

# AS OTHERS SEE US

## AMERICAN NEUTRALITY IN BRITISH EYES

THE former editor of the London *News Chronicle*, Mr. Aylmer Vallance, visited the United States recently, speaking to audiences of various sorts, and observing the political and social scene. Upon his return to England he contributed the following impressions to the *New Statesman and Nation*:—

The European student of affairs who visits the United States in this 'election year' phase of President Roosevelt's administration may be pardoned if he sails for Europe a sadly disillusioned man. That is, supposing him to be a Socialist, or one who pins his faith in a League of Nations' system reinforced by American adhesion. For in that case, between gang-plank and gang-plank, he will have sought evidence that America desires constructively to establish at home a saner, juster economic order, and abroad to play in international politics a fuller, more responsible rôle. He will have sought, but not found.

Twice in the past twenty years the mass-emotion of the least logically-minded nation on earth has been stirred and directed to idealistic ends by leaders who were, in one case, an inadequately informed visionary and, in the other, a partially sincere sentimentalist. President Wilson spellbound the American people in a period of fine-phrased emotionalism, and led them to think temporarily in terms of world order and justice. The bill for idealism—shed American blood, clamorous veterans, war debts unpaid—was heavy. Wilson died, defeated and unmourned; Kellogg framed Pacts; kindly, stupid Stimson courted Sir John Simon's acidulated snubs over *l'affaire japonaise*. The American man-in-the-street recultivated indifferentism; he 'had had some' in

the sphere of foreign affairs; the domestic 'ticker-boom' of the late twenties was good enough for him.

And then came crash and panic. In that chaos of closed banks, nation-wide unemployment and the vast disarray of capitalism 'in a jam,' Franklin D. Roosevelt imposed himself momentarily on the imagination of America as 'the man who knew a remedy.' Manned by 'experts,' brain-trust at the helm, the ship of state was set on a course whose land-fall was to be 'controlled' capitalism, justice for the under-dog, reasonable prosperity for all. But today—half the crew marooned, the compass lost overboard, the ship swings idly, becalmed. Only the captain, who never really believed in any attainable harbor, continues to smile indomitably on.

What has happened? Let Russian Ned, sometime hand on a Volga barge, now American elector on 'relief' work pay-roll, who conversed with the writer on a hurricane-wrecked strip of coral beach midway between Miami and Key West, supply in part the answer: 'One buck sixty a day. Dat's lousy. Can't do more dan youst keep body and soul togedder. Now if dey wanted to give us peoples a break, why not give us youst one hundred dollars? Den I start hot-dog wagon near Miami. Make fortune—one year, two year, sure.'

Significant, this comment, not merely of the traditionally 'solid South's' ingratitude for WPA benefits received; it is symptomatic of the whole American nation's attitude towards fate and the future. That field-marshal's baton in the private soldier's knapsack; that imperishable hope, which keeps civil peace in the proletarian hovels of Pittsburgh and Baltimore; that great 'if:' if only 'a break' be vouchsafed by luck, Packard cars, Park Avenue apartments, all the carefree enjoyments of successful materialism are within a man's grasp.

It is a '100 per cent American' attitude of mind which has done more than anything else to smash Roosevelt's electoral prospects and drive America, in reverse gear, towards self-centered isolationism. New York City—Europe's westernmost metropolis—is not America; Wall Street's perfervid animosity against the New Dealers would of itself cut little electoral ice; the 'Save the Constitution' Liberty League—officered by hard-shell corporation lawyers and financed by the du Pont armament interests—would be a 'flop,' were it not that the philosophy of individualism in its crudest, early Victorian form still hypnotizes the soul of America. The dark days of the depression have been firmly put out of mind, though they may still linger in the subconscious as a submerged complex. 'Get under' is once again no longer a terror, because 'get on' is, to all seeming, a realizable hope.

The Republican Party—James (Judas) Warburg, Roosevelt's former confidant and white-headed boy, now the Administration's ablest and most devastating critic, directing the political Broadway rhapsody—has been quick to 'cash in' on the recovery. Is the building industry reviving, and are real estate values on the upturn from Boston to San Diego? Are Manhattan's 'Nite Clubs' (*anglice* supper bars) turning customers away? Do nickels and dimes flow with increasing 'velocity of circulation' into the eleven hundred 'fruit' machines on which Huey Long and his successors have based their political tyranny over New Orleans? The credit accrues, so the predominant voices of press and broadcast have it, to the G.O.P.'s innate virtues, those forces of rugged individualism which have built skyscraper towers, hired royal suites on transatlantic liners, persuaded Chicago's quiet, decent wage-earners that the meanest racketeering gangster in Cicero is a hero *contra mundum*.

THE cold, uncomfortable truth is that America today is engrossed by calcula-

tions appertaining to the ambience of Monroe thought. Recovery—and it is real, if yet only nascent—is talked and charted, not in a world sense, but in terms of a continent (very nearly self-contained) which stretches from Hudson's Bay to Terra del Fuego. And in that preoccupation with domestic chances—Uncle Sam's 1936 economic Sinn Fein—interest in the European imbroglio is faint, remote and academic.

Could it be otherwise? Always must one reflect that in the judgment of the most, liberal-minded, enlightened Americans the refusal of the United States to become a member of the League was an act not merely of prudence but of high thinking. The League system, viewed across three thousand miles of storm-vexed sea, appears (even to the cosmopolitan eyes of New York) to be an integral part of the Versailles Treaty mechanism—a political device whereby the 'Haves,' England and France, intend to buttress against the 'Have Nots' the advantages gained by arms in no matter how many centuries. In that arena of blood and sand the American people decline today to play any personal part; they do not want even to throw their hats into the ring.

There are, of course, the phil-European cliques, derivative from America's queer racial snobbery, at whose weekly dinners the itinerant Englishman is impressed to speak, and whose first toast is 'His Majesty.' But this is an absurd, unreal veneer on the solid wood of American life. The real America today is profoundly suspicious of European statesmanship, deeply resolved not to be embroiled in the next war, whose outbreak within a decade is accepted as inevitable.

For one brief moment only, last autumn, did America begin to wonder if, after all, there might not be something in the 'collective system.' Though the cynics whispered 'electioneering for the Peace Ballot vote,' public opinion in the States was undeniably impressed by the stand taken at Geneva by Britain in defense of

the principles of the Covenant, and particularly by Sir Samuel Hoare's hint that the machinery of the League might be used, not merely to stereotype the *status quo*, but to remodel 'access' to colonial possessions. For some weeks America was inclined to modify its original belief that England cared less for the integrity of Ethiopia than for the preservation at all costs of the All-Red Route to India. But the mood was short-lived; the shock created in America by the Hoare-Laval peace plan was profound; every suspicion of Franco-British sincerity was revived in accentuated form. America once more turned away in revulsion from a Europe whose statesmen, it seemed, could never get away from the old, fatal game of 'power politics.'

It is idle to hope that this final disillusionment of America can be readily dispelled. Unfortunate in the possession of an Ambassador who has got himself badly on the wrong side of the press, England is definitely *mal vu* in American eyes at this critical juncture of world affairs. The oil embargo is regarded with suspicion as a device whereby the United States could be dragged in to pull the League chestnuts out of the fire. Public opinion is visibly stiffening against any 'neutrality' legislation which would give the Executive discretionary power to weight the scales against a League-condemned aggressor. Whatever views of international morality may be entertained in the White House, the prevailing mood today in New York bar, Ohio small town store, Louisiana roadhouse—wherever '100 per cent America' meets to talk—is: 'Count Europe out; ourselves alone.'

#### THE IMPASSIONED PREACHER OF ROYAL OAK

AN AMERICAN correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, Milan Fascist daily, has sent back to his paper the following enthusiastic account of Father

Coughlin, the 'impassioned preacher of Royal Oak':—

When Father Coughlin speaks over the radio all America listens. The banker in Wall Street drops his talk about business and listens. The farmer, lost in the far reaches of the West, interrupts his afternoon nap and listens. The young men in the gymnasiums; the sick in the hospitals; the frequenters of elegant circles; and the crowds of workers from the small suburban places—all listen. Blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, millionaires and unemployed listen, but especially those millions of individuals who belong to the *petite bourgeoisie* of the country, which forms the backbone of present-day America and to which the preacher of Royal Oak addresses himself, at four o'clock in the afternoon every Sunday, as to his most faithful followers:

Nine years ago, when Father Coughlin began to deliver his first sermons over the radio, his name was completely unknown, the sanctuary of the Little Flower was a tiny country church attended by scarcely fifty people, and the words of his sermons, broadcast by a small radio station in Detroit, were heard by no more than a few thousand radio fans. Today Father Coughlin is the most popular man in the United States. The Sanctuary has become the goal of enormous pilgrimages; the radio network used for the broadcasts includes thirty-five stations covering the whole nation; and the army of listeners, for the most part organized into an association which has taken the name of 'National Union for Social Justice,' is coming to be a political force capable of disturbing seriously, if not of upsetting completely, the old balance of the traditional parties.

Indeed, to say merely that Father Coughlin is the most widely heard speaker in America is to say too little, because the preacher of Royal Oak, until a few years ago the modest priest of a still more modest country parish, has now become the authoritative head of a vast social,

economic and moral movement which, translated into terms of political action and focused on the definite carrying out of its program, might someday undertake the task of renovating the ruling circles and the administrative organizations of the United States—a renovation which is today one of the most insistent aspirations of the American people.

Bundled up in an ample cloak and wearing a gray felt hat pulled down over his eyes, Father Coughlin continues to be for all the parishioners of Royal Oak a good country priest ready to hurry wherever his sacred duty calls him. But in his voice there vibrates an energy, secure and serene, which dominates and conquers. It is thanks to this energy that he has been able to broaden the spiritual confines of his parish from one shore of the United States to the other, and that his flock has been transformed into a disciplined and faithful army.

'We shall continue to struggle with all our powers,' he told me, 'against the aberrations of a voracious capitalism, against the menace of a disintegrating and oppressive Communism, and for the triumph of the Christian principles of social justice.'

Then he turned to the subject of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict and the League sanctions.

'As an American, and in the interests of the American people, I shall not weaken in my fight against the political force which in this country is seeking to drag America with the tow-lines of English banking capitalism or Russian Communism against the Italy of Benito Mussolini in order to increase the sanctions, which are so much the more iniquitous and ignoble because they have been undertaken to damage a great and civilized nation. The sanctions will not overthrow

Italy. They are the result of a plot which has been slowly woven with the active support of international Masonry, the exponents of high finance, and of Communism, all allied at Geneva to defeat Fascism. Now, since Masonry, high finance, and Communism are also *our* enemies, as Americans and Catholics we shall not abandon the struggle until the conspiracy has been completely frustrated.'

#### HOMMAGE À PHILADELPHIE

HERE is another fragment from Pierre Girard's impressions of America, which have been appearing in the *Journal de Genève*:—

Shall I love you someday, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, where in the restaurant-bars Angels bring luscious roast-beef? I already love the murmuring of the wind as it blows around the churches, and, above all, the absence of mystery, which becomes very mystery itself. And later, when I have explained America to my friends for long stretches, and no one thinks of asking me about it any more, I shall discover new reasons for love, and new melodies not heard before.

The tiny street; with its similar houses, red brick, 'guillotine' windows framed with white stone—as one walks along its sidewalk, with its uneven flags, it ends by winning your heart. And one could spend his life following this street, which, under a thousand names and a thousand numbers, comes back again and again to offer itself, in the South as well as in the North. The garage and the church, the red and blue paint, and the gothic gray, the electric sign, and the convocation of the faithful, in gold on black—why should not all this form one of those memories which, suddenly, their day having come, sigh, awake, and sing?

# BOOKS ABROAD

MR. KEYNES SOLVES THE RIDDLE  
THE GENERAL THEORY OF EMPLOYMENT,  
INTEREST AND MONEY. By J. M.  
Keynes. London: Macmillan and Com-  
pany. 1936.

(G. D. H. Cole in the *New Statesman and Nation*)

UNEMPLOYMENT is, in the view of most people, the disease that is threatening our present capitalist societies with destruction. There are, indeed, some who protest that unemployment is not an evil, but will be a positive good as soon as we consent to convert it into leisure and to distribute it aright among the whole people. And there are others who maintain that unemployment is not a disease, but only a symptom of something far more deeply wrong with the economic systems under which we live. But against the apostles of leisure commonsense urges that until most people are a good deal richer than today most of them will prefer more goods to more leisure if they are given the choice. And against those who regard unemployment as no more than a symptom it can fairly be argued that the distinction between symptom and disease is not so absolute as rhetoric can make it appear.

At all events most statesmen and most economists profess to be in search of a cure for unemployment and to regard this quest as at any rate one of the most important economic ends. The trouble is that they differ profoundly about the methods that are calculated to secure their object. Of late years quite a chorus of voices—from the City, from the business world, and from the academic groves of Cambridge and London—has been assuring us that the abnormally high unemployment of post-War years is the consequence chiefly of the 'rigidity' of wages—that is, of the folly of workmen under Trade Union influences in valuing their labor at higher rates than the market will bear. Let wages

fall till they coincide with the 'marginal productivity' of the last laborer, and all will be well. So we have been told, with so much punditry self-assurance that it has been quite difficult for the plain man, confronted with a series of unintelligible equations, not to begin thinking that it may perhaps be true.

There have been, of course, other voices—Mr. J. A. Hobson's, for example,—preaching a very different doctrine and telling us that 'under-consumption' is at the root of all our difficulties. What is wanted, on this showing, is more consuming power; for ultimately the entire volume of economic activity is necessarily limited by consumption. Investment is useless unless there is a market for the consumers' goods which it can be applied to making; for *all* demand is, in the last resort, a demand for goods and services to be consumed. But these voices, in respectable circles, have been drowned by the outraged clamor of the orthodox. 'Under-consumption' has remained a disreputable heresy; and of late, though Marx himself can be quoted on its side, Communist Marxists, such as Mr. John Strachey, have denounced it with hardly less gusto than they have directed against the more orthodox view—presumably because when they are dealing with capitalist or other non-Marxist economists they work on the principle of 'the horridier, the better.'

But now there comes, from one who is no Socialist and is indisputably one of the world's leading economists trained in the classical tradition, a book which with all the armory of the classical method pushes at one blow off their pedestals all the classical deities from Ricardo to Wicksell, and all their attendant self-canonized sprites from Vienna and the London School, and puts in their vacant places not indeed Marx, but Mr. J. A. Hobson and the late Silvio Gesell. For Mr. J. M. Keynes, after