

"The Great Society"

NOT SO LONG AGO one would have sworn that collectivist and interventionist thinking was losing its appeal. The economists were revolting against Lord Keynes, at least to the extent of becoming "neo-Keynesians" or "post-Keynesians." Students were becoming Young Americans for Freedom, or joining the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists. The conservative movement was gaining many new adherents.

Now, suddenly, everything seems to be reversed. The Left has come back with a rush. A socialist book, *The Other America - Poverty in the United States*, by Michael Harrington, becomes the Bible of those who are pushing an anti-poverty campaign that depends on self-defeating state action. The ancient League for Industrial Democracy, an outgrowth of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, does not seem to be stirring, but the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs, which proclaim an unaffiliated Marxism, have started to snowball, particularly on the West Coast. The young who were looking to a revival of

conservatism yesterday have been followed by an even younger set who are going in for "personalist" commitment to nonlibertarian causes.

In the middle of it all President Lyndon B. Johnson has become enamoured of a phrase, "the Great Society." Whether he plucked the phrase out of his own memory, or whether it was fed to him by one of the task force papers which Professor Eric Goldman of Princeton has been in the course of assembling, is immaterial. The point is that the phrase comes from the title page of a pre-World War I book, *The Great Society*, by a Fabian socialist Englishman named Graham Wallas. Thus the movement started by Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, and the other members of the English Fabian Society in the eighties and nineties of the last century is still bearing fruit.

Since I have long been interested in the relations between ideologues and politicians, I took Graham Wallas's book off the

dusty shelves the other day and started reading it for the first time in some forty years. As Wallas used the phrase, "the Great Society" was merely descriptive of the increasing urbanized condition of life imposed on the Western world by the spread of the Industrial Revolution. Wallas spoke of the steam engine and the rise of the Manchester cotton mills as imposing an "extension of the social scale" upon the human species. The argument is now so familiar as to be platitudinous: the villager in northern Michigan or the Orkney Islands cannot escape the implications of the international division of labor and the coming of the population explosion.

Wallas was not advocating anything tendentious by his use of the term "the Great Society" as a description of an historical trend. But when he came to proposing means of adaptation to this society, he could think of nothing better than Fabian penetration of the economic system by collectivist bureaucrats and collectivist methods. He wanted a Mixed Economy, even though that term had not yet come into general usage in 1914.

Modern Variations

Lyndon Johnson's use of Graham Wallas's book title twists

things around a bit. To LBJ's way of thinking, we have not yet arrived at "the Great Society." What the President has in mind when he uses the phrase is not "the extension of social scale" imposed by jet aircraft, or computers, or automated factories. The Great Society of Lyndon Johnson's dreams won't be here until we have used modern scientific developments to eradicate poverty, to give every child a good education, and to make all our communities healthy, happy, and beautiful.

Nobody, of course, can make a brief for poverty, ignorance, and ugliness. But the disturbing thing about the current belated romance with Graham Wallas's Fabian tract of 1914 (which, incidentally, was dedicated to Walter Lippmann) is that the 1965 program for reaching "the Great Society" has a distinctly Fabian flavor of its own. Those now in the political driver's seat want their own gradualist approach to federally-supported medicine and to Washington-directed programs for wiping out pockets of poverty in the Appalachians and bringing schoolbooks and remedial reading teachers to Harlem and back-of-the-yards Chicago.

Back in the early nineteen twenties, when I first read Graham Wallas, I could have been for the

current program. But since then the Britain which Wallas hoped to reform by a Fabian "organization of happiness" has given a rather thorough trial to the schemes now being proposed. The result has not been the attainment of the sort of "Great Society" which our officeholders want. On the contrary, Britain in 1965 is floundering in a most unhappy way.

Socialized Medicine

Britain has its compulsory medical insurance program. But it has not been building new hospitals, and doctor friends of mine who are by no means "reactionary" insist that medicine in the Britain of today is in a period of decline. The British have had to recruit nurses from overseas. Young doctors have been emigrating to Canada and Australia. "It's poor medicine for everybody today in Britain, and good medicine only for the rich who can pay for private service," says a New Haven, Connecticut, gynecologist, Dr. Virginia Stuermer.

Using Fabian techniques, Britain has been trying to modernize its industry to the point of wiping out poverty. But its steel mill owners frightened by the probability of a final nationalization of basic steel-making facilities, have had no incentive to make

their plants as efficient as some in the German Ruhr or in Gary, Indiana. The British pound is today in trouble because Fabian "planning" has kept the British industrial machine from making itself competitive with continental Europe, the United States, and Japan in world markets. Wages in Britain have outpaced productivity increases. Prices are still rising. And the response of the Harold Wilson government to this state of affairs has been to try to insulate the British economy from that of the outer world by putting a 15 per cent tax on imports.

The Fabian way is to impose controls from the top in order to "socialize" individual income. The 1965 approach is admittedly a bit different: subsidizing newschemes of production in the mountain backwaters of Kentucky and paying for schoolbooks in Manhattan is not all-out socialist "central planning." But the impact on the budget can hurt the currency in which the entire nation does its business. The adoption of the Fabian "inevitability of gradualism" to the solution of our problems necessarily aggrandizes the power of the central state.

The Voluntary Way

The shame of it is that the present program for attaining the

"Great Society" will be imposed from Washington on a nation that has given every indication of solving its problems by a combination of voluntary individual action and local, state, and municipal measures. I think of Richard Cornuelle's success in establishing a private reinsurance program for banks which have been lending money to deserving college students. I think of the Western Student Movement, which has been recruiting high-stand university undergraduates to help cut down on school drop-outs by offering free tutoring services to slum children in the Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego areas. Anything that's peaceful and voluntary, as Leonard Read says, is a proper means of getting to the Great Society. Instead, Graham Wallas is being heeded, though his 1914 ideas have already failed wherever they have been tried. ♦

► **THE MIND AND ART OF ALBERT JAY NOCK** by Robert M. Crunden (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964). 230 pp., \$4.95.

Reviewed by Robert M. Thornton

THIS IS the first full-length study of Albert Jay Nock, and happily for admirers of that "superfluous

man" Mr. Crunden's primary interest is not the personal life of his subject but rather what the man thought and how he came to think it.

In a scholarly fashion Crunden tells of Nock's public career as a man of letters and discusses systematically the men who exerted the greatest intellectual influence on him—Matthew Arnold, Herbert Spencer, Henry George, and Franz Oppenheimer. He also explains Nock's fondness for such diverse personalities as the little appreciated "humorist" of Civil War days, Artemus Ward; the often misunderstood French writer of the sixteenth century, Francis Rabelais; and the cantankerous Mayor of New York in the early 1900's, William Jay Gaynor.

Crunden fully realizes that Nock cannot be neatly pigeonholed. With some justification he might be called a nineteenth century liberal (he was in favor of repealing laws and reducing government interference to a minimum), or a conservative (he wished to preserve everything worth saving and refused to entertain the illusion that society can and should be made over at the whim of reformers), or a radical (he sought true reforms and scoffed at the superficial changes that usually leave things worse