

History and Hysteria

THE HISTORY OF THE HAYMARKET AFFAIR. By Henry David. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1936. \$4.

THIS LABOR UNION RACKET. By Edward Dean Sullivan. New York: Hillman-Curl. 1936. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS ADAMIC

IN quality these two books have nothing in common. The first, dealing with the famous bomb incident in 1886, is the successful work of a thorough young scholar who presumably devoted to it years of research, thought, and actual writing. The second, aiming to assay certain important current developments in the American labor movement, is the hasty job of a sensational journalist. Nonetheless, especially since their publication dates are within two days of one another, it is, I think, proper to review them together. Here is American labor at the beginning and at the end of a fifty-year period.

Dr. David, a member of the history department of the College of the City of New York and a collaborator with Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes on the huge "History of Western Civilization," offers a detailed, splendidly authenticated, well-reasoned, and competently written account of the Haymarket Bomb affair. It is the first book on the subject that really deserves to be called a book, and it may well be the last word on it. He presents a great deal of new material and I doubt if any future writer will be able to add much to the factual and interpretive truth concerning the episode itself.

Dr. David begins with the forces that led to the incident and ends with its immediate effects on the American scene. The trial and the execution of the anarchists are done superbly. The next to the last chapter, on "Who Threw the Bomb?", establishes the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of saying who really threw it, and ends on the idea that "the setting of the bomb-throwing and the logic of the whole situation"—which are also well presented earlier in the book—"compel one to conclude that the bomb did not violate the propaganda of the [anarchist] movement, and was probably a product of it. This judgment, however, does not permit the conclusion that the eight individuals convicted . . . were guilty. On the basis of the reliable evidence, they must be considered innocent." The italics are Dr. David's; he makes much of the fact, and properly so, that the affair constitutes one of the blackest chapters in the history of American justice.

In the last chapter, however, which is entitled "Conclusions," the scholar in Dr. David who requires some sort of document for every statement limits him, I

think, too much. He deals only with immediate effects of the affair on Chicago and on America, which are a matter of record. He points out that the Haymarket bomb led to the first major red-scare in this country

and produced a campaign of "red-baiting" which has rarely been equalled. So expertly was this campaign waged that it molded the popular mind for years to come, and played its part in conditioning the mass response to the imaginary threat of the "social revolution" frequently displayed in the United States since 1886.

He shows, too, that the episode became, on the other hand, a factor in the creation of new radicals and new radical movements, and mentions in this connection Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Eugene Debs, and Bill Haywood. But, because there probably is no written proof of this, he fails to bring out that the Haymarket furor gave a great impetus to the growth of the politically conservative and respectable craft-union movement of the so-called labor aristocracy ("craft unionism, pure and simple") under Sam Gompers; that that movement—destined to dominate the American labor scene for the next fifty years—secretly took on certain anarchist characteristics, including violence by dynamite and fire arms; and that in the course of decades the A. F. of L. unionism revised and twisted those characteristics, here and there with the unwitting aid of anarchic employers, or as a reaction to the violence of such employers, into out-and-out racketeering.

This lack strikes me as especially serious in connection with this review; for, had Mr. David even partly developed the above extremely important truth, he might have saved me the task of writing the ensuing few paragraphs about Mr. Sullivan's extremely objectionable book, which cannot be ignored because it touches, even if wrongly, on a most important situation. Had Mr. David carried his job a little further, I might easily

have taken care of Mr. Sullivan by simply referring to the end of "The History of the Haymarket Affair." Now I am compelled to denounce "This Labor Union Racket" as a superficial, ill-thought-out, red-baiting, xenophobic book, concocted around Hearstian and Chicago Tribune headlines, conceivably with the ambition of cashing in, even if only in a small way, on the currently developing anti-red and anti-alien hysteria, which is tied up with the general American crisis, including the crisis in the American labor movement, now on the verge of turning into new directions.

Not that Mr. Sullivan's book is a package of nothing but lies; on the contrary, it contains many surface facts about labor rackets which are important and challenging, but for the most part already familiar to newspaper readers. The trouble is that he does not understand those facts and does not know, or care to know, what is behind them. He seems unconcerned about the truth of the matter which is to be sought among and under the surface facts. Labor rackets, he seems to suggest, exist simply because we have labor racketeers. He does not wonder how those racketeers became what they are. It does not occur to him to study the ideology, if it can be called that, of the A. F. of L., and realize that labor racketeering is an outgrowth thereof, just as the A. F. of L. and its principles are as inevitable developments out of the American life as a whole during the past fifty years as are the Steel Trust, the Lord of San Simeon, Al Capone, and Mr. Sullivan himself.

Employing the typical red- and alien-baiting methods (which is to say that he is as careless with truth as were the red-baiters back in 1886, and never exerts his power of judgment), Mr. Sullivan makes much of the Communist Party in this country. He quotes Stalin on the importance of the American communist movement, not realizing that Stalin can be a humorist. He says that communism is a great and growing power in the United States, while, if he took a trip through the country as I do occasionally, he could not help knowing the opposite—unless, of



THE HAYMARKET AFFAIR. Contemporary cartoon by Nast.

Oxford in Nigeria

course, he is one of those frantic patriots who consider Jim Farley, Joe Kennedy, and John L. Lewis communists. He suggests that part of the communist power in America stems from the "7,000,000 aliens and their dependents" living here, while the truth is that the present number of unnaturalized foreigners in the United States is only 4,300,000, and most of them are more conservative than Herbert Hoover or Patrick Cardinal Hayes.

Anticipating the importance of John L. Lewis in the next few years, Mr. Sullivan exerts himself to present him both as a near-communist and an ambitious seeker of power for the sake of power who uses labor to attain his personal ends. He does not know, or chuses to ignore the fact, that to a representative of the East St. Louis (Ill.) *Journal* the head of the C. I. O. recently made the following statement:

I had read and digested and disagreed with Marx long before many of my Socialist friends had heard of him. His ideas and policies, I believed, never had a place in America. And I still believe that. Those ideas grew out of conditions in Europe and many have had application there, but not in America.

Nor does Mr. Sullivan appear to know that Lewis was forced into his present challenging position by the problem of existence his United Mine Workers face in the America of 1936.

In short, while Dr. David's book, despite its above-mentioned shortcoming, belongs in every library, the place for Mr. Sullivan's volume, although it contains, as I say, not a few significant surface facts, is the nearest rubbish-can.

Popular Philosophy

GUIDE TO PHILOSOPHY. By C. E. M. Joad. New York: Random House. 1936. \$2.50.

THIS book, within its limits, for it deals only with a particular range of problems of philosophy, those that have to do with the nature of knowledge and with the scientific and idealistic theories of the world, is a real feat of popular writing. Without being historical, it presents the views of a number of historically famous philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, in a manner that is comprehensible without too great over-simplification. Joad even undertakes a fairly successful chapter on A. N. Whitehead, and another on Marxian dialectical materialism. He is constantly argumentative, and mixes an occasional bad argument with the good, in a way that should arouse the reader's critical alertness. The book is not quite the masterpiece it has been proclaimed, but it is just the thing as a guide for the reader who is already interested in philosophy as a reasoned pursuit, but whose knowledge of the subject needs to be amplified and brought into order.

THE AFRICAN WITCH. By Joyce Cary. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

MR. CARY'S book, I am convinced at the moment, is one of the most readable novels I have ever read. It is, on the whole, the story of a very minor prince, educated at an English public school and at Oxford, who returns to his Nigerian state as a claimant to the throne, if you can call it that. He is full of the ideas which one is apt to pick up at a public school and at Oxford—education, enlightenment, good form, reform. It is unfortunate that the other claimant should be a painted Mohammedan who has apparently never heard of these ideas; it is unfortunate, too, that the English resident and his officials are inclined to think them unnecessary in a Negro. But then the author seems indifferent to them as well; to him, the arrival of a Negro prince with Oxford ideas is an incident no more remarkable in Africa than fever, and no more susceptible to remedy than magic.

This is a great relief: we are not to be preached to. The English people in this book are not serving any particular end—or rather such ends as they serve are purely personal. They are in Nigeria because they were bored somewhere else, or because they were curious, or because there was no better job for them. One or two, it is true, believe in medicine, one (but he is a German missionary) believes in God, and all of them believe in the superiority of the white man. But nobody serves a flag or a cause; and their existence, deprived of a past or a future, is a day-to-day affair, activated a little improbably by the author's plot.

The plot is highly complicated, very strenuous, and very unimportant in the sense that it illuminates no contemporary question. The important thing about the novel is that the people in it are so alive, so unimportantly and vividly alive. They are in love, they drink whisky, they play polo. A white girl (she is an Oxford don with advanced ideas) is rather too kind to Aladai, the Oxford prince; another white girl dances with Aladai by moonlight, which starts a scandal; and the Resident writes equivocal reports, and just occasionally somebody gets worried about the status of

the English in Nigeria. There is also a Wazir, a master of the horse, a girl half-burned for witchcraft, a pimp, and a whole seething, contemned, contemptuous native town.

What about the plot? It would have to be an ingenious one to bring order to this babel, and it is. There is war between the claimants: and Aladai (who has offended the English) gets mixed up with a lunatic convert, who hopes to please Jesus by feeding girls to a sacred crocodile, and with his witch sister, who starts a woman's war on the side. The women attack the English and the male principle with an indifferent but genial fury. Everything gets completely out of hand, and at the end all is as it was in the beginning.

Is there, possibly, a moral to be discovered here? Something about education, something about empire, something about how nice it would be if the nicer English stayed away from Africa? I don't think so. I doubt if you could even



NIGERIAN DRAWINGS BY C. LEROY BALDRIDGE. From "White Africans and Black."

venture an opinion whether the author is an important author or not. The progress of his book does a certain violence to one's ideas of fiction; it is a rambling sort of a book. But if it had been otherwise it would not have achieved what it does achieve so triumphantly—a portrayal of the immense, the passionately variety of a perfectly pointless existence. Do the English

and the natives really live this way in Nigeria? The author offers no assistance. He is writing, on his own confession, an imaginary tale about imaginary people, and the things that interest him are pride, fear, goodness, cruelty, obscenity, and fun. He is also deeply interested in the whites and the blacks and how they get on together: but his interest is not sociological, he has no point of view. It is probably very wrong of him to have no point of view; it is even more probable that, if he had one, he would have produced a very second-rate novel. I find his novel very soothing as it is; and when my head begins to ache with causes and doctrines, I shall take it down and read it again.