

George v Marx

IN "Poverty and War", David Redfearn goes far and deep into the origins and causes of war, providing a sort of sequel to Henry George's "Progress and Poverty". He dates his material from about 1500, and devotes much space to the two World Wars, which we are able to study closely because many of us lived through the second and a few through the first as well, and can remember the political manoeuvres which preceded them.

War is a symptom of a chronic social disease which most people deem to be incurable - another fact of life. But they are wrong. The conflict which raged world wide between 1914 and 1945 was really one war, with a long breathing space in the middle during which the combatants sulkily licked their wounds and blamed everyone but themselves for the disaster.

The real culprits - the instigators lurking behind the Kaiser and Hitler were, as usual, the land-and-capital monopolists who, by persistent exploitation of the landless created surplus goods and capital, for which outlets had to be found. There was also the problem of surplus people - the over-population myth again - including the unemployed; so, apart from Jews and other "undesirables" whom the Nazis disposed of in their uniquely horrific way, additional living space had to be sought, and that meant colonising - a euphemistic term meaning grabbing someone else's land.

But the natives of the desired new territories usually object strongly to this idea and such schemes of expansion erupt into bloodshed on both sides. Scarcely any of

what we call the Western Nations have been guiltless in this respect; it is significant to note that most of the countries and states of what we call the (undeveloped) Third World have at some time or another been colonised by one or more of the former.

"If the world is to be saved for posterity," say Mr. Redfearn, "the natural instinct for common right in land must be restored and cherished. Nothing else will break the relentless sequence of private ownership - monopoly - poverty - weak home markets - competition for foreign markets - war."

In two absorbing chapters he examines the reasons why this century Marx has been followed rather than George. Put into the smallest of nutshells it is because "whereas a grasp of George's principles requires some small part of his own powers of analysis and deduction, to understand or to think one understands the principles of Marx requires no more than submission to a pair of apparently obvious propositions.

"It is necessary to accept without question the concepts of the dictatorship of the proletariat and public ownership of the 'means of production'; for neither of them survives questioning. Fortunately for would-be dictators, but unfortunately for humanity, acceptance of such vague substitutes for reason comes all too easily to the majority of people."

BOB MILLER

Seymour Rauch. *Legalized Stealing: The American Way of Life*, New York, Peter Lang, 1989.

IT WAS way back in the 16th century that Etienne de La Boétie wrote, in his *Discours de la servitude volontaire*:

"It is the people who enslave themselves, who cut their own throats, who, having the choice either to be slaves or to be free, abandon their freedom and take up the yoke, and, capable though they are of living under good laws, and under the protection of States, choose to live under iniquity, oppression and injustice, at the whim of this tyrant."

What La Boétie meant by "this tyrant" we shall never know for certain. It might have been a contemporary king, one of the tyrants of antiquity whom he had cited as examples, or even what is now referred to vaguely as "the system".

He would no doubt have insisted on the second interpretation, in order to avoid the

Right mix!

fate of his tutor at university, who had been burnt alive for expressing opinions that the Government found unpalatable.

Luckily, governments no longer consider it necessary to burn people alive, finding at best that the "genial humbug", as Stephen Leacock put it, of what are generally considered to be democratic institutions will do much the same job of maintaining iniquity, oppression and injustice.

All the more reason then for doing one's best to convince people that this is the kind of system under which they live, and to show them how a better one may be achieved. Convince enough of them, as La Boétie saw, and no further action will be necessary. The politicians, the civil servants, the police, the soldiers devoted to law and disorder will no longer come for-

ward in sufficient numbers; and insufficient notice will be taken of the ones who do.

Seymour Rauch's book is no mean part of the resulting fairly scarce literature in favour of basic social justice, which needs to be composed with all sorts and conditions of people in view.

His targets are American economics specialists, graduate or undergraduate, who are not yet familiar with Henry George's or his own ideas on what constitutes right and wrong in the world of production and exchange.

For them, the rapid-fire dialogue, in a vernacular spicy but not of the Bowery, will prove an entertaining preparation for a fresh look at the present state of human affairs. The same may very well be true of their counterparts in the rest of the English-speaking world; but the book is not for the average general reader. *David Redfearn*