

Pattern for Utopia

THE GREAT MAN'S LIFE 1925 to 2000 A.C. by Albert Van Petten, published by Utopian Publishers, Inc., New York, 1959, 320 pages, \$3.50

Reviewed by ARLEIGH CHUTE

GEORGE MANN, the "great man," whose fictional life this book chronicles, sets out in 1950 A.C. (the abbreviation for After Christ, adopted by worldwide agreement in the year 2000) to improve his community in Kentucky. To achieve his goal: "the best possible life for the greatest possible number of the most deserving people," he organizes the Association of Independent Citizens, an ultra democratic political group. Its goals—improved justice, liberty and prosperity, the AIC urges adoption of certain general rules that eventually become so widely accepted that the AIC rises first into national prominence, to eventually supplant the two conventional political parties, and finally spreads throughout the world to become the first successful world-wide democracy.

The social ideas in this unique book and the proposed reforms in matters of sex, prisons, handling of children, ethics and justice may both shock and intrigue the reader. The ideas are offered not as requirements but rather as suggestions for consideration. This reviewer found refreshing, the new perspective gained by viewing our social institutions in unaccustomed ways. Of interest too is the clear contrast drawn between two mutually opposed interests—authoritarians vs. anti-authoritarians.

From the economics angle there are a host of new ideas to ponder—"transaction taxes vs. time taxes (as

on property), a method of obtaining full assessment of property, prosperity payments, and positive and negative interest rates. Georgists will be quick to discover, however, that while Mr. Van Petten mentions and is aware of the contributions to economics of Henry George, he does not fully understand them.

But we needn't dwell upon differences in economic theory, for the book's primary contribution to the world of ideas is in the unusual political structure of the AIC, called a "binary pyramidal democracy." The BPD is basically a system in which two or a small number of individuals voluntarily draw up a social contract to govern their association. Pairs join others to form groups of four. These are free to form eight, and so on, all tied together by social contracts that become more general as the numbers increase. Agents to represent the interests of each level at the next higher level are hired too, on a contract basis, thus establishing an extremely decentralized and strictly controllable organization.

Individuals freely join the AIC, or not, as they see fit. So too do they dissolve contracts and make new ones as interests change. Because they are free to move from place to place, political boundaries are determined by the dimensions of the group's influence, rather than by geography.

It is the author's hope in writing this story that a real-life Association of Independent Citizens will form. Whether or not enough people are willing to take part in promulgating such a Utopian ideal is something only time will tell—a whole book could be written on that subject.

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