

Spann's Fascist Utopia

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In one of our recent issues Dr. Karl Polanyi drew a pen-portrait of Professor Othmar Spann, the Vienna Philosopher, to whose sociological work Dollfuss and the Heimwehr are greatly indebted for the main features of the new Austrian constitution. Professor Spann has been recently suspended from his chair under the charge of Nazi activities. Dr. Polanyi tries, this week, by inference from Spann's work, to elucidate a question regarded by "New Britain" as highly topical—where does the border line lie between Democracy and Fascism, between Socialism and Capitalism in a Functional Society?

COMPARE the sketch of a Guild Socialist constitution with the actual constitution of a Fascist State, e.g., Austria, and you will discover a striking similarity between the two. In both constitutions there is separate political, economic and cultural legislation. Instead of one political Chamber (or two) dealing with all kinds of questions, we find separate bodies dealing with different matters. Both constitutions, that is, are functional.

A Puzzle and a Danger

This is puzzling. These two types of constitution seem to have a closely similar, if not identical pattern, and yet the one regards itself as the very fulfilment of Democracy, while the other claims to abolish Democracy and to establish autocratic Fascism in its stead. Under the one the economic system is Socialist, under the other capitalist. No wonder that more and more people begin to wonder what all the bother is about. They are inclined to doubt whether there is, after all, any real difference between the two systems.

A Ready Test

The dangers of a situation of this sort are obvious. For the functional idea is obscuring the difference between Democracy and Socialism on the one hand and Capitalism and Fascism on the other, precisely at a time when Society is already moving with increasing velocity towards a change-over from the primitive, half-conscious and unintegrated State of today into a functional Super-Person. The painful rebirth is coming over us independent of human will. But what, in fact, depends upon us, and us alone, is whether this transformation will land Society on a higher or a lower level of existence than the present. Whether it brings more human Freedom and Equality in a commonwealth the Socialist economics of which are but the frame-work of a Democracy infinitely more full and real than that of our day; or whether it will mean the end of Western and Christian ideals in the human stadium of a eugenically improved Capitalism in a Fascist Satrapy. Western humanity is like a man trapped in a railway-tunnel, not knowing on which track the express will pass.

What we need is a ready test. How can we tell whether a constitution which professes to be anti-

capitalist (as so many Fascist Utopias do) is really anti-capitalist? And whether a popular movement which has the support of a strong section of the population (as Fascist movements often have) is not in reality undemocratic and anti-democratic as genuine Fascism essentially is? This is not always an easy task. Not only in Germany did Fascism camouflage itself as a new kind of Socialism, not only in Austria did it announce itself as True Democracy. Of course, all this seems somewhat like asking for a test of paternity before the child is born. But if we cannot tell by the draft of the new society whether the outcome will be Socialism or Capitalism, it might turn out too late for a remedy.

The test is really quite simple. Everything depends upon wherein ownership of the means of production is vested, and what the powers of the various functional bodies be. In any type of functional Society where private property has not been definitely abolished the final decision must rest not with the Economic, but with the Political Chamber, if Capitalism is to be overcome.

The reason for this is obvious. As the adherents of the Threefold State understand, it is the Political Chamber which embodies and expresses the Idea of common human Equity and Justice. Under its sway private property, however tentatively its socialization might have been proclaimed to start with, would tend to turn into "Socialist", i.e., public property. Only if public ownership, or workers' control, has been firmly instituted from the start can the Economic Chamber wax, and the Political Chamber wane, without any danger of a return to unqualified Capitalism. Indeed, unless this is the case in a functionally organized society, the rule of private property must prove even more downright and thorough than it is in the non-functional society which we have at present.

The Test Applied

Take Othmar Spann's Fascist Utopia. He denounces Capitalism as sheer economic Machiavellianism, as "barbarous, brutal and bloodthirsty". That sounds pretty definite. Nor is he a supporter of private property, on principle. Only "formally", and not in essence, will it be allowed to continue.

By Æ:

UNDERTONES

*Beneath those sweet contented voices
A lovelier discontent,
All unknown to the gay singers,
From hidden voices went;*

*Hardly breath, almost inaudible,
A tone from distant spheres,
That wrought upon me an enchantment
And stayed my listening ears.*

*Was it their buried spirits beating
Their love-fettered wings,
Prisoners within the heart, and weeping
For what immortal things?*

Preferably, property will be endowed with "feudal characteristics". An "almost manifoldness in the forms of property" shall prevail. Owners of property will be put on their honour. The overlordship of every kind of property or estate having been thus vested in the community, the formulation of the actual terms on which the "feudal" property is to be held is regarded by Spann as a "minor difficulty of a merely technical nature". After all this, one could hardly call him an advocate of the continuance of Capitalism. Indeed, but for the fact that in his draft of a constitution the Economic Chamber predominates, with a "feudalized" property system of this kind, society might quite well be regarded as on the way to Socialism. But with Spann, as we will show, it is emphatically the Economic, not the Political, Chamber which dominates. And this settles the matter, whether Spann likes it or not, in favour of Capitalism. In effect, his Utopia bears out fully the proposition that the essence of Fascism consists in securing, for the owners and managers of the means of production, power over an Economic Chamber, and then, finally, establishing the power of this Economic Chamber over society as a whole.

Business v. Romanticism

It would seem at the outset that nothing is further from romantic Fascism than Economics. Spann himself stands for the full-dress pageantry of mediæval society. He has sworn over and over again, by the Totality of Things, by their Oneness and Wholeness, that there never was and never will be as perfect and complete an embodiment of the Spirit of Man as were the Estates of the Realm. The Lords Spiritual, the Lords Temporal, and the Commons had never more than a smack of commercialism about them. The Guilds of Trades, on the other hand, never entered very much into politics. Add to all this Spann's admiration for Plato and his *Politeia*, in which the simple craftsman and artisan are cavalierly dealt with by the philosophers who have set up as professional politicians, and you expect him to be the last person to overrate the importance of merchants and millowners under the Constitution. Yet precisely the contrary is the case. With the bashful naïveté characteristic of his academic approach to reality, Spann has himself expressed some dismay about the fact that in applying his Utopia to modern conditions, he turns out a scheme in which the statesman as well as the priest, the teacher and the philosopher is elbowed off the stage by the captains of industry. Retain Capitalism and introduce Functionalism, and no other outcome is possible.

The Estates in the Realm of Utopia

His three Estates are, broadly speaking, the Political, the Economic, and the Cultural. Although Spann does not use these exact terms, they may fairly be employed to describe his actual constitution.

The first Estate is, with him, the Economic. It consists of three strata—the manual workers, the clerical and managerial staff, and the captains of industry. Vertically, this same Estate can be organized also into the Agricultural, the Commercial and the Manufacturing sections (these can be further subdivided into vocational categories). Running right through this vertical grouping we have the two extremely important representative

organizations, those of the employers and of the employed (who may or may not exactly coincide with the captains of industry on the one hand, the manual and managerial workers on the other hand). For legislative purposes, the representation of the employers and the employed on a parity basis means, of course, the open establishment of the prerogatives of the owning class.

The second Estate is the Political. It consists of the leaders of the State, who are an amateur group, as it were, and includes the Military and the Clergy in so far as they have decisive political functions. Spann calls this Estate the "State". Clearly but few persons belong to this curious kind of Estate.

The third Estate is the Intellectual. Only "creative thinkers and teachers" can belong to it, including ecclesiastical persons in so far as they qualify as such. This Estate is described by Spann himself as a merely "preparatory" Estate, only the First and the Second being "full-grown".

The Estates Swallow Up the "State"

In fact, even this is a euphemism. The Economic Estate alone is a permanent functional organization. The Estate "State" (this queer phrase sounds quite as bad in German as in English) is not in reality an Estate at all. Spann puts this in the following roundabout manner. The Estate "State" has two different functions. First it is the leading group which, if necessary, co-ordinates the functioning of the other groups. Secondly, it is the remnant of what was once the political State. As such it has, apart from foreign policy, only modest functions. For nearly every substantial function attaches to the Economic Estate. It has judicial functions in the field of social, industrial and labour questions. It carries on the general administration of industry including taxation. Finally, it is invested with legislative powers in the whole realm of industrial life. Spann calls this process the "Absorption of the 'State' by the Estates". The reality behind this mysterious happening is that in Fascist Society, apart from the secret deliberations of a small ruling set, there is no Political State as a functional organization left at all, for every sort of legislative, judicial and executive function that matters in the life of the community has passed on to the Economic Estate.

This means the domination of property owners and industrial captains *as such*. The Political State is abolished. No body exists any more to voice the ideas of Justice, Humanity and Freedom. And such is, undeniably, the result where Fascist Utopias come true.

Factory

*The incessant murmur of machinery singing smoothly
makes of my head a cave singing with music,
my eardrums humming tympani. The blur
of delicate metal continually moaning
hangs the day with sound as a silken curtain.*

*I slide on threads of steel. The winds of earth
mouthing on glass or metal factory roof
are inaudible here, hedged out by iron and iron
and the mechanic minds of unquestioning men,
their smooth-limbed bodies, and the soft voice
of Death.*

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