

A World Quite Different

**THE RISE AND FALL OF SOCIETY:
An Essay on the Economic Forces
That Underlie Social Institutions.
By Frank Chodorov. 168 pp. New
York: The Devin-Adair Company.
\$3.95.**

By R. L. DUFFUS

HERE is a book that takes some of us back to the days of that pungent character, the late Albert Jay Nock, and further back still to Henry George and Adam Smith—although Frank Chodorov is by no means an uncritical disciple of the great exponent of the single tax. Mr. Chodorov is, one might say, agin' the government, any government practically. He has produced an essay in a very elegant style that explains his thesis and is quite a pleasure to read.

Some of the author's theories of economics, and of human psychology, do not seem to fit what

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is actually going on in the world and what apparently goes on in people's minds. He states his conclusions very well. But is it true that "nothing can be had with no effort"? People sometimes discover gold accidentally. Is it true that each of us, including the artists, "seeks to satisfy his desires with a minimum of effort"? Is it necessarily true that every government "is compounded of vanity and cupidity"?

Would it be feasible to entrust the putting out of fires to insurance companies or to turn the post office system over to private enterprise? Would it be a good thing to repeal the Sixteenth Amendment and let the Federal Government scratch gravel when it needed money? Is it demonstrably correct to say that "the modern 'welfare state' * * * is admittedly and boastfully the organization of force for the confiscation and distribution of property"?

From the One We Live In

It is no use to deny that arguments such as those Mr Chodorov presents have a certain appeal when there are so many things a citizen can be punished for not doing. None of us in his heart is pleased with the Sixteenth Amendment when the income tax comes due, or the selective-service laws when he or his son has to drop whatever else he is doing and go in for military service. It is unpleasant to be penalized for not having a license to do some natural thing. There are times, perhaps, when it is irksome that the state should step in when we get married, or should distribute our possessions after we die—in the latter case taking a fat percentage for itself.

The trouble with Mr. Chodorov's otherwise pleasing meditations may be that they do not fit the age in which we are fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to be alive. The centralization of our technology

makes it inevitable that there should be a centralization of power somewhere. If this centralization is not controlled by government, some private agency, or agencies, might really be the government. The mild old-fashioned philosophical anarchist can't be at home in today's world.

There is one other difficulty, of course. The Russian state and other Communist states are horrible caricatures of the state Mr. Chodorov describes. They would love to take us over and remake us in their image if we were not in a position to object—which we would not be if our Federal Government were emasculated, and particularly if its power to take our money away were eliminated, or greatly reduced.

The truth is Mr. Chodorov may be either two hundred years too late, or some generations too soon, but he doesn't fit the spring of 1959.