

THE COURSE OF DEMOCRATIC REFORM

ALTHOUGH a surprising degree of the it-can't-happen-here attitude remains among the masses the *coup d'état* in Prague, together with Communist successes in Greece and China, certainly marks a stage in the American and British Governments' preparations for war. And the form of these preparations seems likely to follow General Eisenhower's report of a military alliance of Western Europe and Latin America under the leadership and receiving the subsidies of the United States. These "loans" are apparently to be used in such a manner as to force the subsidiary governments to form "economic unions" with each other, and these military and economic arrangements are based on the assumption that all the peoples are engaged in "the good fight for our common heritage of liberty" and are bound together by "stout ties of common basic purpose."

No outsider can of course judge technical recommendations for marshalling killing machines. The citizen, however, might well remember that neither Cromwell nor Clive was a professional, that the Maginot Line and Singapore Base were monuments to the experts, and that the only adequate safeguard against professional ineptitude, i.e., free and enlightened discussion in Parliament, is badly provided for under a system of party dictatorship.

In assessing to what extent a system of doles can raise the wisdom and public spirit of "democratic" governments we must consider by what methods these governments obtain power. Under a voting system such as our own representation does not depend so much on the volume of enlightened opinion as on the swing of irresponsible votes in key constituencies, and, under the prevailing idea that "social reform" means the handing out of public money there is as much likelihood of any group using the American subsidy indirectly to buy a further lease of power than using it only as a step towards setting its finances on an honest basis. Perhaps politicians would reveal the truth to the people more readily if they knew no subsidy was forthcoming.

But when General Eisenhower assumes that there exists a large body of citizens—in our own country at least—enthusiastic for liberty he is refuted by the obvious fear in all quarters of Communist influence. Common experience tells us that very many of the leading spirits among the rank and file of the Labour Party, the convinced and consistent exponents of Socialism, hold views almost indistinguishable from the Communists. Every logical person who believes that under modern conditions self-reliance and a free market are impossible cannot in his heart resist some concessions to what is called Communism. The drift Socialisms which vainly try to reconcile state-monopoly with democracy fall victims to Communism with deadly monotony because, however illogical the masses may appear to be, logic has a way of asserting itself in the long run. The force of ideas never stands still; unless one set of ideas is gaining it must be losing, and it is important to remember that those who abandon Free Trade make the first concession to exactly that set of ideas which leads to Communism. To transfer power from Labourite Protectionism to Conservative Protectionism is to continue in the same direction while giving even more scope for Communist infiltration among the workers. And any programme of national defence that cannot count on the co-operation of factory workers cannot operate without the introduction of concentration camps.

The only basis, therefore for really effective steps towards national defence is to set the course of opinion towards and not away from liberty.

If this is accepted the task for the good citizen is to convince the masses that it is possible by reforming free institutions to enable every normal person to obtain for himself a more prosperous and satisfying life than any Communist can offer. We believe that it is wiser to acknowledge there is no easy way to achieve this objective rather than to await some adventitious means. We must argue, persuade and reason with the energy the occasion requires. After all, it is not necessary to convince every single person before any reform can be undertaken. A considerable majority, firmly convinced on any important measure, can often establish a reform about which a majority, although opposed, are not seriously concerned. And every real reform, once in force, renders further reform easier to achieve. The obvious results of lifting some trade restrictions, for example, would make it progressively more difficult for propaganda to assure the people that their welfare depends upon restricting production and exchange. If sheer necessity forces our rulers to lift some of the restrictions on trade between ourselves and the peoples of our potential allies those who lose their privileges by such a measure become recruits to the cause of depriving others of their privileges. The movement could become progressive and in the general atmosphere no fine distinctions could be drawn between external and internal restrictions. Men, after all, are usually born with a natural instinct towards freedom. This is apparent in the universal tendency on the part of normally honourable men to smuggle and circumvent restrictions without any feeling of sin.

It is useful to review the most effective directions any reform of democracy must take. If a democrat is to feel the responsibilities of a citizen, he must have an effective and independent vote; if he is to derive the greatest satisfaction from his work as well as his life he must have full freedom to exercise all his originality, skill and enterprise, and to reap the full reward of his services to his fellows, according to their unfettered judgment; if he is to feel a real "stake in the country" he must feel that he, in common with all his countrymen, is landlord of it. If every citizen enjoyed these rights it need not be feared that many would be willing to lend a sympathetic ear to Fifth Column suggestions or that any appreciable number would shrink from patriotic exertion to defend what they enjoyed. To reform our voting laws is not in itself difficult and it would ensure that defence measures received in Parliament much more adequate, enlightened and critical discussion than at present. To establish a free market, internally and externally, for goods and services would ensure a very great increase of efficiency in industry and in the productiveness of labour, sweeping reductions in national expenditure and an absolute increase in the labour force due to the army of officials set free for useful work. By providing more goods, and in greater variety, in the shops it would add enormously to the colour and interest of life and each person would feel more satisfaction and less envy if he was assured that none could obtain more than his fair share of these things by political influence. And if every producer, instead of being taxed on his energy, production and savings, as at present, were to be required to pay only on the value of the comparative advantages he

enjoyed in society—as registered accurately in the value of the land he occupied—all commodities would be cheaper, government itself would be simpler and opportunities for corruption fewer, and every man could at long last feel that his native land was indeed his.

If we in Great Britain could bring these things to pass it is virtually certain that most peoples of the world would be more concerned to profit by our example than to attack us or each other. But even if we only moved a few steps towards these reforms the great increase of confidence that would ensue would help to convince potential aggressors not only that we were more formidable than they supposed but that we were quite genuine in our desire to live at peace with them.

FREEDOM QUESTIONNAIRE

With Collectivist or Statist influence, from Right as well as from Left, supreme in almost all organs of public expression to-day the Editor believes that some of his readers might wish to exercise their command of that kind of knowledge which is more enduring than the usual radio and newspaper erudition. It is therefore proposed to issue from time to time questions and answers dealing with various aspects of the freedom idea from the standpoint of those who believe that "Liberty calls to us again. We must follow her further; we must trust her fully. Either we must wholly accept her or she will not stay."

Answers to the following questions will be found on page 132:—

- (1) The following names are in alphabetical order. Can you arrange them in chronological sequence and summarise each subject's contribution to free ideas?

Hirsch; Milton; Turgot.

- (2) From what famous book is the following quotation, and in what circumstances was it written?

"After dinner, M'Queen, the landlord of the inn, sat by us a while, and talked with us. He said, all the Laird of Glenmorison's people would bleed for him, if they were well used; but that seventy men had gone out of the Glen to America. That he intended to go next year; for that the rent of his farm, which twenty years ago was only five pounds, was now raised to twenty pounds. That he could pay ten pounds, and live; but no more—my companion said, he wished M'Queen Laird of Glenmorison, and the Laird to go to America."

- (3) Modern publicists assure us that the slums were due to "laissez-faire and the Industrial Revolution." Can you say to what extent there was freedom to produce and exchange at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution?

Canon WALTER HENRY HOWARD (of Adelaide, South Australia). We regret the death of one of our workers in the time of Stewart Headlam and Frederick Verinder, as reported in *Standard*, Sydney, N.S.W., September 9th, 1947. A great educationalist and rural incumbent in the "Craigie Country," he was appointed Canon of Adelaide in 1911 and served as Army Chaplain, 1916-21. Untiring in voice and plan for social justice, his last work is in some ways the most matured and strong, "The Land Question and Christian Justice" (6d.) is available in small supply from the International Union.

M. J. S.

FREE TRADE—FREE WORLD*

THE first book to deal with the great American success at the Geneva meeting of the International Trade Organisation up to the time of its adjournment in September, this volume, by a man long known for his readiness to dissent from governmental policies, is a vigorous plea for support of the Truman Administration's efforts to lower tariffs and tear down barriers to trade the world over.

Few Americans are aware of the complete revolution which is taking place in this field. "To-day's revolt against the tariff," says Mr. Villard, "is not due to any spontaneous popular demand nor to the rise of any other leader as eloquent in his attacks upon the protective system as was Woodrow Wilson. Yet there have been deep stirrings underneath which have finally compelled the extraordinary reversal of our governmental policy."

Just how far this astonishing overturn has gone, and what is going on in Washington, in a sense behind the scenes, Mr. Villard's facile pen vividly portrays. Yet he neither expects nor demands the wiping out of all tariffs, although insisting that the sole final objective must be complete economic freedom and free markets everywhere. Often called "the dean of American liberal journalists," he knows the pitfalls ahead of those seeking to remove the tariff evils and the dangers threatening from the present reactionary majority in Congress.

Among many important current topics, this book discusses our trade relations with our Dependencies, with Canada and with the British Isles. Beyond this, it graphically relates the history of our past tariff corruption, its catering to special privileges and its whole sordid political background.

The author is well aware that freedom of trade alone will not insure world peace. But, "whatever the new or old arguments which may be advanced as reasons for further bolstering of the protective tariff system, they are bound to prove erroneous because in free trade human freedom is itself at stake. Against the bedrock principle upon which rests the right to buy where and when one will, all compromises, all excuses for continuance of the exploitation of the masses for the benefit of the few will in the long run collapse. . . . To assert that with all our talents and our wealth, all our freedom from the many burdens shouldered by the peoples of what we used to call the 'effete nations' of Europe, it is not possible for us to live in happiness and prosperity in this world save behind the highest tariff walls, is to say that no peoples on this globe are capable of a satisfying life or of enlightened progress. . . ."

"The moral and financial leadership of the world is in our grasp," Mr. Villard concludes, "but we cannot hold it and use it for the betterment of mankind without absolute economic freedom wherever the American flag flies. To free the world, we must first free trade."

Oswald Garrison Villard is a natural defender of freedom of trade since he is the son and grandson of two distinguished free traders, William Lloyd Garrison and Henry Villard. For fifty years he has followed world events as editorial writer, president and managing-owner of the *New York Evening Post*, and from nineteen eighteen and nineteen thirty-two as owner and Editor of *The Nation*. The present book is his tenth published work.

The publishers are to be complimented on the excellence of its production.

* *Free Trade—Free World*. By Oswald Garrison Villard. New York, The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1947, 278 pp., \$3.00.