

Book Review

REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY, by Frederic C. Howe. B. W. Heusch, New York City. 238 pp. with index. Price \$2.

THE publishing house of B. W. Heusch continues to be hospitable to the radical intelligentsia. I use the term radical in the broad sense as conceived in popular estimation, which lumps together all those manifesting varying degrees of non-conformity, from mildly protesting liberals to those calling themselves Socialists. The radical intelligentsia to a man, are strong critics of the present imperialistic phase of capitalist development. Monopoly control and sabotage of finance, industry and commerce, and control of the political state by monopolists and the directing of its powers into predatory and war-like policies, sets investigating minds and accusing pens to work. The result is, many books containing much useful data, even if often served up with a mish mash of economic and political theory.

"Revolution and Democracy," by Frederic C. Howe, is the latest book of this kind to hand. The author according to publishers' announcement has, during the last fifteen years, published a series of works on "constructive democracy: on what was being done in different countries to control the power of privilege and divert the gains of civilization to the masses of the people." As for myself, speaking as a proletarian, sorry the doing, methinks! But Dr. Howe does not view the social problem from that lowly proletarian level; the exploited masses of the people include, for him, the middle class of farmers, small business and professional callings. These people sense a subordination in status and decrease of social prestige, owing to loss of economic opportunity since the order of free competition gave way to the order of special privilege and monopoly control. The caste system is here in the U. S. A. we are told. As the jargon has it, stratification has set in. It is the sentiments, the protests and social aspirations of this class that Dr. Howe and the radical intelligentsia express in particular, though they voice a general protest and conceive that all other sections of the socially submerged would benefit equally from their proposed reforms. And so, though his book, the product of a trained investigator who is also a lucid writer, contains a great deal of much needed data and information as to the growth of monopoly privileges and imperialisms, the proletarian will not find in it a thorough-going and devastating criticism of the fundamentals of capitalism. It is true that the general scheme of social life and activity today is shown as shaped by the economic interests of a privileged class, but middle class prepossessions appear to be firmly held to. The golden age of man's sojourn on earth is taken to be the early days of the nineteenth century, when an approach to equality of opportunity is presumed to have prevailed. To quote: "Fifty years ago there was an approach to equality of opportunity. Competition was the prevailing note in industry. Business was organized in small units. Men worked willingly. Values were fixed by production costs. Nations were largely self-contained. International finance was limited to the settlement of trade balances. There was equal access to the raw materials of the world. Imperialism was confined to a few subject countries. Freedom was the prevailing note in trade, in commerce, and in industry. This was true not only in America; it was also true of Great Britain, France and Germany, as well." Verily, that is the past strained through the mesh of imagination; thus is history rationalized.

In spite of much current sociological paraphernalia, of Guild Socialism, co-operation, labor partnership, single tax, socialization of transportation and means of communication, the economic and political theories of Dr. Howe have as a philosophical background the beliefs of the eighteenth century in an "Order of Nature." This is evidenced both by his frequent use of such terms as a "natural" order of society, "nature's laws," as applied to society, as well as by a chapter, under the caption, "A Natural Society," which he devotes to contrasting the principles of such a society with what he calls the "artificial" principles of all political societies that ever existed,

past as well as present. The Order of Nature theory is a figment which I have no space at present to discuss. Despite the author's animus against political society, no fundamental reconstruction of society upon new bases can be looked for in his social programme. For, contained in it, is the retention of private property in the means of production, the very basis of political society, though ownership is to carry confiscatory liabilities on all values produced over and above a just reward for enterprise: a reward, which somehow, is to automatically establish itself in the free play of competitive conditions in industry. The confiscated surplus or differential values which accrue from the monopoly control of location, lands, mineral resources, timber stands, etc are to be taxed, as economic rent, into the social treasury to meet the needs of society. Land and natural resources, which are not in use are also to be taxed until the owners put them to use or forfeit them to the State, which will hold them free for access to all—to all with the necessary capital that is. For we are to have free credit—for "men of resource, ability and integrity." And so on and on in close accordance with the single tax programme with which the reader may be more or less familiar. "Freedom, mental as well as economic, would," he says, "be the great gain from the change. It would react upon the mind of America. It would enable men to be home owners instead of tenants. Home owners have always been free men. It is this that lies back of the democracy of France. It is this that explains the democracy of Denmark. It is this that gave birth to the new Irish movement, just as it is this that has made Australia and New Zealand the democratic countries that they are." (Emphasis mine):

Truly distance in space, as well as time, lends enchantment to the view. Dr. Howe looks as romantically upon peasant proprietorship and colonial life as he does upon the early nineteenth century "free" competitive system. What, I suspect, he does see in the latter is not the real life and economic conditions of that period, but the hypothetical, highly normalized competitive system of the classical economists as elaborated in their works. In those works, the system of free competition reigns supreme, and all who possess thriftiness, honesty and ability may have access to the means of production, the producer gets the full product of his toil, the employer, in forwarding his own interests, serves the interest of the community, and the traders make an honest living by selling goods at prices determined by labor cost, and so also serve the common good. This was spoken of by the economists and publicists as the "normal system of economic life," the "natural state of man." And any advance or departure beyond this working ideal must be pruned back at all hazards; so it was conceived. (See Veblen's "The Vested Interests.") It is a pruning back to that ideal of economic lore that Dr. Howe and his fellow radicals have in mind, and in keeping intact the chief essential of capitalism, the ownership by a section of the people of society's means of life—a privileged class after all. The benefits of ownership, it is true, are to be limited by the regulatory control of the community. But, time and time again in this world's history, it has been shown that property interests gather around themselves social prestige, powers of persuasion, patronage and coercion, both open and secret, whose corrupting and intimidating influence have broken down all barriers to power. Competition is the mother of monopoly as the histories of all past societies on a property basis illustrate. And in the peaceful predation of the business world in modern times, monopoly is the normal outgrowth of business enterprise. What naive child-like optimism it is, that would voluntarily begin again the great historic experiment!

The ameliorative reforms of the radicals, however, despite their feint at the big interests, will find little support among the working masses, and with the passing days, less so. Changing conditions of economic life, whose full impact the workers bear at first hand, are breeding in their minds new ways of thinking and social ideals that look forward to the abolition of private ownership of the means of life, and the establishing in its stead, social ownership and control of economic powers. The workers' ideals are such, because the social nature of production, together with the anarchy that has resulted from pri-

vate control, do unremittingly bend their thoughts to that solution. And so, in degree of nearness to realities, the thinking of intelligent workers on social problems has left that of the radical intelligentsia far behind.

As in duty bound, I have taken exception to Dr. Howe's political and economic theories, yet I must praise and recommend his book for much valuable and informative matter contained in it. The Marxian Socialist may well clarify and sharpen his own ideas by studying his opponents theories, and, at the same time, take the material facts and conditions, the data, upon which Dr. Howe basis his attack on this latter monopolistic and imperialistic phase of capitalist development, and give to them a wider and deeper application than they were originally intended for. I give beneath the chapter titles to indicate the subjects treated in the book:

Labor, Coal, Food, Circulation, Land, Credit, Alien Capitalism, Opinion, Culture, Exploiters, The State, Politics, Overhead, Feudalism, Civilization, Sabotage, A Natural Society, Russia, Freedom, The First Step, Free Communication, Free Credit, Industrial Democracy. C. S.

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