

United Front or Trojan Horse?

WHAT ARE WE TO DO? By John Strachey. New York: Random House. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by PAUL H. DOUGLAS

MR. STRACHEY is the master of a powerful and persuasive style who argues that the experience of the last twenty years has demonstrated that the conservative socialists have been crucially wrong in believing the propertied groups would acquiesce in any ultimate democratic victory of the masses.

In the first place, he declares, capitalism is no longer expanding as it was prior to 1929, but is now distinctly contracting. It, therefore, cannot make the concessions which it once could, and instead has to depress wages in order to maintain profits. It is now counter-attacking by fostering fascism and quasi-fascism. Secondly, he argues that the workers cannot introduce fundamental reforms until they have really conquered power, since the propertied groups can always consciously or unconsciously engineer a slump if the laborites go too far. Such a threat, he points out, has commonly forced the moderates to give up their program of reform. Finally, he implies the British Fabians have been too greatly influenced by the peaceful and slow shifting of power in their country from the feudal aristocracy to the industrial capitalists. Strachey points out that this process amounted merely to one set of propertied classes admitting another to a partnership of power, but that both groups can be depended upon to resist to the bitter end any attempt of the propertyless workers to displace them.

In the face of such opposition, he contends, the British labor movement—under timid leadership—has steadily retreated. It gave up the general strike in 1926. It made no attempt at reform when it held political power from 1929 to 1931. It refused to solve the depression in favor of working-class measures, and its leaders instead went over to the Tories. It allowed itself to be deceived by the government about Abyssinia in 1935 and over Spain in 1936. It was weak in the latter instances because it could not bring itself to believe the Tories were being governed by class interests in refusing to check Mussolini and Hitler, and instead ascribed to them national virtues which the Tories did not in fact possess. Unless this policy is speedily reversed, the British movement, he warns, will be overwhelmed in the same manner as were the workers in Germany and Austria. Fascism

will then conquer all of Europe. And fascism, he insists, is merely the political policy of capitalism in a period of decay.

Mr. Strachey's remedy is for a People's Front in both Great Britain and America which will defend "peace, democracy, and the national standard of life." Such a popular front should include the democratic elements of the middle class, as well as the workers, and should not exclude the communists, whom Strachey as a fellow-member naturally regards as the most disciplined and alert of all.



John Strachey

There is no doubt that the democracies and the workers do need to resist fascism far more vigorously than in the past. There are, nevertheless, several crucial points upon which Mr. Strachey's reasoning is either dubious or wrong. Thus, it is not yet certain whether the last nine years represent a permanent contraction of capitalism or merely a temporary dip in its ascending curve. Should the latter prove to be the case,

much of the present strain would be reduced. Mr. Strachey distinctly errs when he identifies the maintenance of money wage rates with the protection of the workers' standard of life. On the contrary, when prices are falling, wage rates can be reduced and the standard of life can be maintained or enhanced.

Mr. Strachey, moreover, is disingenuous when he implies that the vicious attacks which the communists made prior to 1936 against socialist and working-class leaders were merely due to an individual excess of zeal. They were, on the contrary, dictated by the 1928 Congress of the Communist International, which declared Social Democracy to be the chief enemy of the working-class. Under this resolution, the communists tried to split the trade unions and refused to collaborate with working-class parties. It was in accordance with this policy that in the German Reichstag they joined the Nazis in voting against the Socialists and the Democratic center, and by forcing Hindenburg to rule by decrees, paved the way for Hitler. Strachey says nothing of all this, nor of the fact that the communists made a united front with the Nazis at the time of the Berlin transport strike. His glossing over of these vital errors may be the act of a "disciplined" communist, who defends the infallibility of his party, but it is certainly a gross perversion of history.

Finally, Mr. Strachey is silent upon a question which is in the mind of every sensible liberal and moderate when he is asked to admit the communists to a united front against fascism. This is, what would the communists then do if the fascists

were defeated? Would they continue to treat the democrats and liberals as allies, or would they stage a further revolt to make their party the dictator, and shoot down their erstwhile associates as the Bolsheviks did the Left Social Revolutionaries in 1918? It is true that fascism is the most immediate and most dangerous enemy of democracy and of social reform. It is also theoretically possible that the communists may have learned something from their former disastrous tactics. But while true liberals are and should be resolute in their opposition to fascism, they can hardly be blamed if they look somewhat askance at the present loud protestations of friendship on the part of the communists. The latter will have to give far more evidence that their recent change of policy is basic and would not be quickly discarded should the fascists be defeated, before they can expect to be regarded as defenders of democracy. Until they do, the liberals and democrats are likely to reject all such alliances on the ground that it is a cheerless prospect for a man to be killed by communist missiles after he has resisted fascist bullets. Nor do the democrats and laborites want to fight off the Nazi secret police of Himmler only to fall a victim to the G.P.U. technique of Yezhoffs and Yagoda.

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South of Hitler, in a Fold-Boat

THE DANUBE FLOWS THROUGH FASCISM. *Nine Hundred Miles in a Fold-Boat.* By William Van Til. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by JAMES FREDERICK GREEN

IF you have ever wanted to paddle down the Danube in a fold-boat and never quite gotten around to it, here is the book for you. Before you have finished the first fifty pages, you will probably start shopping for a fold-boat and accessories. Or even if you have merely wanted to descend the Danube in a more conventional steamboat, you will enjoy making a vicarious journey in such pleasant company. Or if you are just looking for a sprightly tale to relieve the monotony of midsummer, you will find this chronicle of a holiday trip an excellent choice.

William Van Til and his wife spent last summer in following the beautiful un-blue Danube from its source in the Black Forest to the Iron Gates in Rumania, traveling 882 of its 1266 miles in their fold-boat, *Long Island Duck II*. Almost everything encountered during the long journey—rapids, bridges, castles, boaters and boat-clubs, mountains, rainstorms, and gnats—is described with a rare zest and gaiety. The route is illus-

trated by sketch maps and photographs, the latter unfortunately often blurred.

There is more than just scenery in this travel book. Of the seven countries (including Austria) touched by the Danube, only Czechoslovakia could be listed as a democracy. An assistant professor of social studies at Ohio State University, the author is concerned with political trends and the opinion of the people regarding their rulers. He portrays quite effectively the sense of repression, fear, and uncertainty which hovers over the peasant and artisan. No American can fully realize the futility of modern nationalism until he has arrived at a European frontier. Having ourselves spent more than an hour one warm Sunday morning in signing the papers and paying the deposit needed to move a decrepit bicycle from Switzerland to France, we can sympathize with the Van Til annoyance as the Danube meanders from country to country, and from customs official to customs official.

Particularly delightful is the camaraderie of these fold-boaters of many nations, and the pleasure which they derive from this cheap and healthful sport. It is encouraging to note that we Americans are beginning to discover the joy and thrill of this popular European custom. Perhaps Mr. Van Til will write as entertaining a book on the Hudson or Mississippi, which offer their own brands of dictatorship and serfdom. If so, we shall be among the first to read it, for he has shown a large capacity for the intimate phrase, good humor, and shrewd observation of men and their institutions.

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Inner and Outer Life

MORE LIVES THAN ONE. By Claude Bragdon. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1938. \$3.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM SLOANE

WHEN a man comes to set down the story of his life there are two major courses open to him. He may write about what he has done, or essay the more difficult task of describing what he has *been*. Claude Bragdon has chosen the second alternative, and feeling that every man lives more than one life simultaneously, he has separated his book into five sections, each dealing with some distinct element in his past. The result is an uneven but decidedly out-of-the-ordinary chronicle with a special and occasionally overstressed charm of its own.

In placing his emphasis upon the inner realities of his life, Mr. Bragdon does not forget the external facts of his career. Or careers, for he was successively an architect and a scene designer. (He built the New York Central railroad terminal at Rochester and also the sets for Walter Hampden's "Cyrano.") In addition, he found time to write a number of books and to experiment with light as an art medium. These activities are well described, and the vignettes of his childhood in upstate New York are limned with humor and charm.

The final fifth of his autobiography is entitled "My Occult Life," a section for which the reader has been somewhat prepared by the passages describing his earlier books, particularly "Delphic Wo-

man" and "A Primer of Higher Space." Mr. Bragdon believes that the truth behind life is spiritual and metaphysical; he relates his whole experience to the intimations of the non-material which have come his way. As a theosophist, a believer in reincarnation, these intimations have not been rare.

Whatever you may think of this kind of thing, it has clearly given depth and richness to the author's life. At the same time it is responsible for the worst aspects of his book, a kind of moral sentimentality and a number of lapses from the clear, clean style of his writing.

On the other hand, the accounts of Louis Sullivan, Walter Hampden, Minnie Maddern Fiske, and the narration of the way in which Mr. Bragdon and Nicholas Bessaraboff came to translate Ouspensky's "Tertium Organum," are full of interest. They provide an unorthodox, sometimes absorbing book. Mr. Bragdon sounds like a man who has the courage to live his own life to the hilt.

Suffragette's Niece

EMILY. By Sally Benson. New York: Covici-Friede. 1938. \$2.

Reviewed by KATHARINE SIMONDS

THE modern woman, when Mrs. Benson gets through with her, will be as dead as her aunt the Suffragette. The only reason not to wish this satirist instant success in her crusade is that life would be so much duller without it. Of course, her moral—that woman's place is in her place—is the oldest recorded, since it was for hearkening to the voice of his wife that the Lord cursed Adam.

If no revolution can succeed until it has penetrated the class against which it is aimed, then the revolution against the Modern Woman is well on its way to success. For Mrs. Benson, as befits a Mirabeau, has all the qualities of the woman's mind at its best. She is light of touch, neat without being thin, deft in construction, and quick to perceive pathos as well as absurdity. Her dialogue is so skillful that you can't resist the temptation of reading it aloud; her epigrams so satisfying that you catch yourself trying to work them into your own conversation.

She has the keenest possible eye for the small change in which women demand back the gold of their lives. She is not anti-feminist—most of her women are not bad at heart, but she knows just why they drive their men wild, and just when. In spite of her skill and wit, she preaches as stern a moral for the woman of her day as did Maria Edgeworth for her contemporaries.

She warns us that it's time to shut our traps and let our moral ascendancy well up again in the silence; she assures us that men, having, as things are arranged, few alternatives to us, are touchingly eager to forgive if not to forget.



"The Danube meanders from country to country, and from customs official to customs official" (From "The Danube Flows through Fascism.")