

Books

The Great Planner

THE COMING AMERICAN REVOLUTION, by George Soule. Macmillan. \$2.50.

I WAS LUCKY enough to have visited Washington shortly before reading Mr. Soule's book. There I made the acquaintance of leading left-wing Brain Trusters—"the Felix Frankfurter boys"—Commissioner Jim Landis, Tom Corcoran of the N.R.A., Ben Cohen of the P.W.A., etc. In New York I had talked at length with Adolph Berle. They all looked somehow like Walter Lippmann twenty years ago. They wore their halos carelessly but were extremely self-conscious about their much-advertised mental equipment, about their responsibilities in running the government, about their achievements as practical politicians. Actually the achievements were nil.

Not only were these Brain Trusters not running the government but they were the veriest flywheel in the machine that others were running. At President Roosevelt's suggestion, Corcoran and Cohen wrote the original Stock Exchange Regulation Bill, but the law that was finally adopted might have been written by Richard Whitney, president of the New York Stock Exchange; it was in fact much less drastic than the draft actually submitted to Senator Fletcher's committee by Whitney. The function of Corcoran and Cohen was to do preliminary spade work and to supply liberal phrases for a program suitable to the purposes of the big business interests who dominate the Roosevelt administration. Liberal phrases are a necessity for American capitalism at a time like the present.

This does not mean that the administration always functions as a "purposeful unit." Far from it. The administration comprises right wingers and left wingers. Some of the latter doubtless like to see themselves as working toward a new social order, though they must have to use distorted lenses nowadays to look into the mirror and get any such result. President Roosevelt does not mind their vagaries. He calls them "Tom" or "Ben" or "Jim" or "Rex" and favors them with the ubiquitous Presidential smile. For they are dependent on his favor and he knows it. They are his prisoners, more completely even than he himself is the (quite willing) prisoner of the reigning financial oligarchy in this country. When any major governmental policy is in the making every old-line politician in Washington knows that the will of these precocious little nobodies will have nothing to do with its ultimate character. And with every succeeding "practical compromise" that they accept, it becomes more difficult for the little ones to deceive themselves as to their status as ambitious political whores. Most of them will go on making these "practical compromises" until they no longer regard them as compromises.

Meanwhile, those of them who have not lost all illusion concerning themselves may take heart. George Soule has written their *apologia*. I have not the slightest doubt that *The Coming American Revolution* is already a topic of the most earnest and appreciative conversation among the "Felix Frankfurter boys."

Mr. Soule begins by what at first seems a mere pretentious laying down of the platitude that revolutions are not made overnight, that violent overturns do not come until conditions are ripe for them, that "revolution is a part of evolution, and would be impossible without it." However, even in this opening discussion he indicates the special line of his emphasis. His concern is with "the minor and continued changes" and he is at pains to deprecate the influence of what he calls "the mob." Violence, he says, is usually unavoidable but is comparatively unimportant and usually takes place after the revolutionary shift of power. Soon he gives the kernel of his theoretical position in the following two recapitulatory paragraphs:

When the people are in their most desperate and miserable condition, they are often least inclined to revolt, for then they are hopeless. They usually are ignorant of the real cause of their miseries and have no leadership or poor leadership. Only after their position is somewhat improved and they have sensed the possibility of change, do they revolt effectively against oppression and injustice. What touches off insurrection is hope, not lack of it, rising confidence, not bleak suffering.

When a shift in power actually occurs, it is usually begun, not with a seizure of power by outsiders, but with reforms by insiders. These reforms are the cracks in the dam which invite the flood. They are caused, not by sudden violence, but by the irresistible pressure of events.

To support these theses he discusses the Puritan revolution in England, the American revolution of 1776, the French revolution, and the Russian revolution. In all this discussion the emphasis is placed on "the granting of reform from above" rather than on the struggles that forced these reforms. Yet the author admits elsewhere that the Duma would not have been established but for "a popular insurrection" in 1905, and that in 1917, when Miliukov and his fellow moderates saw fit to become "the inheritors of power," there was a situation in which "the soldiers in St. Petersburg and Moscow would not put down the strikes, attempt seriously to clear the streets, or defend the public buildings, but went over to the people!" He does not admit, what soon became evident to the whole Russian working-class, that "the fiery Kerensky" was pushed into the limelight to satisfy the dissatisfied masses and prevent them from developing the crisis into a proletarian revolution.

Soule's general position boils down to the following two propositions:

1. That systems are overturned not by ex-

ploited classes but by those whom the evolutionary process has already made great and powerful, and who are thus in a position to sweep away old forms that hamper their freest development.

2. That revolution proceeds "from the top down" and is given initial momentum, sometimes unconsciously, by those near the center of authority.

There are elements of truth in both propositions. Taking the first proposition first, it is true of course that no class can overturn a system until it has become powerful enough to do it. However, power must not be confused with wealth and social position. The bourgeoisie rose to power through the possession of a particular form of private property, capital, which already had given individual capitalists high standing in pre-capitalist society. To overthrow the rule of private property entirely, a different sort of power is necessary. That the German working-class, for example, propertyless and persecuted under the lash of Hitlerism, as it is, nevertheless possesses a tremendous cohesive power of its own no one in his senses will deny.

As for the second proposition, it is true that reforms instituted to preserve a social system sometimes provide impetus for attacks upon it. But if the system were not already weakened in some respect the reforms would not have been felt necessary. Moreover, the essential function of social reform is to ward off radical change, not to facilitate it. To maintain, in any basic sense, that revolution proceeds "from the top down" is to maintain a grim Chestertonian paradox, whose acceptance would tend to bolster up the authority of the old regime and to demoralize the struggle against it.

Soule's ideas are not new. They have been put forward again and again by those who distrust the working-class. However, Soule has given them clearer and more fully organized expression than anyone else in our generation. With *The Coming American Revolution* he emerges as the theoretician of all the bourgeois intellectuals who would "take the revolution away" from the working-class.

He recognizes some of the "changes under the surface" of American capitalism which render the present system increasingly unstable. But, he tells us, capitalism has survived "the crisis of the thirties" and is likely to survive subsequent crises until "the spread of collective ideas" makes itself felt. Then "it is entirely possible that political realignments will take place in this country leading to the formation of a party having some real power, and avowedly hostile to the worst practices of capitalism. "Such a party," he says, "would safeguard the rights of organized labor, seek regulatory legislation of various kinds, and try to extend public ownership. On account of the growth of the ideas of social planning, it might even attack capitalism at more significant points than older socialist parties have done." (Italics mine. M. G.)

While mentioning the ultimate possibility of such a party, Soule does not dwell on it at

length. He is interested in what we are to regard as contemporary intermediate steps in the revolutionary process which is "still far from its climax." Prominent among these steps is the New Deal.

Soule is frank to say that the Roosevelt administration has proved itself an agency of capitalism against the working-class. His way of saying it is interesting, however. It is softened and modified by paragraphs like the following:

In this happy-go-lucky manner, the President tried to keep all factions and schools of opinion contented. But in the nature of the case he could not have kept the executives of private capitalism contented if he really took from them any of their power. Since he was prepared, either in his own mind or by the organization of the social and political forces behind him, to press the issue against them, he had to surrender to them. This was called by polite names like "cooperation." He asked private industry to cooperate with the recovery effort; in this exchange it gave the very last it was compelled to give and took all it could. No doubt the President did not understand how much it was really taking. . . .

Meantime, it is suggested, the New Deal is by no means all dross, even though it does serve the capitalists. "In a broad sense, then," he says, "the New Deal gives us a foretaste of the rise to power of a new class, and this foretaste does have a distinct revolutionary tinge, just because it indicates a shift in class power."—What is this new class? "The forefront of the white-collar workers, the productive professions," who "are just beginning to assume some of the political prerogatives which their actual place in a highly organized industrial society warrants, and to which their superior competence in matters of social theory entitles them."

This then, is the class which is to prepare for the coming order from "very near the top of society." This is the class which has the power and will and "competence in matters of social theory" that the proletariat lacks! The bourgeois intellectuals, tradition-

ally waverers, of whom George Soule himself says, "when a regime is stable and immune against overturn," they, "whose sensitive antennae feel most truly whatever is in the surrounding atmosphere, are occupied in celebrating, adorning and justifying the existing order!" The bourgeois intellectuals whose very pretensions rest upon fear of the embittered farmers and striking workers!

Soule's summing up of the New Deal is an *apologia* not only for the "Felix Frankfurter boys" but, by implication, for Roosevelt himself.

The virtue of the New Deal will probably be seen, in the light of history, not as successful social planning, but as a step in the educational process which is necessary if the workers, the farmers and the professional and white-collar classes are ever to become sufficiently mobilized and conscious enough of a program so that they can engage in successful social planning. It has already helped to pose issues, to organize the struggle about essential problems, to sift people into groups according to their real interests.

Is it necessary to point out that a leading function of the New Deal has been to *confuse* issues, to *disorganize* the struggle about essential problems, to *prevent* the sifting of people into groups according to their real interests? Any progress that may have been made in these matters has been through disillusionment with the New Deal and the New Dealers. The New Deal itself bears the same relationship to such progress as George VI's Navigation Acts bore to the progress of the First American Revolution.

By now it will be plain there is nothing inflammatory about *The Coming American Revolution*. Soule maintains that the revolution is coming with the speed of a not too ambitious snail. The revolutionary process, as old as evolution itself, is under way, but "still far from its climax."

And the climax? Soule admits modestly that he does not know what it will be, but he hazards a guess. Here is his guess:

Capitalism comes out of this crisis the victor, but in the long run weaker both physically and morally. Some time in the future—perhaps not for another generation or two—there is likely to occur another equally serious breakdown of capitalism. If by that time the ferment of ideas has done its work and the rising classes have attained sufficient status and confidence, the two essential ingredients of the revolutionary mixture will be present. If the incompetence of the rulers and their lack of faith in themselves has proceeded far enough, they will either call in representatives of social planning to run industry, or they will retire before a popular demand that new ideas be applied. In such a crisis the resistance that they are ordinarily able to oppose to socialist movements will be immensely weakened. . . . At such a time, probably by peaceful and possibly even by constitutional means, the control of production and exchange may easily pass to one of the more moderate movements opposed to the profit system.

After that, who knows what will happen? . . . What is likely is that there will be a prolonged period of turmoil and uncertainty, that the moderates will ingloriously fail, that there will be fighting, swings to the left and reaction. . . . Eventually the outcome will be the final disappearance of the profit system.

Meantime, there is not much use in trying to strengthen the revolutionary working class movement, because revolution proceeds "from the top down." Don't worry about the revolution. Hats off to social planning!

MANUEL GOMEZ.

An Adman's Honeymoon

RED THUNDER, by Roy S. Durstine.
Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.

Although it is nowhere announced as such, this is the chronicle of a honeymoon. The author, adman and a partner of Bruce Barton, changed wives last year and set out upon a tour of Soviet Russia, Germany, and Austria, with his new bride—a radio singer known to the audiences of the Durstine directed advertising programs.

The honeymoon itinerary proved ill-chosen. The vexations, indignities, and irritations experienced in Soviet Russia seem to have been fairly continuous! The Durstines quite frankly do not approve of Soviet Russia. Indeed, one deduces from the very first page that they loathe and detest every inch of its land, its people, and its sinister flag, "the color of dried blood,"—also the Soviet officials, "dressed like Union Square merchants of small calibre."

Marching up to the desk of Moscow's National Hotel they found an insolently disdainful clerk, who, we are told, snapped to fawning attention when impressive letters of introduction were produced. "You see, I didn't know you were so important," he apologized. The food was "anathema." "There isn't a lemon in Russia." The waiters are "worried old men whose hands are trembling as they put down the plates" (presumably in terror of the OGPU). On the streets they encountered the wretched figures of beggars. "One observer counted all the dogs he saw in Moscow for a week. There were three. 'The rest have been eaten,' said a Russian franker than most. 'We tried cats too, but they gave us tummy aches, so we gave them up.'"

The Durstines went everywhere, looked at and sniffed at everything as only two smug little petty bourgeois *can* sniff. They were shocked (why *they* should have been is a mystery) at what they saw at the marriage bureau, "where the bonds are tied," "with speed and precision are torn asunder"—where facts and statistics of sexual diseases, the prenatal care of mothers, and the care and feeding of babies are indelicately "explained in every detail on wall charts."

At a day nursery—which "reeks of disinfectant"—they found "boys and girls all mixed up." And, most touching of all, "one dark baby was crying as if her heart would break," while two calloused women attendants looked on and found it only "very amusing." But the old radio "Mammy" spirit sprang to the rescue: instantly, "a pair of American arms swept her up. An American breast comforted her. An AMERICAN voice whispered to her. The sobbing lessened and ceased. It wasn't very amusing." And,

LOUIS ADAMIC

. . . has written the tremendous record of social violence in America—and, by the addition of more than fifty pages, has brought up-to-date his full, dramatic history of the bloody strife which has marked the increasingly serious struggle between labor and capital in the mills and mines, on the railroads, on the docks and across the plains. Sinclair Lewis writes: "That this should not have a huge sale is a disgrace to the entire country."

DYNAMITE

The story of class violence in America, 1826-1934, first published in 1931 and now reissued, completely revised to date, at the popular price of \$2 (Formerly \$3.50).

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