

Rosy Specs, Blue Picture

THE FAT YEARS AND THE LEAN.
By Bruce Minton and John Stuart.
New York: Modern Age Books. 1940.
464 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by FREDERICK LEWIS ALLEN

THIS book is a curious exhibit. Taking the form of a history of the United States from Great War to Great War (from 1918 to 1939) it is a prolonged and unrelieved Communist tract, so orthodox as to be quite suitable for distribution by Soviet foreign missionary societies.

To begin it, as I did, without reading the foreword and thereby being notified of the intention of the authors "to sift a colossal body of evidence which in our estimation proves that capitalism, as it emerged after 1919, was moribund," is to be bewildered almost at once. On the very first page I confronted a statement that "once the statesmen of England and France staked off their claims [in the Paris Peace Conference], nothing remained for the United States. This country had to be content with having crushed German imperialism." Did the authors, I wondered, imagine that the United States had territorial claims for itself? What sort of history was this? On page 6 I was surprised to learn that "the great corporations had begun to come into their own. At the turn of the century they had produced two-thirds of the country's manufac-

tured goods; by 1919 this share was augmented to 87 per cent of the total." A footnote here cited Berle and Means—and a glance at Berle and Means showed that 87 per cent figure was for *all* corporations, not "great" corporations by any known system of measurement. That odd discrepancy drove me back to the foreword to find out what might be responsible for such carelessness—and also put me on my guard. On the next page appeared an even more astonishing statement—that during the War "the number of millionaires almost quadrupled: twenty-five thousand income-tax returns in 1918 showed incomes over one million dollars apiece." Again I went back to the record, and in the "World Almanac" for 1922 I found Federal figures on the number of individuals who paid income taxes for 1918 on incomes of a million dollars or more. The actual figure was not 25,000 but just 67! Heaven knows the profiteering in the War was scandalous in any case; but can't we, I asked myself, at least be accurate enough about it to avoid multiplying a statistic by 373?

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the ratio of factual inaccuracy in the book drops sharply from that point on, though there are various subsequent statements and figures which might be worth a careful check-up. But the overwhelming bias con-

tinues unabated, with all the imprecision that this implies. The word "monopoly" is used to mean any sort of business that the authors dislike, whether competitive or not. "Fascism" is used in the overall sense familiar to readers of recent Communist literature; for instance, the "nub of disagreement" in the Roosevelt-Landon campaign of 1936 "centered in the question of how to preserve [capitalism], whether by forcible dictatorship of monopoly that meant fascism, or by holding on to democratic forms, acknowledging certain abuses, and alleviating them." There is no lack of positiveness in the authors' opinions: writing about the onset of the depression, for example, they assert that "with the exception of a few Marxians, no one in America realized just what had happened." Nor do they shrink from the formidable problems of exegesis presented in recent months to Moscow missionaries. The Soviets, like the Communist Party, being always right, it is easy for them to announce that in the fall of 1939 Finland "began to indulge in a series of provocations directed against the U.S.S.R. At this point, the Soviets took stern measures. With the intention of eliminating a menace to its security and peace, the Soviet Union took up arms against the hostile Finnish government."

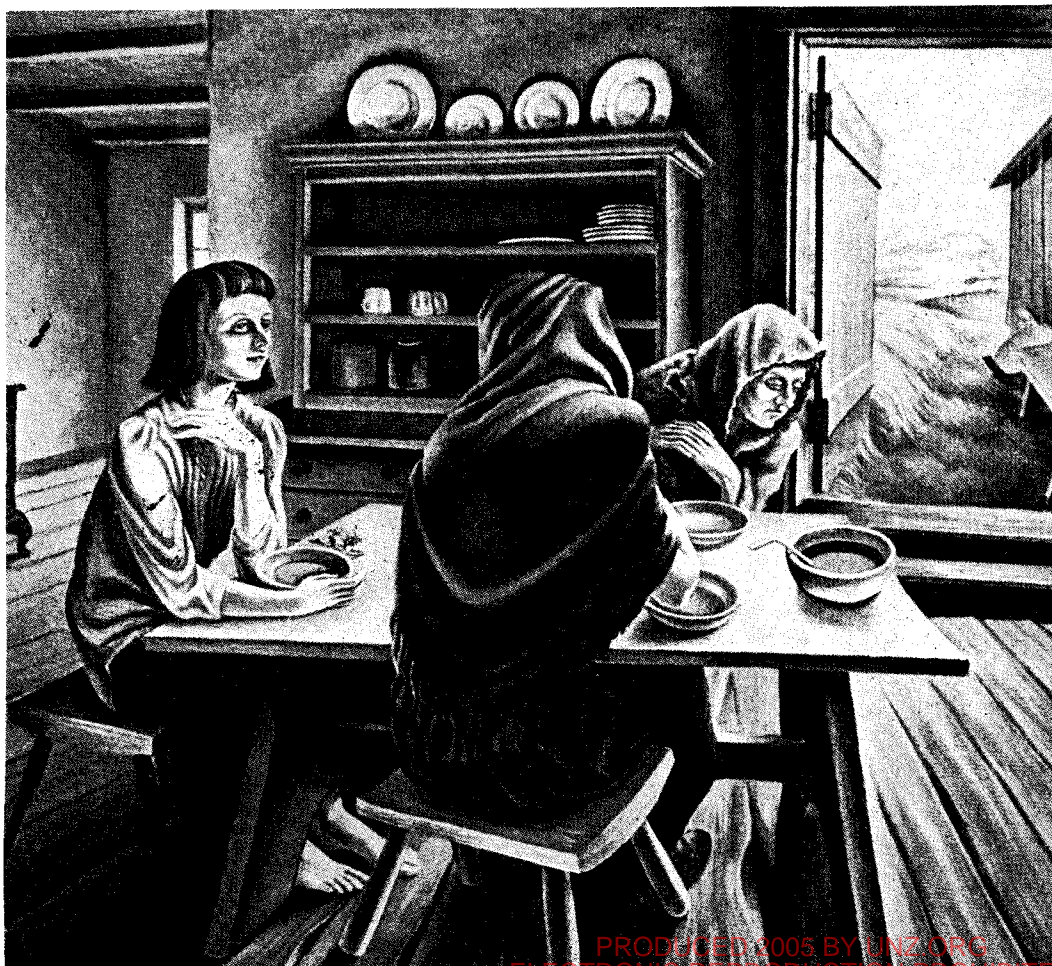
There is almost nothing in the book about American education, literature and the arts, religion, science, invention, engineering, or the changing conditions of marriage and family and social life. There is almost no suggestion that the American people ever enjoyed themselves. Not only is the entire story economic and political, as the authors themselves are the first to admit, but since the Marxians were not running things during this twenty-one-year period, almost everything that happened is presented as dimly wrong. One has a certain admiration for men who can stick so unerringly to the note of disapproval (except about the C.P. and Russia) for 429 pages; even in a history of a generally unhappy period, there must have been temptations to cheerfulness now and then.

But the reader should have a right, it seems to me, to ask for at least an attempt at impartial and discriminating judgment of men and events. The chief value of "The Fat Years and the Lean" is as a durable demonstration of the precise tint of the spectacles through which Soviet partisans looked at recent American history in 1939 and 1940.

Frederick Lewis Allen, an editor of Harper's magazine, is the author of "Only Yesterday," and "Since Yesterday," histories of the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties.

The Saturday Review

From the painting, "Give Us This Day," by John S. De Martelly



Radio and Reading

DO BROADCASTS COMPETE WITH BOOKS?

ALBERTA CURTIS

THE book world has viewed, somewhat down its nose and sometimes with alarm, the inroads which radio has made upon the leisure-time of the reading public. Radio is said to be a more facile and sociable medium of communication than print, and there is the fear that it will attract people away from reading for information and entertainment.

On the other hand, optimistic broadcasters, librarians, publishers, and booksellers have frequently wondered why radio cannot be used as a powerful tool to stimulate interest in reading. Mention of a title by a commentator, or the dramatization of a past novel have occasionally created great demand for the book throughout the country, *e.g.*, Alexander Woolcott's going "quietly mad" over James Hilton's "Lost Horizon" and Orson Welles's dramatization of H. G. Wells's "War of the Worlds."

The question of what radio actually does to reading has now been made the topic of thorough and objective study by the Princeton Radio Research Project, which was set up in 1937 by the Rockefeller Foundation to study the effects of radio upon American cultural life. The findings will be published shortly in the monograph entitled, "Radio and the Printed Page," but some of the material has been available for examination.

In order to make the topic amenable to research, the question: "Are radio and print allies or enemies?" had to be split up. The questions posed for study were directed mainly toward the positive side of the picture: "Can radio serve to stimulate reading? If so, under what conditions?" The answers are surprising evidence that radio listening does stimulate reading, but they do not at this time give much on the possible, concomitant *decrease* in reading due to radio. With most forces working toward wider spread and consumption of print, it would take as much work again to single out the influence of a single factor working in the opposite direction.

The study began with the collection of miscellaneous experiments in radio promotion of reading, and opinions of exact data as to their effectiveness. These are too numerous and scattered

to report here. It is generally agreed, however, that the history of important book programs begins with Alexander Woolcott's "Early Bookworm" series. Employed by a group of leading publishers on time given by the National Broadcasting Company, he was free to criticize as he chose any of the books on their lists. This and subsequent series by such exponents of the literary craft as Clifton Fadiman, Harry Hansen, Harry Salpeter, and others, about 1930 to 1933, proved failures so far as book sales were concerned. The fact that mail response on these programs was of high quality and increasing quantity over the periods they ran did not keep them on the air, when products of greater mass appeal were proving that they could use the time with financial benefit.

This is not to say that the early experiences with book programs on the national networks discouraged all such efforts. The Publishers' Advertising Club of New York polled all stations in the fall of 1937 on a survey of radio book programs, and found that 146 out of the 200 replying did use some book scripts, 92 of them regularly. The issues of *Radio Guide* for all sections of the country were checked for book programs in the

week ending March 18, 1939. This yielded a list of 101 different book program titles.

Most of these programs are sustaining (non-commercial), and it is probable that book talk on the air will remain in that portion of the time budget. The book review is by far the most frequent type, with its producers stressing that they give it a more personal, intimate, colloquial touch than the literary columns employ. Other types are the straight reading of books or digests of books, literature "courses," dramatizations or dramatized "teasers," literary quizzes, author talks, panel discussions, spot announcements.

THE effect of radio programs is more observable, and probably greater, away from the relatively well-served East. Evidence of this is furnished by Joseph Henry Jackson's book reviews over a NBC Pacific coast network. This has been on the air for over fifteen years, but did not achieve popularity when tried on a coast-to-coast network, possibly because it was given a less favorable time. However, its action is credited by booksellers in the Far West as having a paramount influence on book buying. In a poll on the influence of various reviewers, Jackson was top man, and his radio series received just twice as many votes as his book column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

A report on rural library services prepared for the American Association for Adult Education by Marion Humble, who investigated in the Middle West and Far West, shows that the radio is a potent force there. "To the question, 'Where do you hear about the books you ask for in the library?' farmers' wives, rural teachers, and club women in small towns gave the same reply, 'Radio.'"

An example of a closer check is the following: One Middle Western educational station, WOI of Iowa State College, has attempted to supply an audience which is undernourished in the literary sense. A half hour daily reading of novels, and seven book reviews per week have been carried on for ten years. A Radio Book Club run by the station has circulated, for a



Joseph Henry Jackson is a veteran among the radio commentators on books.