

*Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy.* By ROBERT MICHELS. New York, Hearst's International Library Company, 1915.—ix, 416 pp.

This volume is an elaborate defence of the thesis that

the majority of human beings, in a condition of eternal tutelage, are predestined by tragic necessity to submit to the dominion of a small minority and must be content to constitute the pedestal of an oligarchy. . . . History seems to teach us that no popular movement, however energetic and vigorous, is capable of producing profound and permanent changes in the social organism of the civilized world. The preponderant elements of the movement, the men who lead and nourish it, end by undergoing a gradual detachment from the masses, and are attracted within the orbit of the "political class."

In other words, no matter how wide the suffrage, how numerous the elections, how democratic the forms of party organization, how "direct" the primaries, a few will always lead and dominate, the many will follow and be dominated.

In all this, there is little new to those who know their Aristotle, their Ostrogorski, or their assembly district leader. Acknowledgment of the general truth of the proposition is to be found in the old axiom about eternal vigilance being the price of liberty. Michels simply writes a new chapter to an old story. He has gone somewhat more into the psychology of parties than have most American writers on parties, and he has added to Bryce, Le Bon, Ostrogorski, Mosca and Pareto an immense amount of detail drawn from the political experience of French, German, and Italian socialists. It is the systematic treatment and the wealth of illustration from European experience which make the work of special value to students of American politics. It is indeed more of a philosophy of politics than a description of mere political machinery.

Michels' point of departure is the necessity for leadership in modern industrial democracy. There is a tendency toward oligarchy in all political organization, but as modern parties must inevitably pass judgment upon highly complicated problems of legislation and management, technical information becomes absolutely essential to effective action, and consequently direction must fall into the hands of the few possessing the requisite expert knowledge. In recognition of this fact the socialistic parties have founded schools for the education of their officers and workers. No one can speak with authority on social in-

surance, for example, without having made a special study of the literature on the subject and the practice of advanced countries.

The technical specialization that inevitably results from all extensive organization renders necessary what is called expert leadership. Consequently the power of determination comes to be considered one of the specific attributes of leadership and is generally withdrawn from the masses to be concentrated in the hands of the leaders alone. . . . The more extended and the more ramified the official apparatus of the organization, the greater the number of its members, the fuller its treasury, and the more widely circulated its press, the less efficient becomes the direct control exercised by the rank and file.

Then there are the less obvious psychological elements, such as real incompetence of the masses for direct government in highly technical matters, their love of dramatic spokesmen, their veneration for heroes. When once the tribal gods are established it is almost impossible to overthrow them. They point to their services and their sacrifices. The masses are thankful for past favors and ready to rend those who attack their own chosen.

Leaders, particularly among the socialistic parties, usually start out by making sacrifices for the cause. They are workmen who have been blacklisted for carrying on propaganda or they are bourgeois who have left their class to champion the rights of the fourth estate. As the parties grow older, they fall into the hands of the older men who naturally become more conservative with advancing years. The leaders soon have a vested interest in their Parliamentary careers or in their positions as party organizers, officers and editors, to say nothing of the party property. In 1913 the central treasury of the German socialist trade unions owned property worth more than \$22,000,000; hundreds of leaders, big and little, held paid jobs; and socialist innkeepers depended upon socialist trade for their livelihood. Thus the party machine and its property becomes a vested interest enlisted on the side of the established order.

The sifting process which tends to concentrate the party leadership in the hands of an oligarchy is accelerated by other influences in the socialist groups. Only the veterans survive. The men of science who are drawn to the party through their idealistic natures or their indifference to large pecuniary rewards do not often like the hot and dusty battles of the political forum. The young men of genuine ability who are swept into the socialist movement by their impetuous natures, during youthful days before avarice becomes the dominant motive, are

constantly drawn off, as they grow older, by attractive opportunities within the conservative circles. They grow disgusted with the proletariat or they are found to be useful to the superior classes and they are given lucrative positions in public or private life. Thus the circle of the faithful is narrowed. The few who remain true to the end are all the more endeared to the masses on account of their tested loyalty. Their leadership is all the more secure.

Although Michels believes that a wider popular education will increase the capacity of the masses for exercising control over their leader, his outlook is rather pessimistic :

The democratic currents of history resemble successive waves. . . . When democracies have gained a certain stage of development they undergo a gradual transformation, adopting the aristocratic spirit and in many cases also the aristocratic forms against which at the outset they struggled so fiercely. Now new accusers arise to denounce the traitors ; after an era of glorious combats and of inglorious power, they end by fusing with the old dominant class ; whereupon once more they are in turn attacked by fresh opponents who appeal in the name of democracy.

From this point of view, all the conservatives have to do is to regard the radicals with calm indifference and to buy the powerful among them with ribbons, titles, honors, nominations, benefices, positions—and money. Thus the materialist interpretation of history becomes the instrument of its enemies—the idealists of the *status quo* ; and by a strange turn of fortune Marx becomes the servant of the Hohenzollerns. This is no place to argue with Dr. Michels. Moreover pessimism is a matter of temperament, not of philosophy. He has told more truth than most of us can endure and his volume will prove to be stimulating to all students of democratic institutions.

C. A. BEARD.

*Principles of Labor Legislation.* By JOHN R. COMMONS and JOHN B. ANDREWS. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1916.—524 pp.

The aim of the authors of this book has been to reduce the vast complexity of details of statutes, administrative orders and court decisions to systematic statement, and to subordinate them to the test of principle. Purposely, underlying principles are given place of first importance. The science of legislation is kept boldly in the foreground.