

President Grace L. Coyle

WHETHER our democratic institutions and the traditions from which they spring can survive the economic dislocations of the thirties is the major issue that confronts us. We are not at present threatened as other countries are by the imposition of despotism from without. The most serious fifth column which has penetrated within our gates is the malnutrition of our population, the frustration and despair of our unemployed, the racial inequalities and antagonisms heightened by economic tensions, and the inhuman cynicism of those among us who can realize these conditions without attempting to remedy them. European experience should teach us that the despair of the people is the opportunity of the dictator.

The basic issues of the forties arise therefore at two points: in the first place we must preserve and strengthen the underlying attitudes essential to a democracy—attitudes of fraternal consideration for every individual, of respect for the rights of all of us to freedom of thought and speech, and of active responsibility for the public concerns of vital importance to our national life. This, however, will be insufficient unless we, in the second place, look to the economic inadequacies and inequalities which not only weaken the stamina of our people but which cynically refute our democratic pretensions. Beyond that

we cannot be content until we have provided out of our rich resources not only the minimum essentials for health and decency but the opportunities for the higher attainments of a civilized people in education, recreation, and the other arts of life. . . .

We need to include among our values the public virtues—the concern for the common good and the habits of effective participation—if we are to contribute toward the creation of a democratic citizenry. . . . One of the major needs of our time is to discover how to direct the irrational and unconscious motivations of men in ways that will produce the common well-being of all, and how to develop more fully the rational and creative social impulses. Insofar as we can contribute to the creation of active and intelligent participation in public issues by all those we touch, we will encourage that growth of social responsibility which underlies a healthy community. In a democracy it is not enough to interpret social needs to the privileged or the powerful alone. The only permanent and wholesome basis for a democratic community is an awakened sensitiveness to human values in all parts of our population, a communal sense that the injury of any is the concern of all, and a widespread willingness to assume the necessary responsibility to meet common needs.

The firmest foundation for the ultimate preservation of our democratic heritage lies in a sound people well nourished in body, healthy in mind, fully developed each according to his powers. Such a people are the best preparedness for the free cooperative endeavor for common goals not only of defense—essential as that may be for the time—but also for the permanent achievement of a great culture. For this achievement we need a profound insight and an unshaken courage. Today we remember the dark ages into which the exhausted energies of men have sunk back to despair and brutishness. But we must remember that that is not all of history. Throughout its course those who have achieved the beginnings of social justice, who have freed the human intelligence, who have set the humane against the brutal passions of men, have moved forward in a fragile and wavering advance. But they have moved forward. The rise of science, the achievement of political democracy, the abolition of slavery, the extension of medical care, the free education of the young, the development of that vast body of social services which we represent, these are but part of that struggle for a civilized life. Our generation is called upon to hold this line and to press forward. This struggle is the great adventure of mankind, faltering, uncertain, but with it all—superb.

of the American Youth Commission, did as good a job of reading as was done by many a "speaker" with his own paper before him. Again the undercurrent was the "survival of American democracy," to be accomplished through finding ways to meet immediate needs, but Mr. Reeves confined himself to specific means at hand. He outlined the problem with a presentation of facts—"one third of the unemployed in the United States are young people under twenty-five," any new jobs resulting from a war boom will not be open to "inexperienced young people"—and proposed a program of next steps for the federal government and for local communities: on the federal level a work-study program for all unemployed youth with federal aid to the states for general education; on the community level, coordinated occupational adjustment services involving the participation of community leaders and of youth itself. "The way for young people to learn to be responsible is by carrying responsibilities."

The uncertainty that social workers took with them to Grand Rapids was illustrated by the fact that they could be carried away by addresses and personalities as different as those of Mr. McMichael and Rabbi Silver. Rabbi Silver spoke at Thursday's general session on "The Outlook for America," after a Memorial Day flag ceremony by the Grand Rapids Boy Scouts and music by a delightful high-school choir. He minced no words in describing the dangers which face this country. His whole talk was a plea

for defense based not on hysterical fear but on a reasoned understanding of what the world will be like at the end of the present war. Though he envisaged a Nazi victory as utter catastrophe for the civilization of the Western Hemisphere, he was not too optimistic over the probable effects of an Allied victory, which, he said, could come only after an exhausting war which "will shake the very foundations of the social, political and economic life of Europe." The United States, he held, must be prepared to help with the task of reconstruction—"for its own economic and political forces will be critically involved"—and this time must assume definite responsibilities for upholding any international order which might evolve.

In spite of the gravity and realism of the alternatives which he presented, Rabbi Silver did not leave his audience engulfed in gloom. For he saw and enumerated the special qualities of American democracy which make it a strong bulwark against any storm: its ability to withstand previous crises such as the Civil War; its wholesome capacity for self-criticism; the vast natural resources which are available for the elimination of poverty among its people; the lack of animosities toward neighboring nations.

On the following evening, Mrs. Dean analyzed "The Implications of the European Situation for the United States" in a brilliant but paralyzing address which will be published in the July issue of *Survey Graphic*. Like Rabbi Silver, Mrs. Dean asserted that the time has come for a

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver



WE should build up our national defenses to a point consistent with the definite commitments and responsibilities which we intend to assume in connection with our foreign policy . . . to a degree where they would be a strong deterrent to any would-be aggressor . . . We should not forget, however, that a strong military defense in itself is not sufficient. A greater

defense for a nation is the loyalty of its citizens and their essential spiritual unity . . . Forces opposed to democracy will use the very techniques and machinery of democracy, as well as its abundant tolerance, to destroy it. In the face of this, democracy must not remain naive or complacent. It must aggressively and relentlessly expose and harass every form of propaganda which is hostile to our basic conceptions of life and government.

But no hysteria! No witch-hunting! We should not in our great concern, in our justifiable zeal and impatience, permit ourselves to resort to extra-legal and unconstitutional methods to obtain even worthy and desirable objectives. To destroy liberty in an effort to preserve it is the height of folly. . . . Sound American patriotism must quickly transform itself into an intelligent and ardent program for social justice. . . .

strengthening of our national defenses, both military and spiritual. In fact, though she warned against capitulation to a sense of defeatism, she saw little validity in the theory that the United States could carry high the torch of civilization once totalitarianism has engulfed the rest of the world. In such an event "our course must be charted anew, in waters made perilous by new and unexpected dangers."

A FITTING CLIMAX TO THE MANY "DEFENSE DISCUSSIONS" whirling through the minds of social workers was the address by Max Lerner at the final luncheon. Though grimly aware of the Nazi menace, Mr. Lerner proceeded on the premise that the greatest danger lies in the devitalization of our democracy from within. Outlining the elements which give rise to Nazism he pointed out that these already exist on this side of the Atlantic: a growing anti-Semitism; an anti-alien campaign in the guise of Americanism; an anti-radical campaign similarly masquerading; an anti-labor sentiment. These, he said, will be the foundation seized upon by the Nazis for the spread of their propaganda should they win the war abroad.

Mr. Lerner's program for combating the "rising prestige of fascism" in this country was based on realization of the kind of ground which induces its growth. "The roots of Hitlerism lie not in the German mind but in the fertile soil that German economic collapse in the post-war years offered to the spread of Nazi ideas." To many, he said, the fascist appeal lies in its efficiency, its ability to organize to the fullest use a nation's resources and technological knowledge. Therefore, the best propaganda against it is the "propaganda of the deed," which to be effective, must

be fourfold: a program of economic planning to promote the nation's economic security; a realization of the importance of leadership—"only in a democracy can great leaders have humility and only in a democracy can followers have dignity"; closer attention to the "art of administration" probably resulting in greater centralization and greater concentration of power; reorganization of the "opinion industries," the press and radio, to insure "the competition of ideas in American life."

THE CLASH OF "THE WORLD OF TODAY" PENETRATED every meeting of the conference. But after one has faced the imminence of grave problems now unknown, of inevitable change which may affect the whole fabric of life, there is not much to do but get on with the day's work. And that is what the social workers did. They had come to Grand Rapids to examine their program and their performance and they went about it quietly and soberly, threading their way through a multitude of meetings where in the course of the week practically every strand of American social organization was scrutinized.

In such a large and diverse gathering, it is difficult to identify any predominant strand of interest, but it seemed to a number of competent observers that this year's conference put more emphasis on examining the functioning of social services of every kind than on examining their field of operation. To be sure the relief program was taken apart and put together again in a variety of ways, but rarely with disregard of means to implement it.

Through all the conference ran a salubrious tendency to self-examination. The group work section faced the gap between "what we say and what we do"; the community organization section moved to define the objectives, techniques, and skills required in its field; the social action section tried to discover the "basic content of the concept" in relation to social work; the case work section discussed efforts to "formulate suitable criteria" for measuring the community's need for case work. Meetings concerned with health turned more on how to get the job done than on broad programs and policies. Such matters as interpretation of social work programs, methods of staff development, the content of professional education were not off by themselves but were parts of the whole program.

THE SOCIAL CASE WORK SECTION, CHAIRMAN, ELIZABETH H. Dexter, Brooklyn, N. Y., had twenty-three meetings, practically a conference within a conference. Six of these meetings were "general sessions" dealing with subjects of interest to the whole case work contingent; the others were on specific subjects, designed for discussion. Thus the program makers planned—and successfully—to spread the attendance which in recent years has made the meetings of this section too large for comfort.

The first of the general meetings demonstrated that Grace Marcus' defection from active practice—she is now with the American Association of Social Workers—had cost her none of her prestige in the field. The largest audiences of the week, general conference sessions excepted, gathered to hear her paper and that of Ruth Smalley of the University of Pittsburgh on the conflict between serving the interests of society and the interests of the individual. Miss Marcus, speaking of the distinctive responsibility of the social worker in this conflict, told her listeners that:

The ferment of a scientific psychology is coursing through case