

Puncturing the Balloons of Statism

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IT IS EASY to listen to slogans and platitudes about the blessings of freedom and the sanctity of the individual and, hearing them so often, to acquire a conditioned presumption that our cause in the ideological war with totalitarianism is the right cause. But slogans and platitudes alone cannot erase the uncomfortable awareness that there are imperfections in our society. They are not an adequate answer to those who, masquerading as liberals, tell us that we must mend our free society, patch by patch, with applications of the opposing philosophy which holds that "the state" alone knows what is best for us all and that it alone can make us secure and happy.

It is vastly more satisfying to come across thoughtful lines of reasoning which remove whatever doubts we may have and reassure us that freedom is and should be the ultimate goal of man and that our way of life is not merely a way-station on the inevitable road from feudalism to socialism.

In *Freedom & Serfdom* fourteen noted philosophers, economists, and historians do a good deal to supply this assurance.

Selections from their works have been assembled by Albert Hunold of the Swiss Institute of International Studies and were published first in Geneva. They are now translated into English, some of them for the first time.

Belief in the inevitable decline of the West may be traced largely to Karl Marx and Oswald Spengler. Marx predicted a revolt from within by the factory workers; Spengler predicted the rise of a new Caesar, and Adolf Hitler wasn't long in applying for the job.

As Professor Hans Kohn points out, both predictions have gone awry. Hitler came to an inglorious end and there is no sign of a new Caesar, Spengler style. Marx's dictatorship rose not out of the proletariat of the West, but among the professional revolutionaries and ignorant peasants of Russia, then the most backward of European countries.

We can easily and happily agree with Professor Kohn that the rise of totalitarian socialism does not herald the decline of the West and that, on the contrary, it reflects the "inadequate Westernization" of the countries where it has flourished. It

has taken hold only in countries which have experienced neither capitalism nor freedom; how then can it possibly be argued that freedom and capitalism breed or must yield to a Socialist dictatorship?

The reader will also find Professor Friedrich A. Hayek's appealing case against the word "social" in social legislation. In its proper and Kantian sense the word applies to human values developed spontaneously through evolution and selection as distinct from deliberate action by government. But today, as Dr. Hayek says, "this parasitic fungus of a word" is being used to impute goodness and morality to bureaucratic schemes which may or may not be useful but which certainly are not "social." Associating the word "social" with security and the welfare state has weakened the sense of personal responsibility, in Dr. Hayek's opinion, and fostered the belief that to oppose the welfare state is somehow being anti-social.

Professor Michael Oakeshott of London offers a harsh but interesting view of the man for whom this "social" legislation is demanded. He is the heir, says Professor Oakeshott, of the displaced laborer who, at the end of feudalism, didn't know what to do with his new freedom. He is the "mass man" who wants only to be released from the burden of making his own decisions. He wants a leader whom he can regard as another mass man like himself, and will want whatever his leader tells him to want. For him the state promises a revival of the security which he enjoyed under feudalism.

Is it inconsistent to preach toleration while we refuse to tolerate the activities of Communists in this country? No, says David McCord Wright; if there is a threat to toleration and free speech "we would be traitors to toleration and free speech if we did not act to suppress it."

We've been told that our schools should

pay less attention to the humane letters and more to engineering and physics. This, says Russell Kirk, would be to give up our strongest moral weapon. We've been told that the state embodies the best in society; yet every totalitarian state, as Alexander Rustow notes, has tried to stamp out the family, which is the oldest and most fundamental unit of society. We've been told that the uninhibited state is not allergic to freedom; yet Hans Barth and Hannah Arendt prove with geometric precision that totalitarianism cannot exist without the complete suppression of freedom. And so, in one matter after another, the statist balloons are punctured.

In general, the selections that were originally written in English are easy to grasp. Those which have been translated from other languages—especially German—sometimes make the American reader feel that he is swimming through clam chowder. Perhaps we should expect sentences that wander on for a half page or so in a language where words can be hooked together like cars in a freight train to make longer and more complicated words. But it does seem odd that with all the distinguished philosophers and other scholars who have written in the German language, there has not evolved a simpler style for the presentation of a profound subject.

At any rate, for those who want to know—rather than just think—that freedom is right, this clam chowder is worth navigating. There may not be a persuasive answer to every question (such, for example, as just how the government of a free society should help those who seek help from it). And there are other points that might be emphasized (the advantages of a free society are not only moral and intellectual; they are material as well). But as a panorama of the views of some of the most eminent thinkers of the day, *Freedom & Serfdom* would be difficult to match.