

# THE AMERICAN SCENE

POLITICALLY the year 1939 began with much to comfort those truly solicitous about the future of the democratic idea in the United States. The President's message to the Seventy-sixth Congress as well as the inaugural speeches of the several newly elected or reelected Governors carried a full realization of the spreading dangers, here and abroad, to the hard-won principles in the Bill of Rights, together with a reaffirmation of the national resolve to defend those principles in the United States against all open and covert totalitarian propaganda. Governor Lehman of New York, perhaps more vigorously than any other state executive, carefully described the differences between our mode of government and those in Fascist and Communist countries. At great length he pleaded with the Legislature so to amend the laws and precedents with regard to evidence obtained by public officials that the utmost personal rights are left inviolate.

President Roosevelt pointed out that the enormous changes in social living during the past six years were made 'without concentration camps, and without a scratch on freedom of speech, freedom of the press or the rest of the Bill of Rights.' Looking into the future he warned the nation that 'the united strength of a democratic nation can be mustered only when its people, educated by modern standards to know what is going on and where they are going, have conviction that they are receiving as large a share of opportunity for develop-

ment, as large a share of material success and of human dignity, as they have a right to receive.'

In other words, the strength of a democracy lies in its standard of living. The greater the public welfare and the more widespread individual self-respect, the more impervious is the nation against all forms of dictatorship. A strong labor movement, working for a more equitable distribution of the public wealth, thus constitutes a mighty safeguard against totalitarianism, and it also helps to insure the worthy aspects of the present economic system, for capitalism in nearly all its forms, as events in Germany and Italy have amply shown, has almost as much to fear from authoritarianism as constitutional government. Where 'the blessed right of being able to say what we please' has been abolished, everybody loses, the haves and have-nots, believers and atheists, poets and merchants alike.

IN THIS connection the recent survey of sentiment concerning the Wages and Hours Law, conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion, offers great encouragement. In the country as a whole 71 per cent voted in favor of the law, while 29 per cent were against. In January, 1938, when the Institute conducted a similar poll those in favor amounted to 69 per cent, while in 1937 only 61 per cent thought well of the minimum wage idea. Today, it seems, not only have the workers in general swung more and more in line with the Wages and Hours Law, but it also holds true of

the employers. The New England and Middle Atlantic states, where most of the nation's manufacturing takes place, led in the percentages of favorable ballots. Then came the West Central, Western, and East Central states, in that order. In the South, strangely enough, where wages are lower than anywhere else in the country, only 59 per cent voted for the law.

These figures apparently mean that the people have come to look upon the minimum wage as a decent form of governmental regulation, not the rank injustice which organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers incline to believe it is. The *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, which have been agitating in favor of major changes in the law, it would therefore be logical to say, have represented not the majority but a rapidly decreasing minority of public opinion. The Republican politicians who did not dare to come out publicly against any of the major economic bills of the New Deal obviously knew more of the temper of the voters than the editorial writers and columnists who give the unwary reader the impression of absolute surety and soundness. Perhaps Walter Lippmann, Dorothy Thompson and Mark Sullivan don't know everything after all.

THE American lynching record improves with the years, though it still presents a disgraceful picture. The Tuskegee Institute reports that in 1938 six persons were lynched, or two less than in 1937 and 1936, and fourteen less than in 1935. All the 1938 victims were Negroes, two of whom were burned. 'There were 42 instances in which officers of the law prevented lynching. Three of these were in

Northern states and 39 in Southern states.' The encouragement in the latter fact immediately disappears when one considers that all the lynchings were in the South: Florida, 1; Georgia, 1; Louisiana, 1; and Mississippi, 3. These four states appear among the last ten in nearly every comparative study made of the American confederation, while Mississippi has for years been known as the worst American state. It suffers from a lack of good hospitals, public schools, colleges, hotels, homes for the aged and incurably ill and newspapers; and Florida, Georgia and Louisiana are not far ahead of it. All four, being among the least civilized of American commonwealths, naturally practice the least civilized form of public entertainment, lynching.

SURGEON General Thomas Parran, in his annual report, reveals that the death-rate of 10.8 per thousand in the first six months of 1938 represented a decline from the rate of 11.3 in 1936 and 10.9 in 1937. Infant mortality and death from childbirth also fell noticeably. Most of the deaths in 1937 resulted from heart disease, malignant growths, pneumonia, kidney disease, accidents (not including automobile) and tuberculosis. Cases of smallpox mounted to the enormous total of 11,673, the highest since 1931, but very few of them ended fatally.

Considering the persistent unemployment of some 11,000,000 in the country, this record offers much to be thankful for. Relief funds plus a spreading immunity to infection doubtless had much to do with it. Almost certainly, if there had been no WPA grants, the death rates and the incidence of disease would have been

higher, as the first three-four years of the depression seemed to indicate. The WPA has cost billions, but hospitalization for the poor and public burials together would probably have cost just as much. As a matter of simple bookkeeping, the national relief program has evidently justified itself.

One thing which Dr. Parran points out should give pause to those in the medical profession who still have doubts about the wisdom of group medical practice. He estimates that '40,000,000 people in the United States—the lower economic third of our population—are unable to provide themselves with medical care during serious illness,' and that the nation lacks at least 360,000 hospital beds. These two matters constitute the chief problems which coöperative medicine has tried, and with remarkable success to all concerned in nearly every instance, to solve. Officials of organized conservative medicine maintain that group practice 'lowers the standards of medical practice, hinders medical progress and brings about the regimentation of the medical profession to virtually the standard of a labor union,' but they have not produced a single valid example to prove these charges.

ACCORDING to figures compiled by the Psychological Index of the WPA, the number of articles dealing with psychological research in English, especially in the United States, continues to mount. The increase in the number of English psychological articles in 1938 over the preceding year was 7 per cent, 'a new peak for the period since the war,' though in German, the language of Freud, Ad-

ler and Jung, the total for 1938 remained 'more than 44 per cent below the post-War zenith of 2,658 articles published in 1930.' Finally, all over the world, 'the rate of increase from year to year has been subsiding recently from the pace set during the decade of recovery following the war.'

These figures somewhat clarify a literary phenomenon that has become more and more evident in the past two-three years, namely, the subsidence of psychological works, both imaginative and otherwise, on the Continent and their continued influence, particularly in the non-fictional field, in England and America. The cult of D. H. Lawrence, as purified by Virginia Woolf and filled with 'social significance' by the more vociferous radicals, persists in England; while in our land the Dale Carnegies and Dorothea Brandes, with their guides to smooth living and easy dying, keep on filling their vaults with government bonds and other securities. The dire economic misery of the Central European countries probably has something to do with the diminishing interest in the more obvious Freudian excitations, and perhaps the English-speaking peoples would have shown the same diminishing interest had starvation and spiritual humiliation hit them with equal force. But no matter what the future holds in store for them, the chances are that they too will turn more and more to the sounder, age-old forms of fiction and will learn to smile indulgently at those who pretend to tell them when to *Wake Up and Live* and *How to Make Friends and Influence People*. Collective aberrations, like individual fevers, quiet down in time, if only to be supplanted by other aberrations.

TWO events have already made the new year memorable. Of these the first was the full and unconditional pardon granted to Tom Mooney by the newly elected Governor of California. Almost from the day of his conviction, 22 years ago, of having set the bomb that killed ten people during the Preparedness Day parade in San Francisco, lawyers and laymen from all walks of life made appeals for his release on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that perjury and malice had conspired against him. Apparently every avenue of court procedure had been exhausted, and five Governors had refused to pardon the innocent man for reasons that made so little sense that they must forever remain mysterious. It has remained for Governor Olson to do the only honorable thing by Mooney, thereby clearing his state to some extent of one of the most shameful pages in its annals.

The happy ending of the Mooney case naturally raises memories of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. In all probability, as more and more impartial students agree, both men were convicted wholly by mob hysteria. They died in the Massachusetts electric chair seven years after a jury found them guilty. By that time so much doubt had been raised regarding their guilt that honest men and women hoped Governor Fuller would at least commute their death sentences to life imprisonment.

Bolstered by the findings of a committee including former President Lowell of Harvard, he felt, on the contrary, that justice demanded their execution. All that kindly people can do now is to hope that God will have mercy on Governor Fuller's soul.

Professor Felix Frankfurter's elevation to the Supreme Court assures that tribunal a liberal majority for many years to come. The universal approval which greeted his nomination made sweet music to the ears of all genuine friends of American democracy. Dr. Frankfurter had been called a Red because he defended Sacco and Vanzetti and helped the New Deal in shaping its policies. A Jew, he had also earned the silent disfavor of those men and women who find more pleasure in Henry Ford's pronouncements than in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The Frankfurter nomination also quieted the legend that President Roosevelt never forgives, for Dr. Frankfurter was believed to be opposed to the President's Court Plan, perhaps his favorite proposal.

With Tom Mooney free and Felix Frankfurter in the Supreme Court, Americans have a right to feel that while, in a democracy, trains are not as punctual as in Italy, and 'public improvements' are not as quickly realized as in Germany, human lives and the immemorial decencies are more secure.

—C. A.

# NOTES AND COMMENTS

## Valentine for Il Duce

For the Duce's delirious ideas,  
We can offer but two panaceas;  
Either give him Gibraltar,  
Suez, Cyprus and Malta—  
Or a kick in the Pantellarias.

—Sagittarius

## Flat Foot Politics

The Soviet youth is now being taught the 'Western dances' in the Moscow Palace of Culture dedicated to Stalin. Particular attention is being paid to the rumba and the teachers are following very carefully the method of the English dancer, Victor Silvester. However, a high ideological level is being maintained. A good example is a speech of the dancing master to the graduates of the school who have finished his course of 'Western dances.'

'As you are leaving our dance school, allow me to remind you once again of the true function of the legs. Who, if not we, will move the rumba on the road to progress? Certainly, not the capitalist Victor Silvester. My last injunction to you is: "Think with your feet."'

—*Posledniya Novosti*, Paris

## Blind Alleys?

Two towns in Sudeten Gau, Turn and Teplitz, have put on record their obligations to a British statesman. Each has renamed one of its principal thoroughfares 'Lord Runciman-Street.'

—Peterborough in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post*, London

## Appeasement

Interview with Mussolini, *Daily Telegraph*, May 28, 1936.

Interviewer: Can one say that, with the inclusion of Abyssinia within the territories under Italian sovereignty, the new Roman Empire is complete?

Mussolini: The end of sanctions will mark the entry of Italy into the ranks of the satisfied States.

—*Tribune*, London

## Nazi Noël

Children: Have You Thought It Over?

All the things you want to write for the Christmas Prize Competition of the *Fränkische Tageszeitung*.

Boys and girls! You know the Jew! Write down all you know about him! Or paint and draw the Jew as you see him!

And you tiny tots, have you already thought what you want to draw?

Children, there are so many prizes.

—Announcement in *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, Nuremberg

## Rhyme if Not Reason

Whatever hostile critics may say, we are convinced that our motives in the creation of our Empire were not greed of gold or love of power, but a subconscious urge to civilize, that only became conscious under the enlightening pen of Rudyard Kipling.

—Lord Esher

## But Definitely!

It is a curious fact that the hunting-field can show more individuals who have done or are doing something definitely worth while than are to be found in any other community gathered together for purposes of relaxation. A hunting holiday is the finest Winter Sport of all.

—Advertisement in the *Times*, London

## Those Wedding Bells

The Bishop of Stuhlweissenburg, in agreement with the Cardinal-Prince-Archbishop of Hungary, has forbidden that the *Wedding March* from Wagner's *Lobengrin* or Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music, or any part of these operas, should be played at weddings.

The reason given is that the *Wedding March* in *Lobengrin* is the prelude to a murder and the cooling of conjugal relations. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* the bridegroom is transformed, on the stage, into an ass.

'Tactful enlightenment by the clergy,' adds