

# CONFUSION AMONG THE LIBERALS

BY ROLAND HUGINS

EVERYONE seems to agree that Liberalism in America is very sick, and that it may indeed be on its death-bed, yet curiously enough nobody seems to know who or what the invalid really is. Any precise formulation of the Liberal creed seems difficult, and the reason may be simply that the Liberals are fond of squabbling among themselves. Any discussion of current problems, such as Prohibition, the purport of Bolshevism, the proper social status of the Negro, or the League of Nations, will split any considerable group of liberal-minded persons asunder and hold them divided for hours. True, they may come to agreement on a few innocent minima, say, free speech and free trade. But on all controversial issues of the day they have diverse views, and some of them are sizzling hot in their repudiations of the opinions of the others.

A certain part of this confusion of mind among Liberals is perhaps obvious. But what is not so obvious is the fact that the post-war Liberals in America have split into several distinct groups. These groups cannot be separated one from another with a knife-like sharpness, but the divisions are sufficiently clear to be significant. In the Nineteenth Century one could speak of a Liberal with reasonable accuracy of meaning, and in the first decade of the Twentieth Century one could discuss neo-Liberals and neo-Liberalism and still know what one was talking about. This is no longer possible; and the first and most vital division which must be taken into account is that between the two large groups which we may designate as the Libertarians and the Humanitarians.

The Libertarians are those who place their emphasis on the liberty of the individual—that is to say, on civic and legal rights and in particular on that bundle of moral prerogatives which goes under the name of personal liberty. The Humanitarians, on the other hand, are not concerned about individual liberty (although they may speak of a “positive, protected liberty”); they are interested in economic and social improvements. They have abandoned the doctrine of *laissez faire*, and they seek to improve, by governmental action if necessary, living and working conditions and to establish higher standards of health, education, and the care of dependents. These two groups, then, the Libertarians and the Humanitarians, are the two main sections into which American Liberal opinion has divided. Later, when we come to examine more in detail the opinions, leadership and antipathies of these two groups, we shall find it convenient to refer to the Libertarians as the Liberty-Liberals, or Right wing, and to the Humanitarians as the Welfare-Liberals, or Left wing.

Unfortunately for simplicity, however, this is not the whole story. There are two other groups of present-day Liberals, of some prominence in this country, and of great importance in Great Britain. Both of these other factions are, in a sense, hyphenated or hybrid. Between the Welfare-Liberals and the true Radicals stands a section of opinion which represents an endeavor to combine “the best elements” of both Liberalism and Socialism. Persons of this persuasion we may call the Labor-Liberals. And between the Liberty-Liberals and the true Conservatives or Tories,

stands a faction which attempts to reconcile Liberalism with Conservatism. These, in deference to their social ideal, we may call the Efficiency-Liberals. Thus we have a fourfold grouping, which comprises, reading from Right to Left, the following segments: the Efficiency-Liberals, the Liberty-Liberals, the Welfare-Liberals, and the Labor-Liberals.

## II

This classification may appear to be cumbersome and arbitrary. Liberals themselves often display a dislike of being labelled. They feel that they are too big, or at least too individual, to be pigeon-holed. Doubtless there are persons so eclectic in their social philosophies, so insistent on keeping tentative toes in several divergent camps, that they escape all the categories. But these are the exceptions. The opinions of most people attain a considerable degree of coherence and consistency, not so much through any logical process of sorting and coördination, as through the impetus and focus of their emotions. Labels are, after all, but attempts to generalize about trends. They are the necessary tools of the observer. It would be difficult, for example, to discuss the state of modern psychology without recognizing that the psychologists have clustered into a number of schools: gestalt psychology, dynamic psychology, purposive psychology, reaction psychology, structural psychology, and behaviorism. Likewise, in dealing with political and social tendencies, we still have need of the basic distinction between Right, Centre, and Left, that is, between Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals. But each of these three basic terms needs further subdividing; and if we want to find out what way the American world is going we need particularly to know what is happening among the Liberals.

There is a superstition among intellectuals that the Great War blasted Liberalism. According to this thesis, the Liberal

parties were healthy and successful up to 1914, but during the conflict were betrayed and scuttled by their leaders, specifically such leaders as Grey, Asquith and Lloyd-George in England, Clemenceau and Briand in France, and Woodrow Wilson in the United States. By 1919, with the signing of the peace of vengeance at the end of the war to end war, this Liberal collapse is supposed to have become fully apparent to all, with the result that since then Liberalism, as an organized political force, has been crumbling away, with its former adherents moving either to the Left toward Radicalism and Communism, or to the Right toward Conservatism and Fascism.

This point of view has been emphasized even more strongly in Europe than in America. For example, there is the vigorous pamphlet entitled "From Liberalism to Labor," put out in 1921 by Charles Trevelyan, formerly Liberal member of Parliament and a minister in the Asquith Cabinet. In this pamphlet Trevelyan says:

Those Liberal leaders in Britain were silent. Neither before, nor during, nor after the peace which condemns the world to a new era of national hatreds and armaments did they offer one bleat of opposition to the forces of reaction. Rather it was they themselves who had pointed out the course for the reactionaries by their Secret Treaties in 1915 and 1916. The truth is that by the end of the war Liberalism as a political force had ceased to function. . . . It is indeed difficult to trace any part of the policy of Liberalism which was not abandoned during the war, with the result that when the chance of a new start dawned for the world, reactionary ideas had an ascendancy absolutely unchallenged except by the forces of labor.

It is true that the Great War did, by letting loose a flood of nationalistic passions, submerge Liberalism and Liberal ideals for the time being. Likewise on the Continent, both in the Allied countries and in the Central Powers, the war submerged Socialism and every form of radicalism. The real question is: Why did Liberalism continue to remain flattened out after the war? Why did it show so little resilience and power of revival? As a matter of fact, the war merely demonstrated how liable and ready liberalism was to crack. It revealed the presence

of unsuspected fractures and confusion. The Liberal leaders and the Liberal intellectuals divided in their views on the causes of the war and the significance of the conflict. This was the beginning of disintegration and feebleness. Had the war not started the splitting process, some later event would have done so. At one point in the pamphlet quoted above the author remarks: "Even without the war it is more than doubtful whether the mass of Radical voters would not have transferred their allegiance to Labor within a very few years."

In the United States the war produced a similar division in the ranks of the Liberals. In general, and with qualifications necessary because of cross-currents of opinion, it may be said that the Welfare-Liberals supported the war and President Wilson's interpretation of it, while the Liberty-Liberals were in opposition. And the same alignment, for and against, tends to persist in respect to the League of Nations. But in the United States there has been no Liberal party to disintegrate. Here opinion and partisanship do not necessarily run together. The method of electing Presidents prescribed by the Constitution, and particularly the necessity of capturing a majority of electoral votes by State blocs, has given the great traditional parties a cohesion and a continuity lacking in most other democracies. It is a commonplace that both the Republican and the Democratic parties contain within themselves reactionary and progressive elements, and that in any given election it is a gamble which element gets control. The intra-party differences between the two wings are often more important than the "issues" raised between the parties themselves.

And yet, in spite of all this, the United States is likely to remain the last great stronghold of Liberalism, in one form or another. Historically, Liberalism has been the creed and faith of the *bourgeoisie*. Europeans are fond of pointing out that in America we have no aristocracy (except perhaps our plutocrats) and no proletariat

(except perhaps our farmers). The bulk of Americans belong in the middle classes, and have the middle-class point of view. On its idealistic side that point of view is Liberal. And hence it matters a great deal which brand of Liberalism, if any, is going to win out.

By separating into four factions American Liberalism has, of course, weakened itself, and has thinned and watered its faith. Each sector reflects but one aspect of the whole Liberal tradition. Furthermore, the various sections tend to war among themselves, and in part to nullify one another's efforts. Bad feeling is chronic, and just as orthodox Communists and Syndicalists reserve their most virulent disdain for the revisionist Socialists, so an American Liberal is likely to vent his choicest contempt on some brother Liberal in a rival camp. The reason for these mutual hostilities will be made clearer by a review of the doctrinal positions of the four groups. This review will be indicative rather than exhaustive. We shall proceed from Right to Left, beginning with the Efficiency-Liberal.

### III

This particular straddler, this compromiser between Conservative and Liberal principles, is often found in professional and academic circles. You will know him by the qualifications he attaches to his convictions. He believes in democracy, but he adds that "in times of emergency" it may sometimes be necessary to resort to Fascism and the Iron Hand; he declares that he is pro-labor and against every form of economic exploitation, but he also thinks that there is a great deal to be said for "the new tactics of Big Business"; he stands for *laissez faire* and personal liberty, but he is quick to point out that "liberty is not license" and that measures like Prohibition may be desirable for purposes of "social control"; he favors free speech and the open expression of every kind of political and social thought, but he recognizes that restrictions on debate are necessary in war-

time, and that there are certain kinds of radical talk which are "subversive."

In all this the Liberal-Conservative is not insincere; he feels that he is merely interpreting abstract principles so that they will conform to modern realities. The Efficiency-Liberals are certain that the present organization of society, economic, political, and juridical, is fundamentally sound, and they believe that through the application of intelligence the weak spots in the system can be eliminated. They have profound faith in the social sciences and in research. Such problems as the business cycle, unemployment, lawlessness, and governmental incompetence will yield, they think, to the technique of factual study and statistical analysis. They have little awareness of the fact that in the social sciences, as in all kinds of intellectual endeavor, one's basic (and perhaps unconscious) assumptions are the really important matters. Their own assumptions center about the concept of social and national efficiency. This is no narrow ideal, but it is essentially pragmatic.

These Efficiency-Liberals, though numerous, have now no definite organization. A number of years ago an attempt was made to set up what was called the Liberal League. Although the platform, or declaration of principles of this League was vague, and its clientèle rather mixed, it contained among its members many men like Professors Thomas Nixon Carver and Irving Fisher—quite the type. A large number of college and university professors, of newspaper owners and editors, and of bankers and business men may properly be classed as Efficiency-Liberals. Together, they have enormous facilities for swaying public opinion in this country. Possibly their most typical organ is *The Saturday Evening Post*. This nationally-read weekly has not, of course, built up its huge circulation through the championship of a programme, but on the other hand it has never been at any pains to conceal its editorial opinions. And the *Post* is only one of several similar organs.

Next in line stand the Liberty-Liberals, arrayed in defense of personal freedom. Probably this group traces its lineage more directly to the earlier, Nineteenth Century Liberalism than does any one of the other three groups. It really believes in individualism; it wants governmental regulation and collective interference restricted to as narrow a range as is possible in an orderly society. It still finds refreshment in old slogans, such as that the state is at best a necessary evil, and that that government is best which governs least. It demands real freedom to say and write what one pleases, and insists on open options in personal conduct.

The Liberty-Liberals are, of course, hotly opposed to the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, to Comstockery in all its manifestations, to the censorship of plays, moving-pictures, books and schoolbooks, and to every form of gag-law. In modern America they have plenty of fights on their hands. So strongly do they resent every extension of governmental activity, and so apprehensive are they of the dangers of bureaucracy, that they have opposed a number of measures of a humanitarian nature. For instance, they entered actively a few years ago into the opposition which defeated the proposed constitutional amendment for the regulation of child labor. Furthermore, they are more than lukewarm to proposals for the shackling of monopolies and trade associations, for government ownership or operation of public utilities, or for the socialization of natural resources. In brief, they are against anything and everything which cripples individual initiative and freedom of choice.

Some of the Liberty-Liberals are older men, like Nicholas Murray Butler, who imbibed the pure milk of Victorian Liberalism in their youth. But most of them are of a younger generation, and represent a revolt against the restrictions and taboos of the post-war era. In many instances these rebels got their resentments first, and their doctrines later. A considerable proportion, though not all, of the people who

support such dissentient organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment are Liberty-Liberals. The group as a whole is articulate. Several monthly magazines put their major editorial emphasis on personal and moral liberty, and a number of the best daily newspapers in the country, including the *New York World*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* have carried on a valiant campaign to restore vitality to the guarantees of individual rights in the Constitution—guarantees which have been blithely ignored by both legislatures and courts in the last decade. These newspapers have endeavored to read a new and modern meaning into the old doctrine of States' rights.

#### IV

The fundamental fissure in American Liberalism is found, as I noted earlier, between the Liberty-Liberals and the Welfare-Liberals. The latter have a leaning toward blue-laws; they strongly favor Prohibition and the drastic suppression of every form of "vice."

They have been led in this direction by two considerations. In the first place they have come to perceive that *laissez faire* will not work under modern industrial and social conditions. It is necessary, they believe, for the state to take positive steps for the improvement of factory conditions, for the prevention of disease, for the control of sanitation, and for the regulation of industry. They are thoroughgoing interventionists.

In the second place, sumptuary laws seem to them a natural corollary to welfare projects in general, an integral part of their campaigns for such measures as the protection of women workers, the prevention of child labor, municipal housing, old age pensions, accident, sickness, and unemployment insurance, the elimination of tuberculosis and of blindness, the abolition of capital punishment, the reform of penal institutions,—and so on.

In a phrase, they have come to conceive of social control as a part of social hygiene. They do not, of course, admit that they are the enemies of liberty; on the contrary they insist that interventions and restrictions of the sort they approve, aimed at the abatement of poverty, hazard, and temptation, enhance rather than impair "real" personal freedom. Most of the Welfare-Liberals are pro-labor, and lean leftward in their economic convictions. Some of them favor the single-tax, some of them want nationalization of mines and water-power, and nearly all of them would like to see further extensions of government enterprise.

Social workers, almost without exception, can be blanketed among the Welfare-Liberals. The group includes many "advanced" thinkers among economists, political scientists, and public school teachers. Again, there are in the United States several scores of associations, societies, leagues, institutes, bureaus, and councils, endowed or publicly supported, which are devoted to educational or philanthropic endeavors, or to research in the social sciences. Some of the members of their staffs are Welfare-Liberals. And lastly, this faction embraces a considerable miscellaneous following known as Progressives. The leading, or at least the most representative, journal of this section of opinion is the *Survey*. The two able New York Liberal weeklies, the *New Republic* and the *Nation*, also belong definitely in the Welfare group, despite the fact that both these journals have attempted in recent years to face two ways on Prohibition.

The Labor-Liberals, the last group of the four, is the most radical. It seeks to snuggle up to Socialism without actually committing itself to wedlock. The reasoning behind this alliance, or compromise, has been stated with reasonable clarity. Oscar Jaszi has written (the *New Republic*, September 10, 1924) that "the most urgent ideal need of present day humanity is a just and reasonable compromise between those elements of classical Liberalism which constitute the indispensable conditions for



human progress (*e.g.*, liberty of conscience, liberty of the press, of free investigation, of free initiative, of unimpeded exchange, of unrestricted choice of vocation, free sexual selection, free social organization, etc.) and those elements of Socialism which would introduce order, justice and moral autonomy into the economic relations of the working community." Again, Harold Laski has declared (the *New Republic*, July 8, 1925) that: "Men have still to grow accustomed to the realization that the Liberal party is obsolete. They have still to make themselves face the idea of the Labor party as the inheritor of the radical tradition. . . . Liberal ideas, so far as they have relevance to the new age, must be realized through different institutions."

The two foregoing quotations reveal merely the aspirations of the Labor-Liberals. A detailed programme of action has never been presented by them, though doubtless one could be drawn. Such a programme, certainly, would include demands for many fundamental economic changes: proposals for the nationalization of at least all the key industries, including railroads, ships, coal and iron mines, telegraphs and telephones, and banks; and also projects for a vastly increased participation of workers, including the technicians, in the management of industry and commerce. These changes, it would be alleged, can be accomplished without any essential sacrifice of the Liberal principles of free thought, free speech, free enterprise, and free government.

The Labor-Liberals in this country are mostly of two sorts: intellectuals and active workers in the cause of labor. Both sorts earnestly desire that something substantial, something radical, be done to elevate the status of the toiling masses and to insure the workers a larger share of the social income; and yet they shrink from going as far as have the Communists of Russia in subordinating every other human value to a programme of proletarian control. For a number of years after the war the Labor-Liberals had a capable spokes-

man in the New York weekly called the *Freeman*, no longer published. Some of the labor dailies and union journals give expression, fitfully, to their point of view, but they have at the moment no consistent exponent or champion.

## V

Well, what can be done about it? On the assumption that the foregoing classification and analysis of the fragments of American Liberalism is fairly accurate, does any possibility of reunion and coördination suggest itself? Is there any way by which the diverse ideals and the conflicting aims of the four sectors can be welded into a harmonious and effective whole? So far no real attempts at reconciliation have been made, because the nature and extent of the divisions have not been recognized. A few Liberals, it is true, have sought to wave away all disagreements by maintaining that Liberalism after all is chiefly an attitude and a temper; and then have gone on to claim for themselves a monopoly of open-mindedness and of the "scientific approach" to social problems. This kind of thing will get Liberalism nowhere. Everyone claims to be scientific nowadays, and none more so than a certain type of realistic Conservative, and a certain type of doctrinaire Radical. Negative attitudinizing is futile. Liberals are persons with opinions—like everyone else—and many of their opinions have sharp corners.

There is, possibly, a way out—a way by which Liberalism could be saved, not from its enemies, but from itself. This would involve two steps. The first would be to cut away the two outer wings. The Efficiency-Liberals do not really believe in *laissez faire*: they believe in government support of existing property rights, quite a different matter. The Labor-Liberals are not really interested in private initiative or individual freedom: they are interested in a formula for the complete reorganization of society. Rid of these straddlers, the two remaining branches of Liberalism could

try to compose their differences; to combine, if possible, the Libertarian and the Humanitarian points of view; and to reunite tolerance with pity.

There is a chance that the reconciliation could be effected. There seems to be no ultimate reason why Liberty-Liberals, because they think a man should be allowed to take a drink or place a bet on a horse, should also be in favor of allowing children of ten and twelve years to work in mines and mills, or should be opposed to old age pensions. On the other hand, if the United States handled the liquor problem as does, say, the Province of Quebec, or if it adopted the lenient and enlightened methods of Denmark in dealing with sex irregularities, doubtless the Welfare-Liberals could go about their reformatory

tasks quite as effectively as they do at present.

Let us hope that some such attempt at adjustment will be made. It would be rather of a shame if Liberalism actually were to disappear, and the world be offered a narrowing choice between reaction and revolution. Both Conservatism or Radicalism, when pushed to their logical extremes, become tyrannies, the first the tyranny of a caste, the second the tyranny of an idea. Possibly Bolshevism, with its economic Calvinism, may be a splendid thing for Russia, and possibly Fascism, with its employer Bourbonism, may be a splendid thing for Italy; but there are many of us left in the world who would hate to have to choose either as a way of life for ourselves.

# AMERICANA

## ARKANSAS

THE sad life of a pastor among the Missionary Baptists of the Malaria Country, as described by a rev. contributor to the *Baptist and Commoner* of Little Rock:

You have preached that the just shall live by faith and that we walk by faith, etc., but when you take a stand at your post of duty, you find that your congregation has misappropriated your text; for judging by their actions, they seem to think that was addressed to the preacher only; at any rate, they are not out at the service. You find that Brother Jones went fishing; Brother Smith motored to a distant city to visit his wife's mother; and that your young people went to the frolic last night, and were in no mood to come as they were up late. Then Brother Lemm Patton got drunk, cussed and fought; and Aunt Lucinda Scrogans and a few other sisters keep up a perpetual uproar. You throw up your hands in despair; you want to quit, but you can't find the proper place to quit.

One day your wife informs you that the grocery bill is past due; that the light man is pressing for pay; and that the house rent is due next week. You have to explain to her that they did not pay you anything this time, so "We'll just have to trust in the Lord and walk by faith." You go out again, and they pay you this time; that of course, will relieve the tension some, even if you don't get enough to pay your bills. You begin emphasizing more consecration and less vanity; you emphasize the fact that the workman is worthy of his hire and that the preacher should live of the Gospel, etc. They say you are able-bodied, and should earn your own living; then you act on that suggestion; you apply for a job; you get along nicely until the week-end, when you explain to your employer that you must have a little time off to fill your appointment; he gives you all the time you need; he dismisses you; he can't use you unless you can work steadily; you explain that matter to your congregation; but they can't help that; it's just your own hard luck. When you take an offering, you find a good sister doesn't have any change, so she sashaes around over the house to get a quarter changed so she can pay a nickel. (This is no joke; I know it to be a fact; it happened in one of my services, but I am not calling any name nor any place.) The tension gradually tightens; you get farther behind; you secure the aid of a few loyal members to help you investigate the extravagance of your people. You secretly find that

Sister Jones and the girls bought five dollars worth of rouge, lipsticks, eyebrow pencils and vanity cases last Saturday. Yes, Brother Lemm Patton paid three dollars for a box of fine cigars for himself and the boys; Brother Smith bought a dollar and a half's worth of chewing tobacco and three packages of cigarettes; and in order to keep peace in the home, Aunt Lucinda had to have a thirty-cent bottle of snuff. But they were financially oppressed and just couldn't pay you but five dollars on Sunday. Your investigation revealed that the families represented in your congregation spent ten dollars last week for nothing but chewing gum, candies and cold drinks, which is scientifically proved to be the great outstanding factor in the present crime wave and low moral ebb.

Amid your struggle your wife, who has suffered untold anguish to be loyal to you; to hold up your hands; to walk beside you, hand in hand with you through all the trying ordeals, meets you at the door. She places her hands on your shoulder, and squarely looks you in the face. With tears gushing into her eyes, she explains to you that the supply of provisions is exhausted, and that she has no money to buy more. She speaks with quivering lips and trembling voice, in spite of her efforts to conceal her emotion. Now what are you to do?

THE editor of the eminent *Paris Progress* makes a handsome *amende honorable*:

In reporting the accidental death of Windel Crow of New Blaine last issue information given the *Progress* was erroneous. Young Crow was a son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Marshall instead of W. R. Marshall; he resided at New Blaine instead of Delaware; the small Crow lad riding the truck at the time was victim's cousin instead of brother; and the Rev. W. W. Walker of Prairie View instead of the Rev. Wade was in charge of funeral services.

## CALIFORNIA

EDITORIAL note in the *Gerber Star*:

Ten cents straight will be charged for all obituary notices to all business men who do not advertise while living. Delinquent subscribers will be charged fifteen cents a line for an obituary notice. Advertisers and cash subscribers will receive as good a sendoff as we are capable of writing, without any charge whatsoever. Better send in your advertisements and pay up your subscriptions, as hog cholera is abroad in the land. ✓