

# THE STATE OF THE UNION

BY ALBERT JAY NOCK

## *Autopsy on the New Deal*

AT LAST, thank Heaven, there are pretty clear signs that Spring has come. It may be a false dawn, for I am writing this on the fifteenth of July, which is a little early, but the groundhog has certainly come out and looked around, and I should judge by the feel of the political weather that he has made up his mind to stay out. Congress has adjourned for a few days, out of respect to the late Senator Robinson. My guess is that when it re-convenes it will shelve the Court bill for good and all, pass a minimum of necessary measures, and then go home to mend its fences and sharpen its knives. Then if the boys get any kind of reasonable assurance that they can either beat the local machines or keep them with them, and that Mr. Farley will be unable to invade their districts and buy them out of their jobs, those knives are going to carve Mr. Roosevelt into cat's meat when the next session opens, six months hence.

You can hardly blame the boys for feeling as they do. For five years

they have been cowering under the bull-whip of a blockish and touchy Legree for whom they have not the slightest respect, and who they know would sell them down the river at any time they dared so much as say their souls were their own. Naturally they are tired of this, for there is a limit to what even the most timid and spiritless machine-slave can stand. The sudden blow-up in both houses of Congress is what future historians will probably call a "servile rebellion". It is no discredit to Senator McCarran, for instance, to suspect that his kick over the traces was due more to sheer rage than to principle, for you can hardly imagine any vertebrated animal who would not choose to peddle hot peanuts for the rest of his life rather than put up any longer with Mr. Roosevelt's insolent dragooning. A good soldier will take quite a bit of manhandling from a leader whom he can respect, even though he may not like him much, but taking it indefinitely from Mr. Roosevelt is something else again.

So I repeat that in my opinion there is going to be joy in the presence of the angels around the White House next January, which is emphatically to the good. Our apprehensive citizenry may be assured that when the Senate Judiciary Committee files the kind of report it filed on the Court bill, and when senators bust out against the Administration with language like Mr. McCarran's, Mr. Glass' or Mr. Wheeler's, and when congressmen turn loose a line of talk like Mr. Sumners', dictatorship is as yet a good long way off. Like Napoleon, as Artemus Ward said, Mr. Roosevelt tried to do too much, and did it; and in so doing he has ripped his party wide open from tail-hem to neckband. The Court issue gave the disaffected brethren their longed-for chance to pour forth a five years' accumulation of venomous bile in his direction, and they still have enough of it left in stock to keep the flow going for the rest of his term. Mr. Roosevelt is now at last left standing before the country, looking like himself. That is to say, he is left looking like a shallow person, unworthy of confidence, whose wrong-headed ambition has finally made him overshoot the mark and shoot his grandmother; and an unmanly person, moreover, who most con-

spicuously can't take it—a poor sport, who can only give it, never take it. He may still press the Court issue on the next session of Congress, perhaps may get consideration of it, perhaps even win it, though this seems most improbable. But he has maneuvered himself into a position where if he wins he is hopelessly discredited, and if he loses he is equally discredited; and this is precisely the position which his character and record entitle him to occupy, and which every American of sound mind and independent judgment must be delighted to see him occupy.

## II

Therefore as things stand at present, it seems unlikely that we shall hear much more about the New Deal, and we can thankfully begin to speak of it in the past tense. The name has already taken on a back-number sound; it is no longer anything to conjure with, as it used to be in the spacious days of Brother Tugwell, the Economic Planners, and the Brain Trust. This being so, it would seem to be a pretty good time to hold a preliminary inquest on the New Deal, with a view to picking out the worst thing it has done, the thing that has been most

seriously injurious to the country at large.

To a great extent, naturally, this must be a matter of personal opinion, so when I put in my nomination it should be understood only as pointing to what I think is the worst thing it has done to me and to the few people with whose opinion I am personally acquainted. No doubt there are many who will not agree about this, and who think that other misfeasances of the New Deal are much worse. I freely admit that they have a great deal to say for their view of the matter, and that I am far from hoping or wishing to convert them to my view. What I am interested in is the inquest, not the findings. The reason why I write as I do is that I thought if I say frankly what I believe is the worst thing the New Deal has done to myself and my friends, it might stir up other people to join in the inquest and try to decide what is the worst thing it has done to them; and if a number of people did this, it would help establish a rational public opinion.

What their findings would be, I repeat, is not the important thing, and I would not argue about them. Mr. Lippmann, for example, as I observed last month, dreads the prospect that the New Deal will have brought all Liberal ideas and

movements into disrepute. I can understand how Mr. Lippmann would hold that view, and I am glad he saw fit to state it so frankly, even though I believe, quite on the contrary, that if the New Deal has done that, it has done no bad thing at all, but a very good and salutary thing. Again, some say that the worst thing the New Deal has done is to burden the country needlessly with a crushing weight of debt. Some, again, point to its monstrous concentration of authority at Washington. Others point to the inroads it has made on the citizen's rights and liberties by its creation of a huge, wasteful, and nagging bureaucracy. Others think it has hurt the country most by its wholesale corruption of the electorate; while others, finally, think the worst thing it has done is to inculcate the vicious doctrine that the State owes all its citizens a living, and thus to convert great masses of the population into loafers and sturdy beggars. All these are sound counts against the New Deal, and a choice for first place among them is, as I say, a matter of perfectly respectable opinion.

Bad as they are, however, there is one achievement of the New Deal that has been worse for me than any of them; and that is its suffocation of a decent humanita-

rian spirit, its drying-up of ordinarily decent humane impulses toward one's fellow-men. Since I began to notice this effect upon myself I have been inquiring around among acquaintances, and have found that to a greater or less degree, they too have felt it. One of them put it to me very well only the other day. He said: "The mere fact that I wouldn't any longer give a dime to a panhandler is nothing, or that I wouldn't give a thousand dollars to a soup-kitchen or an orphanage, if I had it. I am on perfectly good terms with myself about that, because the government has arbitrarily taken on the job and taxes me for it, and the government may jolly well swing it. What worries me is that I have no longer any proper feeling for anybody who is in any way out of luck, man, woman, or child, rich or poor, high or low, bond or free, drunk or sober. I used to have a very strong feeling for any kind of distress. When a poor chap touched me for a nickel, I really had sympathy for him. I was sincerely sorry for him and wanted to help him if I could, and really cared what became of him. Now I don't. I'm ashamed of it and try to talk myself into believing it isn't so, but the sober fact is that ever since Roosevelt confiscated a whole nation's

sentiment of decent altruism five years ago and put it in the service of his filthy little political purposes and ambitions, I simply don't care a good goddam what becomes of anybody."

Well, take it or leave it, there is my grievance against the New Deal. I say nothing for it, do not attempt to justify it, nor am I proud of it—quite the contrary. I am no more proud of being maimed than my friend was. No one would be proud of going about with one eye because some ambitious and conscienceless ass of a surgeon had experimented on the other one; nor would anyone be particularly pleased about it, either. But if the eye is out it is out, and that is that; there is no use pretending otherwise, and if you put in a glass eye for appearance's sake, there is no use trying to persuade yourself that you can see with it, because you can't. My complaint is that by hoodwinking man's noblest quality, the spirit of altruism, into the service of the most ignoble ends, the New Deal has caused the mere name of altruism to stink in the nostrils of good-hearted, well-disposed, and decent men, whose sympathies the world can ill afford to lose.

The thing is worth thinking about. We think a great deal about

the State's ever-increasing confiscations of money and power; why not think a little about its confiscations of sentiment? They seem to me the most damaging and degrading of all its confiscations, as well as the hardest to repair. If this view appears extravagant, consider the history of these confiscations for a moment. In every country the State has laid its defiling hand upon man's natural sentiment for his native surroundings, and debauched it into approval of the obscene enormities which go on under the name and sanction of patriotism. In every country the State has laid its hand upon man's religious aspirations and debased them to its own purposes. In every country the State has laid its hand on the natural sentiment for family and kinfolk, and perverted it; for example, does not Mussolini say that "Fascism takes man from his family at six and gives him back to it at sixty"? And now, in our own country, the State has touched and perverted the sentiment which moves us to believe with Dumas' hero that, "after all, man is man's brother".

I suggest that once in a while, as we look back on the New Deal, we take a little time off from considering its political, social, and fiscal

effects, and consider what it has done to us as human beings. Are we quite the same people we were before, or are we suffering the effects of a sort of moral gas-attack? Has the New Deal's rank betrayal of our better nature hardened us to human anxiety and distress? When we hear about the worries and persecutions of the Economic Royalists; or when Mr. Roosevelt tells us about the submerged third of our population and the sorrows of the proletariat; or when we hear that our hospitals and charities are fast going on the rocks; or that thousands of willing workmen are pitched out of their jobs as an incident of the struggle for power between John L. Lewis and William Green; does this kind of thing touch off a ready interest and sympathy as it did, say, six years ago, or in our inmost hearts do we no longer actually care a tinker's damn what becomes of any of these unfortunates, but only wish they would all go off somewhere together and get drowned? This candid examination of ourselves can do us no harm and may do us some good; and at all events it will put us in the way of making a more accurate estimate of the New Deal's moral quality than we have been able to make hitherto.

# THE LIBRARY

## *A Maverick on Parade*<sup>1</sup>

By JOHN W. THOMASON, JR.

I REMEMBER a thing George Bridgeman said once, when I was young and studied under him at the Art Students' League of New York: it was in his life class, and he was criticizing a drawing with such vigor that the young lady who drew it burst into tears and retired to commit, she stated, suicide. He said that when you drew a picture, unless you followed the model with unusual care, you drew a self-portrait: if you were tall and thin, you drew tall, thin people; and so forth. Inescapably, he asserted, you delineated yourself, especially when you were faking. And I remember a portly Marine officer of one of our staff branches, who does me the compliment to look at the little sketches I make, saying that he wished I would draw some Marines with a little meat on their bones — not fellows with legs like kildees or sand-hill cranes. Reading *A Maverick American*, by the

Hon. Maury Maverick, member of Congress for the Twentieth Congressional District of Texas, this came into my mind. For it applies to all the arts, and most strikingly to this book.

The vital statistics of the Hon. Maury Maverick, as set forth in *Who's Who*, affirm that he was born in 1895 at San Antonio in Texas, studied at Virginia Military Institute and the University of Texas, was admitted to the Texas Bar in 1916; that he served in France with the Twenty-eighth Infantry, a regiment of the First Division, and a very famous formation indeed; that he returned to the pursuits of peace and interested himself in the lumber business and civic affairs; that an admiring citizenry rewarded him with the office of tax collector to Bexar County, 1929 and 1931; and thereafter with a seat in the Seventy-fourth Congress of the United States, representing the

<sup>1</sup> *A Maverick American*, by Maury Maverick. \$3.00. Covici-Friede.