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Editor: A. W. Madsen

Assistant Editor: F. C. R. Douglas

34 KNIGHTRIDER STREET, LONDON, E.C.4

Telegrams: Telephone:
"Eulav, Cent., London." City 6701.

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THE GOOD SOCIETY

DISTRACTED AS the politically-minded world is by conflicting theories as to the proper forms and functions of Government, a welcome should be assured to Mr Walter Lippman's recently published book *The Good Society*. This is not, as its title might suggest, another excursion into the realm of imagination and the discovery of an Utopia where all goes right and nothing goes wrong. It is a sane and patient examination of the principles that must guide the progress of society if it is to arrive ultimately at a condition that can be called "Good." Its range of observation is world-wide. The information it conveys and the explanations it offers of the subtle influences that have produced the kaleidoscopic change of recent years, carry conviction of their trustworthiness. The reader who "skips" any of its 389 pages or skims lightly over its closely compacted arguments is defrauding himself of intellectual enlightenment and spiritual stimulus.

The earlier chapters of the book take the form of a valiant defence of nineteenth century liberalism. Mr Lippman believes that for a hundred years after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, the pioneers of liberalism were marching along the right road. They saw clearly that the salvation of society hinged upon the emancipation of human energy from the limitations and handicaps due to special privileges, monopolies and restrictions. He shows in copious detail what those pioneers *did* accomplish in removing barriers to human freedom; and it is unquestionable that in liberty of speech, of thought, of creed and personal behaviour, we owe them much. But about the year 1870—before Liberalism had fulfilled its mission of adapting the structure of society through the liberation of its citizens to the new economy that had come with the Machine and the Industrial Revolution—a change began to show itself. In the partially emancipated condition of society all the forms of economic injustice had not yet been eliminated, and poverty still prevailed despite rapidly increasing wealth. Discontent and rebellion became rife, and middle and upper-class consciences began to prick. Then came the captivating idea of planning and control of industrial conditions from above, facilitated by the rapid concentration of capital through new laws permitting incorporation and limited liability. This movement Mr Lippman calls "Collectivism" as meaning the treatment of men as masses of material to be handled rather than as individuals with separate and inviolable souls to be taken account of. Meantime, Liberalism had, in Mr Lippman's words, "run up a

blind alley and come to a dead end," leaving us, their successors, with many problems to solve as best we can. "We belong," he adds, "to a generation that has lost its way," and the remaining chapters may be described as a search for clues to the re-discovery of the right way.

The trouble with the contemporary Collectivist is that his intentions are good though his errors are fundamental. He has become imbued with the idea that government may be reduced to an art with definite formulæ according to which men and women may be impelled along the upward path. There are many reasons to show why this must be impossible. In the first place the material the governmental authority deals with does not react as do the insensate atoms upon which all our arts are based. And in the second place the executives of the controlling authority, being merely human, must necessarily lack the vision and understanding, and the super-human qualities appropriate to such a task. Carlyle remarks somewhere that when the blind lead the blind there is always a possibility that the destination may be reached with careful going and the aid of a good stick; but, he asks, when the squinting lead the squinting what chance is there of arriving at the goal? Authoritarians always fail to allow, not only for the obliquity of vision, and the personal bias and prejudice to which all men are liable, but to the inherent limitations of human nature—limitations, to lose consciousness of which is to imperil our sanity. They do not realize that no man has yet been born wise enough and good enough to govern another man *for that other man's good*. For there is a "something" in that other man that is the best part of him—a something that nobody knows of, that he himself is perhaps unaware of—an inviolable essence, a residual sub-consciousness which can be "governed" rightly only by being allowed self-expression—in a word, by Liberty.

We may pass for the moment the chapters on "The ascendancy of Collectivism," and "The wars of a collectivist world," to those entitled "The debacle of Liberalism," and "The agenda of Liberalism." The idea that holds these later chapters together and gives the book its unity and coherence, lies in the author's conviction that the industrial revolution to which we are committed, with its change-over from the old self-sufficient mode of earning livings to the new mode of specialization with sub-division of labour and world-wide markets, calls for a new social philosophy quite other than that of Collectivism or overhead planning. It calls for a government that recognizes its true function as being that of a dispenser of Justice and Equity among its citizens, and a protector against the exactions of monopoly or privilege in any form. Thus we might supervise a game of whist, not with the purpose of telling the players what to play, but solely to prevent cheating and to detect any departure from the rules of the game or the conventions of fair play.

That we must of very necessity return to this kind of government, by whatever name we shall call it, Mr Lippman prophesies with the confidence of a man of science who has caught sight of an irrefragable law of Nature. In some respects it may be unlike the liberalism of which we still have some more or less hazy memories. It will not be of the Spencerian "hands off" type which Huxley contemptuously described as "Administrative Nihilism." Indeed latter-day liberals

may think Mr Lippman's agenda of governmental functions so comprehensive as to come perilously near to that of the overhead planner. But a careful reading of the chapter will show that every item in his agenda conforms to the guiding principle of an ideal liberalism—that of sweeping away all monopolies, from those of the natural resources to the privilege of issuing money, and then by process of law modifying such inequalities of bargaining power as may remain. And if any one entertains a doubt as to whether Mr Lippman is "sound" on the land and taxation question or fully realizes its vital relation to social well-being, we beg him to read and re-read pages 276 and 277, remembering

at the same time that he is treating of general principles and not of the application of them in practice.

As a peroration to a most praiseworthy book the final chapter "On this Rock" is admirable. The Rock on which our author takes his stand is the dignity and the incommensurability of the human soul. As between liberty and dictatorship in any form we may quote his own words—"It is just here I submit, that the ultimate issue is joined, on the question whether men shall be treated as inviolable persons or as things to be disposed of; it is here that the struggle between barbarism and civilization, between despotism and liberty, has always been fought; and here it must still be fought."

ALEX MACKENDRICK.

THE WEST INDIES AND OTHER DEPENDENCIES

Col Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P., on the Causes of Unrest

IN THE DEBATE on the Colonial Office Vote, House of Commons 14th June, the Secretary of State, Mr Malcolm MacDonald announced the Government's decision to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into the social and economic conditions of the British West Indies and that a scheme of land settlement (by purchase of land) had been decided upon for Jamaica. Mr Lloyd George took part and approved the land purchase plan.

Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood said: He disagreed completely with Mr Lloyd George if he thought that by putting up money in this country, we could do justice to the people in the West Indies. That method had been tried and it left us with the situation we see to-day. We want a Royal Commission, not to find out the facts, but to do a little straight, honest, economic thinking. The late lamented Mr Malthus wept bitterly at the prospect of a world which would be over-populated and underfed. He discovered 100 years ago that we were moving towards a condition where population would out-run subsistence. We know that that has not happened. As population has increased and inventions have grown, foodstuffs, instead of becoming scarcer have become more abundant. Malthus and his despairing theories were upset completely by the late Mr Henry George. The right hon Gentleman appears still to be labouring under the Malthusian tragedy. Henry George, said in quite simple language, that "Men and hawks eat chickens, but the difference between the two is this, the more hawks the fewer chickens, but the more men the more chickens." And ever since Malthus's day we have been having more men and more chickens. The Secretary of State for the Colonies suggested that the combination of the increased population and the increased productivity of the land in Barbados and Porto Rico and elsewhere was ruining the people of the West Indies and was the damaging result of natural economic laws. Did he believe that an increase of population or an increase of production was a disaster to the world? If that were so, they should surrender themselves to the hope of higher tariffs, land monopoly and a bloody war. The idea that if we halved the population of this country, or the Barbados, there would be greater prosperity and more employment was the economics of the madhouse.

In a great part of the Empire, in Kenya, in parts of the West Coast of Africa, in Tanganyika, in Nyasaland and in Northern Rhodesia different methods were devised by the people who need workers to get labour cheap. In Kenya they had the method of the hut tax, which forced the people to go out to earn money in order to pay their hut tax. In Nyasaland, they had a restriction on the number of natives who leave the

country to go and work elsewhere in order that they may work cheaply instead for employers in Nyasaland. Every sort of device is used, but chiefly the device of taking away the land from the native so that he cannot employ himself.

Col Wedgwood contrasted the conditions in Nigeria, where for the last 30 years there had been no trouble. Why was that? Because a system of land tenure had been established giving satisfaction. All the farmers in Nigeria held their land with security of tenure, subject to paying the rent to the State, which rent was regulated every 7 or 14 years, not according to the use that a man makes of it, but according to the land value. There you had free peasantry cultivating their own land and suffering neither from under-employment nor from over-employment.

In Jamaica the Governor has put forward a scheme, accepted by the Government, whereby £500,000 would be spent in buying land in order to settle the peasants upon it. The British people would be paying interest on that £500,000. We were buying up the land from the people who own it and have taken it from the native inhabitants of the island, and handing the land back to the natives and settling them upon the land! If they would but apply the taxation of land values, it would produce the land settlement that is needed, without coming to this country for money to buy out the landlords in those Colonies.

An example of Government action was what happened in regard to Newfoundland. The Royal Commission had advocated a tax in order to break up the big estates and force the land into the market and into production. That was not adopted. Here we had an impartial body of commissioners inquiring into things on the spot and making this recommendation, but the Colonial Office said: "That is heresy. We must do these other things, but we will leave that out."

Referring finally to the troubles in Palestine, Col Wedgwood said: In Palestine, the land was at the root of the evil. As long as the price of land is inconceivably high, you will have unemployment and stagnation in the country. There are acres and acres, square miles of the country, which could be redeemed and be made productive, but which is still held out of the market while Jews are starving in Poland and Vienna. The land is there for them if they were given the opportunity to use it.

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