

Book Review

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Book Review

LIBERTY OR EQUALITY. By Erik Von Kuehnelt-Leddihn. Caldwell, Idaho. The Caxton Press, Ltd., 1952. Pp. 284. \$6.00.

This book is a searching analysis and criticism of Democracy and should be read by all interested in our Constitutional system. Its author, a brilliant Austrian scholar, has lived and taught in the United States and the book, with an excellent index and 990 numbered notes and references, is a mine of information.

Its contents give additional evidence of the wisdom of our Constitutional Fathers. For the makers of our Constitution did not believe in Democracy; they planned a Federal Republic of separate states and with meticulous care divided total power between the Federal Government and the states, and further divided the Federal power into three separate departments, the Legislative, the Executive and the Judicial.

We, as the unworthy heirs of our Constitutional Fathers, have sat idly by and have seen the Federal Government grow supreme in power; leaving the states drifting into a position which may leave them as mere geographical areas. In addition, the plan of the separation of power in the Federal Government itself has been seriously impaired.¹

John Adams saw revolutions as the result of the popular franchise, Madison feared the status of property and thus of liberty. Jefferson, too, was uneasy of the future through urbanization with the masses in the big cities having no stake in liberty (7, 32, 38, 62, 148).

It is important to reflect that the Constitution itself, with the first ten amendments, is the very negation of uncontrolled majority power. And Jefferson himself (so misunderstood by many Americans) who drafted our great Declaration of Independence in which he referred to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", was explicit in his later draft of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, in his protection of ". . . life, liberty and property" from the excesses of Democracy.

The author points out that Democracy as understood in Europe is not constitutional democracy with protection for minorities but uncontrolled democracy and therefore Hitler and Stalin were, in a sense, correct when they said they were Democrats; Stalin claiming to be a follower of Jeffer-

¹ Buck, *The Constitution and Socialism*, 12 Md. L. Rev. 1 (1951).

son. The author gives a close historical analysis of European Democracy, and while other writers have found its origin in the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, he carries it back to Hus and Luther (Chapters VI and VII). He refers in this connection to Peter Viereck who seems to be the only American author with an understanding of the history and meaning of Democracy in Europe.² The author regards Luther as a sincere and orthodox Christian who had rebelled against the excesses of the Ancient Church (214, 220, 221). Luther's position was that faith and reason cannot be harmonized, yet the later and incorrect understanding of his views has led to the use of private reason and interpretation of religious truths and has thus tended to destroy the basis of faith itself (188, 230, 233). The author, however, relies on reason, and this seems to coincide with a trend among thinkers today towards reasoned belief rather than the acceptance of a sterile skepticism (114, 127, 140, 165, 178).

We can affirm with conviction that the Judaic-Christian-Greek-Roman culture of the West is the best. But to attempt by reason to understand the mystery of this world is a task which Plato, and after him, many learned Theologians, Philosophers and Scientists have attempted in vain.³

The author discusses the confusion in the use of the word "liberal". It may mean one who wants for himself and his fellow citizens a maximum of liberty (3, 87). It may mean one whose beliefs are nihilistic and whose philosophy is one of despair (4, 32, 165). It may mean one whose views follow the Manchester School and who is willing to see enforced a utilitarianism of the Benthamite Stamp (5, 118). This Pragmatism is but another name for Materialism and includes the idea of "progress" and the false notion that happiness is created by an abundance of goods.

The modern collectivist state is a combination of centralized autocratic power over the individual directed towards a purely materialistic end, and its paternity is Hegel, Bentham, Marx. Everything is to be sacrificed to economic determinism (203, 211, 219).

We need leaders to lead us in an effort to restore the strength of the great Constitution which came to us as a precious heritage, and in doing so, to give us an inspiring goal. Our goal should be the attainment of as much freedom for the individual as is compatible with national safety.

² VIERECK, *METAPOLITICS* (Knopf, 1941).

³ LOVEJOY, *THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING* (Harv. Univ. Press, 1948).

Hamilton's dictum that the ". . . people is a great beast" is untrue. All of us have evil in us, though it is only too true that the mass of the people in times of stress can be stirred by Demagogues to terribly destructive ends.

But the bulwark of our Constitutional government, and especially the protection of life, liberty and property as Jefferson provided in the Fifth Amendment, is what has made American Democracy succeed, and the author's discussion of the excesses of the uncontrolled Democracy of Europe is a sharp warning to us of the awful consequences of the neglect of our Constitutional safeguards.

That we have succeeded in a material way is too plain for comment, and the warnings from the intelligentsia of the imminent breakdown of capitalism have proved to be false. In this situation to turn to Socialism would not help but would merely mean that with added governmental interference there would be fewer goods to distribute. The problem here is the difficult one of attempting to improve our characters and is essentially a religious one.⁴

We have a right to be proud of our record, including our material success, and our leaders should be outspoken in driving home the fact that we have accomplished something for the freedom and opportunity of the individual which is unique in a world controlled by force.

WALTER H. BUCK*

⁴ SOROKIN, *THE RECONSTRUCTION OF HUMANITY* (Beacon Press, 1948).

* Of the Baltimore City Bar.