

# Thoughts Current

● By Ernest M. Hopkins

Traveling in Europe last year, I had some unusual opportunities to learn about the grave changes in the fate of nations made by the rival philosophies of Communism and Fascism, and to reflect upon these. I saw Fascism at work in Italy, and I met friends who had been intimately in touch with affairs respectively in Russia and in Germany. The testimony was unanimous, and the evidence supporting this was indisputable, that the character of great peoples was altering and that fate, ever dependent upon character, was altering with it. Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin were guiding their nations to new and strange ideals and aims. Those aims and those ideals I abhorred, but I could not be indifferent to many phases of the spirit engendered by the austere and determined purpose which offered no bribe or bounty but demanded that men and women do something held up to them as duty, cost what it might in suffering, poverty, and death.

The aims to be reached seemed to me sinister, the very negation of that freedom which develops young men and women intellectually and morally. But here, at least, the people were not told that material comfort was their right, that whether they sought work or not a comfortable living must be provided for them; and, more than all, they were learning to know that life held a purpose for them ampler and less selfish than their own individual salvation.

When I came home, how different was the scene! Here was the country dedicated by our fathers to the ideal of a commonwealth wherein the purpose of government was that opportunity should be open to all; where the age-long barriers between class and class should be no longer insurmountable; where men must work for their reward, and when work was done that reward should not be withheld; where self-respect carried with it the respect of the community; where it was a common obligation, not to be shifted to town or county or state, for a man to help his own, up to the very limit of his capacity.

Here in America it is doubtless true that the aftermath of war and the natural forces of 1920-1930 have helped to weaken the American spirit, but it appalled me to see the artificial political forces of the Roosevelt régime devoted to breaking down and making soft the whole structure of life among us, not only in its physical but in its mental and spiritual aspects. It seemed to me that all the forces of democracy dedicated from the foundation of the Republic to hardening the self-reliance and personal responsibility of every citizen were now being utilized to belittle and undermine the very qualities of individualism which made this country strong and through which its future lay. It seemed to me that a premium was being put upon class warfare rather than upon coöperation. In short, I had the acute sensation that instead of returning to the Land of Promise, which I had always considered the United States to be, I was returning to a land where erratic and ill-considered experiment was being substituted for anything like rational progress, to a land where for the first time the qualities which had made the country great were being abandoned and even held up to contempt as compared with new qualities, qualities whose validity had never been proved in any group, not even those centring in Moscow, Berlin or Rome.

I am not saying that we are on the road either to Fascism or to Communism. I do say that we are abandoning the spiritual heritage of America, and as I think of these things I am tempted to bitterness. But I keep clearly in mind that the deeds and policies of the last four years are not all evil. I remember the gallantry and confidence with which the President took the helm at the height of the storm. I remember the determination with which through the Hundred Days he steered the ship.

But I think, too, of the New Deal. The New Deal is misnamed. It is, in truth, a New Game, the objectives of which are vaguely defined and the rules wholly indeterminate.

What its exponents purport to ask from us is something quite different from what they are likely to demand, if future practice is to be judged by past performance. Ever on their lips is the preservation of American institutions. They profess themselves desirous merely of modifying them. But it is simply a matter of record that the Administration has ignored most of the philosophic concepts on which our government was founded. It has been bitterly critical of any restraint upon measures which would in effect be the permanent abandonment of Americanism. The great question before our people is whether the nation shall still hold to the tried and proved principles of our history or whether it shall abandon them for new theories and practices of government the merits of which are wholly problematical.

It is not necessary to impugn the motives of the leaders who are dominating the government at the present time to question their wisdom. There is little point in arguing about their sincerity, although I, for one, do not doubt it. What is all-important is that there shall be presented to the American people a true diagnosis of the ills which affect them, and that they shall be given an understanding of the extent to which these ills are organic, or, on the other hand, incident to the supposedly curative treatment which is being administered to them.

## II

The national Administration is entitled to credit for improvement of national conditions only as that improvement has been greater under its management of affairs than it would have been if that management had not been undertaken. Materially, we are better off than we were four years ago. That I grant. I do not grant that this improvement is greater than it would have been without the ministrations of infinite government bureaus. But, absolutely regardless of this, it still remains a fact that the gain has been secured at a costly price. It has been purchased by the sacrifice of moral and spiritual values, for it has engendered a well-nigh universal spirit of covetousness.

One of the most sapient aphorisms of which I know is that it takes a tragic amount of time on the part of the wise to correct the mistakes of the merely good. The misfortunes of the present day may easily become catastrophes if the process is continued of dissipating our inheritance of courage, initiative, fortitude, and aspiration. Under the impulses of these qualities a struggling people organized the government and overcame great difficulties to set up the principle that every man is entitled to an equal opportunity. To argue that this ideal has not been fully attained is not to demonstrate that it has not been more fully attained in America than anywhere else in the world.

When, before the New Deal came to America, has it been assumed that no distinction should be drawn between men of varying capacities who strive to make use of America's opportunities? With the record behind us of accomplishment greater in magnitude than the world has ever known in the same brief span of years, we are asked to believe our slowly evolving form of government a failure and to credit the absurdity that the welfare of the population at large is something other than the sum total of the welfare of the individuals which compose it.

I suppose that it is always an inevitable instinct of the reformer to disregard experience in order that he may be free for complete experimentation, but this is an unsafe claim to grant in political affairs. A story told by Graham Wallas in his Dartmouth lectures some years ago bears definitely upon the matter of accepting new hypotheses of life formulated from the data of half-truths. He said that in the middle of the last century, when Baron Justus von Liebig was one

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of the foremost chemists in the world and the outstanding authority upon food values, the Baron devised a model diet. At that same time there was a distinguished chef of the Reform Club, the descendant of a line of chefs through several generations. Mr. Wallas said that he had been at great pains to compare the menus of meals of the Reform Club, distinguished for their palatability, with the lists prescribed by Baron von Liebig. From a comparison of these Mr. Wallas stated it was perfectly clear, in the light of present-day knowledge, that one who held to Baron von Liebig's diet long enough would not only have sacrificed all enjoyment in eating but would likewise eventually have grievously impaired his health, while one who ate constantly at the Reform Club would have sacrificed neither health nor appetite.

So far as they went, Baron von Liebig's deductions were scientifically accurate, but there was no allowance in them for such intangibles as were later to be found in the properties of calories and vitamins. On the other hand, the Reform Club chef, who had inherited an art perfected by trial and error through generations of his ancestors, offered a perfectly balanced diet.

In some analogous manner, it may well be that a government committing itself exclusively to a new form of political action and social organization may in later days be found to have ignored the intangibles essential to social health. The hazard is great: instead of preserving social health it may prove to have induced social scurvy and spiritual death.

And the analogy suggests more than this to many of us who have been eager for reforms in our social and political life. A man may be such a glutton for nourishment that his body will reject all that it has tried to absorb. Think of our experiment with Prohibition. When the body politic bolts its measures of social advance too rapidly and in too indigestible a form, the unassimilated mass regurgitates and the patient thinks with nausea of all that he has attempted to swallow.

I do not doubt the idealism or the worthy purpose that has actuated the Administration in much that it has undertaken. Some positive performance was imperative. But I do believe that a plethora of unrelated measures hastily conceived, inadequately organized, and hastily put into effect *without any competent personnel to develop them*, is working to the detriment of the very purposes of fulfillment of which they have presumably been undertaken.

### III

The nature of man is whatever it is. It is no fair criticism of what has been done to argue that political expediency might have been disregarded by the Administration in its attempt to secure authority for measures conceived with high moral intent. Nevertheless, I shrink from believing that politics has had to be so completely practical as it has been made. The blight of Farleyism is on the land. For political expediency, Civil Service has been undermined. For political expediency, it is suddenly and violently stabilized. Political assistance has been required from the beneficiaries of public bounty. Vast sums in public works have been strategically spent for political advantage. Everywhere manifestations of practicality dissipate the aura of idealism which

many of the Administration supporters attempt to exhale.

I am very doubtful of how much the consciousness of the President is alive to the significance of some of these matters. In the very nature of things the Chief Executive is surrounded by a neutralizing zone, in his advisers, which prevents such situations being allowed to become known to him, except as definite attempt is made to have counselors who will be real informants. Such attempt, certainly, the President does not appear to have made. His responsibility for conditions, therefore, is but little less than it would be if such conditions existed with his knowledge and approval. His artistry in the use of language is so effective and his dramatic genius for emphasizing promises rather than records is so great that it is difficult, in the face of one's desire to be fair to him, to be fair to the public whose minister he is. Nevertheless, admiration for his personal qualities and belief in his individual integrity do not justify us in judging him apart from the government which he has set up.

Madison, in the fifty-first paper of the *Federalist*, said: 'In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.' My reluctant loss of faith in the New Deal is based largely on my conviction that it has taken none of these auxiliary precautions and that it has made no attempt to control itself. If these things be true, our Ship of State is on an uncharted course, where the elementary precautions of a survey have been forgone and where the gambler's chance has been accepted of a speedy passage to a given haven or of shipwreck upon an unmarked reef. However one figures the odds, the hazard is not justified.

What, meanwhile, of the organization of society in the promised land, if it be reached? It is to be unlike anything our people have ever known or desired. I question if they wish it now. Initiative, courage, hardihood, frugality, and aspiration for self-betterment are to be penalized, and the fruits of these are to be taken from those who have undergone self-sacrifice to attain them and bestowed upon those who have never developed the qualities to possess themselves of rewards. Humanitarianism is to be reduced to the economic code of a managed society. The necessity for struggle, by which men have developed strength, and the discipline of hardship, through which they have achieved greatness of mind and heart and soul, are to be replaced by a specious security.

I say 'specious' because in the very nature of the system there must be attrition of the qualities which afford means to establish security. Thus security itself must eventually be made impossible. How can we escape the conclusion that society, for whose material welfare the Administration is so solicitous, instead of being graded up to a higher level of intelligence, culture, and achievement, is being graded down? And the level to which it is being degraded is the lower standard of men little competent to understand what constitutes the goodness upon which humanity must depend for social advance.

I would not be understood as arguing that society must not assume responsibility for its natural dependents or that concern should not be felt for and necessary help offered to its under-

privileged members. Neither would I attach blame to the Administration for the gradual disappearance of qualities of resourcefulness among an increasing number of our population in recent years for which the sordid materialism of public thought in the past has been responsible. What I would assert is that, under the New Deal, dependency is being encouraged to the point where it is rapidly and needlessly increasing, that the last desirable tendencies of a materialistic age are being accentuated rather than diminished, and that by the exclusiveness of solicitude for the incapable at the expense of the capable we are inducing a deterioration in our national character to a point little short of self-destruction.

Particularly, I resent the extent to which the New Deal has felt obliged to go in soliciting support for its programme by reiteration to the public, and particularly to youth, of the misfortunes to which they are pictured as being subject. We are being made a people sorrowing in self-pity for ourselves. If enough people tell a man that he looks ill, he begins to feel his own unhappy symptoms. The influence of suggestion is one of the most powerful forces in the world, and one of the greatest misfortunes of the present day is the effect upon our people of having had sympathy forced upon them for conditions the correction of which demanded but the exercise of due measures of intelligence and courage.

The foundations of American society were laid by men who endured economic want and physical hardships that they might gain access to opportunities few in number and inconsiderable in importance as compared with those which to-day lie close at hand for all of us. There was no thought in their minds that the conditions of life ought to be anything but a challenge or that the rewards of life could be possessed except through valiant effort. They accepted the conditions and went their individual ways without dismay and without complaint, with definiteness of purpose and with high aspiration. Thus, from recognition of the fact that life must be a struggle for men to profit most from it, arose a great people.

### IV

The New Deal was so fundamentally right in its assumption that positive action was necessary that it may seem gratuitous to criticize it for anything which it has done. It is to be granted that compromise was indispensable between the forces holding rigidly to tradition and those arguing for change in projected policies. The seriousness of the situation lies in the lack of recognition of subtle factors with which this compromise was undertaken.

Measures of humanitarian aspect have been adopted without attempt to safeguard them against subversive influence upon the stalwartness formerly characteristic of our people. Relief has been so administered that to many its appeal has become preferable to gainful labor. Without reflection upon the honest toil of some, conditions under which PWA projects have been set up in many an instance have made malingering a fine art. The Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, highly meritorious even as they stand, might nevertheless have been made infinitely more advantageous to qualities of citizenship by requiring either acceptance of the discipline of a military camp or the training of a trade school.

Granted the objections of the pacifists on the one hand, and the trade unions on the other, which

would have made such requirements difficult, no great effort to overcome these was evident. In short, among scores of enterprises looking toward the amelioration of economic distress, little attempt has been made to develop any sense of moral obligation in the minds of recipients to build up their own moral stamina or to endure any measure of hardship as an aid to recovery for society as a whole. The dictum that all men are entitled to a more abundant life without regard to their willingness to strive for it, without the self-discipline of learning how to use it, destroys all sense of realism and works toward a disintegration of national character which rapidly is becoming tragic.

Nothing is more distasteful to me than to find myself cast in the rôle of a pessimist. However, if effective opposition is not soon offered to types of thought and modes of action which the New Deal cumulatively aids and abets, I can see little hope of escaping an age darker than this country has ever known. The mental, moral, and spiritual nature of individual men of genius and capacity will be stunted and stultified.

On the material side, the New Deal seems to me wrong and dangerous in that it destroys economic values on the incomprehensible thesis that the less there is, the more will each of us have. When it argues that money is not entitled to its natural return, it does more than penalize the rich. It endangers the welfare of hosts of citizens in humble circumstances. It cripples every charitable institution in the country, every hospital, every college. In the name of security it threatens the continuing stability of such agencies of real public security as life insurance companies, upon whose vigorous survival all sense of legitimate safety among millions of our people must depend. It inveighs

against special privilege, but it is blind to the fact that special privilege is still special privilege when taken from one class of our people and conferred upon another.

But it is the effect of the New Deal on the imagination and aspiration of youth that I most dread. I am desperately afraid of it because it teaches young men and women to unlearn the lessons of America which school and college have striven so earnestly to teach. It encourages weakness and penalizes strength. It diffuses throughout the masses of our people the spirit of acquisitiveness which it condemns in groups of them. It punishes accomplishment and persecutes individuals and industrial enterprises alike simply on the basis of the magnitude of their achievement without regard to the social value of the imaginative and creative talent which brought them into being. It thwarts mutual understanding and coöperation, and stimulates antagonism in our industrial life. It foments class hatreds and exploits them for its own political advantage. It is tragic for an educator to watch these lessons taught to young men. Shall they be instructed that comfort is theirs for the asking, that they have a right to things they do not earn, that ease and rest must not be bought by toil and danger and struggle?

Young men have their heroes, and the heroes of the world have had a different gospel from the New Deal. As I write, I think of the appeal of Giuseppe Garibaldi to the battalions of young men upon whom he called to do the impossible. Of that scene the historian, Trevelyan, writes:—

In that stillness of the tempest, the sonorous, thrilling voice was heard to the outskirts of the vast crowd.

'Fortune, who betrays us to-day, will smile on

us to-morrow. I am going out from Rome. Let those who wish to continue the war against the stranger come with me. I offer neither pay nor quarters nor provision. I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country with his heart and not with his lips only, follow me.'

Hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, death. Such was the offer, nothing more.

No such sacrifices are demanded of us, thank God! I cite the striking passage simply to show that no selfish interest can make an appeal to manhood comparable to the call of devotion to a higher cause. Had such a call been the clarion note of the New Deal, how gladly would our united country have responded!

*This timely article of President Hopkins appealed to me so strongly that I am sending a copy to every Dartmouth graduate.*

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