

WHERE THE WORLD IS GOING

BY ROLAND HUGINS

SINCE the conclusion of the world war, searching questions have been asked of the future. In what respects will this new era be different from the old? In what direction is civilization really moving? What is the underlying drift in this post-war world? Passing events have called forth a number of hasty generalizations. When Communist revolutions swept Russia and Hungary, the world was said to be moving toward the "rule of the proletariat." When Mussolini in Italy and de Rivera in Spain seized the reins of government, the mood of the day was said to be "a search for dictators." When Premiers MacDonald of England and Herriot of France appeared on the scene, observers declared that the nations had begun a "swing to the left." When Baldwin in Great Britain and Coolidge in the United States won imposing victories at the polls, the world was declared to be seeking "shelter in conservatism." As each new set of actors comes upon the stage, another irresistible movement is discovered. The fact is, however, that the various trends overlap, wane, and recur, so that the total impression is one of confusion. If we are journalistic in our attitude, and seize upon the event of the hour as significant, we are bouyed up or depressed by each day's news. If we endeavor to fit all the conflicting trends into a consistent pattern, we find that the facts are seemingly self-contradictory.

Unfortunately, certain morbid tendencies of the present movement are all too clear. Democracy is on the wane, and is being supplanted in Europe and South America by governments which rely essentially on coercion. The masses seem content to be governed by strong minorities, if only they are efficiently governed. To

theoretical arguments in favor of liberty men and women pay little attention. Only experience with oppression teaches mankind to value freedom. After a few generations the memory of former tyranny grows dim, and a new tyranny, dressed in some specious philosophy, establishes itself. The old human propensity to make others do as we wish then reasserts itself. Russia has been suppressing free speech in order to fight and exclude Capitalism; the United States has been suppressing free speech in order to fight and exclude Bolshevism. Those who expected that the privileges of free speech, free assemblage, and self-government would be rehabilitated as the passions of the war died down now know that they delude themselves. Time alone does not bring stabilization and freedom.

In our post-war era the extremes of the political scale are driven further apart. Liberalism has been stretched to radicalism, to communism, to proletarianism. Conservatism has been extended to die-hard Toryism, to Fascism, to Caesarism. Russia at this moment stands further to the Left, and Italy further to the Right, than did any nation before the world war. In some countries, like Great Britain, the center or liberal party gradually disintegrates, while radicalism and toryism grow in strength at its expense. The pendulum of political oscillation swings across a wider arc than in the past. These extremes react upon and embitter each other, and may lead very possibly in some countries to civil wars.

At the same time the barriers to international violence seem to have grown more rather than less brittle. The eagerness with which nations exploit exclusive sources of raw materials, like rubber or oil, to the industrial detriment of other nations; the increasing exasperation of the colored races, yellow, brown, and black, under the exactions of white imperialism; the resumption of rivalry in armaments, which when confined at one point, breaks out in another; the intense preoccupation of statesmen with alliances and nationalistic understandings; the new radiance which has come to invest patriotic ideals; all these signs appear to portend further great wars.

We have with us, now as always, certain dogmatic theorists who profess to read the whole future like an open book. Unfortunately, however, these theorists divide sharply into rival camps. One group calls for optimism; the other group for pessimism. According to the hopeful prophets, the miseries of this post-war era, its constant alarms, minor wars, political excesses, and economic

shortages are the inevitable after-effects of the great conflict; tremors which naturally follow an earthquake in human affairs; flare-ups from a conflagration which is dying down and ultimately will be extinguished. All great wars, it is said, are followed by disturbances. In due time we shall return to stability, and resume the onward march of humanity. The future, so these optimists maintain, holds unlimited possibilities, industrial and scientific. Ultimately we shall conquer war, poverty, and vice. Our children will live in a more sober, more productive, more efficient, and hence a happier society. In a word, progress is inevitable, and though the curve of progress may show occasional zigzags and temporary retrogressions, its long-time trend is steadily upward.

No such rosy developments are foreseen by the pessimists. They fear that mankind has turned the wrong corner; when the world has recovered from its prostration it will be plunged by its ineradicable hates and its irrational fears into fresh wars. Neither pacifists nor Leagues can prevent the nations from asserting their conflicting ambitions. Modern science has rendered warfare so devastating that one or two struggles will destroy civilization. Each successive upheaval will be accompanied by blacker reaction and followed by more desperate revolt. Spiritually, say the pessimists, the modern world is sick; radically, it is decadent. The inferior human stocks are swamping the better strains. Our complex civilization will collapse of its own weight when its biological foundations have crumbled. The end of all must be a new Dark Ages, with centuries of painful effort to regain lost ground.¹ We can do little or nothing to arrest this slip down into the dark. In brief, the history of mankind moves in cycles, with alternate epochs of civilization and savagery; and we are now on the downward slope of the curve.

Either of the foregoing theories may be made to appear plausible if the evidence to support it is selected with sufficient partiality. But all such doctrines savor too much of predestination. Who can really prove that some inner necessity drives civilization either along an ascending spiral, or around a sagging circle? The history of mankind is not long enough as yet to enable us to formulate a rigid "law of progress." We of this generation shall do well if we are able to predict the next long swing.

¹ This cyclical theory has received a brilliant exposition by Oswald Spengler in his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.

Before we can undertake a realistic prediction of the future, we need to glance back to the liberal and humanitarian movements of the past. We need to recall the rise and decline of liberalism, which constituted the outstanding chapter in the history of the last hundred years. In particular we must not forget to note, at the end of the chapter, the portentous footnote of Socialistic revolt.

Treitschke declared that Liberalism was the one really new thing that the Nineteenth Century produced. As a matter of historical development, however, the liberalism of the Nineteenth Century grew directly out of the idealism of the Eighteenth Century. Those doctrines of natural and inalienable rights, and those declarations of religious, political, and economic freedom, which Voltaire, Rousseau, Locke, Adam Smith, and a score of other radical spirits had proclaimed to an earlier generation, were the texts on which the liberals drew and relied. The liberals took the next step: they applied principles to institutions. In that "long transition from feudality to the present time," liberalism was a logical though transitory phase.

The liberal movement left its mark on the whole Western world; but its manifestations differed from country to country according to national character and circumstance. After the tremendous upheaval of her great revolution, France experienced oscillations between republicanism and monarchism, lasting until the establishment of the Third Republic. In the United States, after the War for Independence and the adoption of the constitution, democratic and liberal ideas had practically a free field for many decades. In Germany, Austria, and Italy, liberal doctrines led first to the revolts of 1842, and later to a long series of social reforms.

It was in England, however, that liberalism came to a full, though tardy, bloom. The excesses of the French Revolution evoked a strong tory reaction across the Channel. Indeed, so perturbed were Englishmen that, as Macaulay says,² there was scarcely a man in the country with a good coat on his back who did not join in the hue and cry against France and against republican theories. The British radicals of those days—who would be considered very mild fellows now—were subjected to an intensive persecution, and were jailed, mobbed, and deported. This persecution furnishes a striking historical parallel to the bounding of radicals and Reds in the

² *Essay on the Younger Pitt.*

United States after the world war, when the propertied classes in America had been terrified by the spectacle of Bolshevism in Europe.

By the eighteen-thirties of the last century toryism in England was on the run. The Whig Party became the Liberal Party, and adopted for its creed the doctrines of laissez faire and individualism elaborated by Bentham and Mill. Political leaders such as Cobden, Bright, and Gladstone forced through a program of free trade, parliamentary reform, extension of the suffrage, colonial self-government, and non-interference in foreign affairs. The Liberal Party was the dominating political force in Britain for the next half century.

Looking back over a hundred years it can scarcely be denied that the achievements of liberalism were substantial. Some of its more important victories were these: freedom of worship and the removal of religious disabilities; the establishment of representative government on the basis of manhood suffrage; the abolition of slavery throughout most of the world; the reform of prisons and the softening of the penal code; the spread of elementary education; and an impetus to economic productivity through guarantees of equal opportunity. The world of the last century and the world we know today would be vastly different had not the liberals won their early battles.

The nature of Nineteenth Century liberalism is now frequently misrepresented. In our time the creed of liberalism has been watered down to a vague enthusiasm for social welfare in general, which finds adequate expression in that loose formula: "the greatest good of the greatest number." But the driving force behind the liberalism of the last century was a passion for liberty. Those early and orthodox liberals had a lively faith in the curative power of freedom. In their attacks on caste government, on religious intolerance, on slavery, on colonial oppression, and on tariffs and trade restrictions, they were animated chiefly, though perhaps not solely, by the determination to set men free. Their notion of the essential character of liberty may have been a little naive. It is possible now to perceive that the early liberals were too much inclined to identify liberty with liberation, and too ready to believe that once the shackles of the Past were stricken off, men and women would quite automatically become good, and prosperous, and happy. None the less freedom was to them the method and measure of progress. And fundamentally they perhaps were right.

At the very time, however, that liberalism appeared to be triumphant, its influence and prestige began to wane. Not only did it fail to push its way through the weakened defenses of monarchism in Central and Northern Europe, but it began to sicken in the house of its friends. For a variety of reasons this turn in the tide of opinion remained hidden from the majority of thinking men and women. Its outward manifestations took several decades to develop. The contraction of empires ceased, and a new movement of colonial expansion began, this time marked by the absorption of lands inhabited by backward peoples and rich in natural resources. Great Britain built up a mighty new empire of crown colonies, and France carved out a colonial domain only second in size. Germany, Italy, Belgium, and most of the other powers joined in the scramble, a little late. A succession of colonial wars, notably by reason of their sordid deceptions and unusual barbarities, proved almost invariably successful for the European expeditions. Slavery in a thinly disguised form was reintroduced in various parts of Africa and Asia; and in some colonial areas, particularly in Western Africa, the enforced labor of natives was maintained by torture and atrocity. A new race of armaments, on land and sea, was started and accelerated.

These manifestations of liberal decay did not attract the attention they warranted because they took place largely in the half-hidden realm of foreign affairs; whereas in the field of domestic politics the impetus of liberalism had not yet spent itself. Movements were on foot for the extension of the suffrage to women, for old age pensions, for a shorter working day, for safeguarding the laborer's safety and health, for higher taxes on unearned incomes, and for a firmer democratic control of the machinery of government. In Britain those leaders who, like Morley and Campbell-Bannerman, objected to imperialistic adventures, were held to be old-fashioned, while the younger generation of liberals—Grey, Asquith, Haldane, Lloyd-George and their kind—successfully made the straddle between reaction abroad and progress at home by denominating themselves "Liberal Imperialists," and by invoking the spell of the new black magic of the age, national efficiency. The same tendencies manifested themselves elsewhere. Germany, for example, established an elaborate and beneficent system of social insurance within her borders, and launched an intelligent attack on the problems of

poverty, disease, and crime; and at the time she pursued in her foreign relations a policy of blood and iron. So while the old forms and labels remained, the spirit of liberalism was evaporating. The former respect for the individual as such, the enthusiasm for tolerance, and the cosmopolitan good-will gave way to a new discipline, a new self-righteousness, and a new truculence. After 1880 liberalism was like a spent bullet: it still travelled, but its momentum was slackening.

The sickness of liberalism in the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, although for the most part unnoticed, did not escape comment from a few astute observers. In 1874 John Morley wrote:³

Within the last century England has lost one by one each of those enthusiasms which may have been delusions, but which at least testified to the existence among us of a vivid belief in the possibility of certain broad general theories being true and right, as well as in the obligation of making them lights to practical conduct and desire. . . . It is possible that the comparatively prosaic results before our eyes at the end of all have thrown a chill over our political imagination. The old aspirations have vanished, and no new ones have arisen in their place.

In a book published in 1904, ten years before the beginning of the world war, L. T. Hobhouse marshalled evidence to prove how widespread and profound was the reaction against liberal ideals, and sought to explain the causes of the reaction.⁴ Hobhouse said:

During some twenty, or it may be thirty years, a wave of reaction has spread over the civilized world and invaded one department after another of thought and action. This is no unprecedented occurrence. In the onward movement of mankind, history shows us each forward step followed by a pause, and too often by a backsliding in which much of the ground gained is lost. Of the causes of this rythmical, yet tragic alteration we know little. Does popular government, with the influence which it gives to the press and the platform, necessarily entail a blunting of moral sensibility, a cheapening and vulgarization of national ideals, an extended scope for canting rhetoric and poor sophistry as a

³ *On Compromise*, London, 1874.

⁴ *Democracy and Reaction*, London, 1904.

cover for the realities of the brutal rule of wealth? Or should we rather trace the reaction to the temper of the time and the mode of thought prevailing in the world? Is it that after the great reforming movement of the Nineteenth Century a period of lassitude has set in; that the ideals of the reform have lost their efficiency; that its watchwords cease to move, while the blank thus left is filled in by shallow philosophies or sheer materialism?

In America this note of disillusionment with liberalism and democracy made itself heard somewhat later.⁵ Of course, after the catastrophies of the great war, and its sequel of unhappy peace, the discomfiture of the Liberal parties became apparent to everyone. In late years liberalism has shrunk visibly, not only on prestige, but in numbers of adherents.

The war itself dealt a shattering blow to liberalism. After the conflict was over, hosts of people turned away from the Liberal parties in disgust, and moved toward either radicalism or conservatism. In whatever countries the liberals were in control at the beginning, during the course, or at the conclusion of the war, they managed to belie and abandon their liberal principles. They gave lip service to liberal ideals and made effective use of liberal slogans, but they shaped their policies and deeds in the spirit of British and American Toryism, French Bourbonism, and German Junkerism. It is obvious now that the world war was basically a huge scramble for power, commerce, and colonies. Its motivating forces were mutual fears and mutual greeds. But these ancient motives could not, so the Liberal statesmen thought, be frankly avowed in a world which had been fed for more than a century on democratic dogmas. So the war, ethically speaking, had at all times two aspects: an outer and fabricated pretense of noble and endangered ideals, and an inner and realistic core of sordid plots and bargains. The agreements and undertakings which precede the outbreak in 1914, and which determined the alignments of contending forces, were concluded surreptitiously by foreign ministers and by cabinets, and were brazenly denied in parliaments. During the course of the conflict the word propaganda became a synonym for lying. Occasionally some one would blurt out the truth, as when a German Chancellor admitted

⁵ See, for example, *The New Democracy*; by Walter E. Weyl, published in 1912; and *Liberalism in America*, by Harold Stearns, published in 1919.

that he regarded this country's guarantee of Belgian neutrality as a mere scrap of paper. When the fighting was once in full swing, debate behind the lines was suppressed. Far beyond the needs of military censorship, free speech was suspended, protests were stifled, and dissenting minorities were dragooned into silence.

Safely sheltered behind the flames of popular passion which war always kindles, small cliques began, ran, and concluded the war. When the peace settlements were being arranged at Paris, the Allied Governments brought forward a number of secret treaties which they had negotiated among themselves during the struggle, by the terms of which they had generously promised each other everything in sight. These secret treaties were urged as justification for the dishonor of violating the terms of the Armistice. Who indeed needed to bother to keep his word with the atrocious and perfidious Germans? Were they not beaten, helpless? To their shame, the American representatives at the Peace Conference signed and later defended the notorious treaties of Versailles, which gave to dishonor the force of law.

Doubtless those European statesmen who in the name of high motives tramped on every moral principle in order to win the war and to gather its spoils, were something better than crafty conspirators. They were in part men of confused mind, blinded by the glamour of that new nationalism which covers an old barbarism. But the fact remains that they were devious and disingenuous, and that by their successful deceptions they trifled with the lives and happiness of millions. They did not scruple to make use of mendacity in order to manipulate the passions, loyalties, and sacrifices of whole nations. By many men and women who are still war-minded, these leaders are honored even today. But by many others they are scorned; and the "liberalism" which they preached and betrayed is viewed with skepticism, or suspicion, or disdain.

The world does not yet realize what a loss it has sustained in the disruption of liberalism. For that disruption the liberals themselves are, of course, chiefly to blame. They have been traitors to every liberal principle except free trade, and even on that score they have been lukewarm. The critics of liberalism have asserted that liberals ceased to think with the death of John Stuart Mill, and that they lost their grip on affairs when they failed to evolve an economic program to supplement their political program. Is it now

too late to formulate a new liberal program? Certainly little is being done at present to put fresh content into the old slogans.

While liberalism was gradually transforming itself into an intellectual and moral vacuum, Socialism was rushing in to take its place. Few people realize how recent a phenomenon Socialism, in the Marxian sense, really is. *Das Kapital*, it is true, was first published in German in 1867. But the ideas of Karl Marx, that aristocratic German Jew who married a Countess and who spent the best years of his life in the British Museum studying all the theories of economic value from the Sixteenth Century forward,—the ideas of this founder of “scientific” socialism were slow to penetrate into other lands. The first translation of *Capital* was made into Russian in the seventies—a fact of some significance in view of later events. But the book was not translated into English or French until the nineties, and did not appear in many other languages until after the opening of the Twentieth Century. Of course most people obtained their ideas of scientific socialism not from translations of *Das Kapital*, but from popular expositions or refutations of the Marxian thesis.

Before 1914 the Socialists wrote, ranted, held conferences, quarrelled, split hairs, organized political parties, and had considerable influence on social legislation. But they controlled no great nation. Then in the Russian Revolution of October, 1917, they exploded into a world power. The Bolsheviks have just celebrated the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of their reign. In Russia they seem firmly entrenched.

Many persons have expressed surprise that the Soviet Government, with its extreme economic doctrines, has managed to stay in the saddle so long. But it is really far more surprising that the previous reign of the Czars and the Grand Dukes, a foul and oppressive tyranny, endured for several hundred years. All kinds of government, including the worst, seem to “work.” The Soviet regime, with its vigorous program for the improvement and enlightenment of the proletariat, that is, of the working masses, and despite its use of terroristic methods and its suppression of free discussion, is certainly not the worst government the world has seen, or tolerates today.

But does Communism hold the future in its hands? Is it the beacon that will guide the world out of its folly and unrest to the

happy land of social peace and plenty? The Bolsheviks are daily assailed by their critics in other countries with hatred and fury. But we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that there are millions of people throughout the world who are watching the Russian experiment with a furtive hope in their hearts that it will be a brilliant success. Why? Because these millions are in some degree dissatisfied with their own social and economic arrangements and with their own way of life, and are looking somewhere—anywhere—for deliverance. And the Communists believe in themselves; they have faith; a religious fervor. In all the Allied countries patriots lay wreaths and say prayers at the shrine of an Unknown Soldier. But in Russia they lay their flowers and say their prayers at the tomb of Lenin. A faith of this sort is a contagious thing. Religions have often in the past spread beyond the borders of the country in which they were born.

But the future does not belong to Communism—not as exemplified in Russia today. Of course any prediction of the human future must of necessity reflect the personal bias, and the hopes, of him who predicts. Yet certainly, looking back over the social aspirations and struggles of the last century and a half, it would be presumptuous to assert that liberalism must die utterly, without contributing anything further to social and political doctrine and practice. Liberalism meant, in essence, liberty; and liberty is a food that modern man will not permanently do without, however tempting the substitutes offered. On the other hand, proletarianism unquestionably holds a core of truth which will survive. The idea that the interests of the toiler are paramount to those of the social parasite, no matter how glittering, and the idea that labor has first claim not only to its economic hire but to economic surpluses, these ideas, once let loose in the world, are not likely to be exterminated.

The tomorrow of our world will be dominated by a social philosophy which is even now being hammered out on the anvils of experience. If this philosophy must have a name, it is best designated as Labor-Liberalism. Many minds will work together for its elaboration. It will be no thin, violent, one-sided creed, but will embrace all the essential social values. It will not sacrifice liberty to equality, nor pity to justice. Such an all-inclusive, sane, social philosophy is possible, and it will succeed.