of "anti-statism" by the Republican Party is that more of the intellectually curious may look into its meaning. As long as its subscribers keep the breath of life in it, *analysis* will try to keep that definition free of political pollution.

*A new edition was put out two years ago by Caxton Printers, Ltd., priced at \$2.50 per copy. By a special arrangement with the publishers, *analysis* is able to offer the book, as long as copies are available, together with an annual subscription, for \$3.09.