

## LIBERTY AND LIBERALISM

WE have so often heard the cry that Liberty is threatened. Statesmen preach to us of our precious heritage of Liberty which must be preserved from the attacks of foreign-born political absolutisms. In the name of Freedom we are called upon to rally to the defence of parliamentary institutions or Democracy. Why does this appeal fail to carry conviction? Is it not that many feel that the Liberty that they are called upon to save has not yet been won? They are told that they must not allow themselves to be enslaved as are the peoples living under Dictatorships. But is it not true that the peoples living under dictatorships sometimes renounced their parliamentary institutions because they believed that dictatorships would give them greater freedom?

The alliance between parliamentary institutions and freedom is a fiction of political Liberalism, which is already denied by half of Europe. Liberalism is, however, more than a political philosophy; it is a *weltanschauung* or general attitude of mind. In England this attitude dominated the intellectual outlook of the nineteenth century, permeating theology, philosophy and economics, as well as politics. The Liberal attitude is essentially relativist, anti-dogmatic and anti-authoritarian. Denying the truth of absolutes it is fundamentally hostile to all systems of thought and institutions which seek to preserve them. In the name of freedom Liberalism has waged war on all absolutism, whether theological, economic or political. For religion it has tried to substitute freedom of thought; for a monopolistic economy, a free economic system; for political despotism, free representative government.

In all spheres Liberalism has tended to misinterpret freedom. For the Liberal, freedom means freedom of choice. A man is supposed to be free when he can act as he pleases. But this conception of freedom neglects entirely the true paradox that a man is more free when he does good than when he does evil. It is the denial of this second aspect of the problem of liberty which makes Liberalism such a poor defender of Liberty, for it is a truth for which the greater part of the world is seeking.

Liberalism has denied the moral problem of freedom. It

## BLACKFRIARS

has closed its eyes to the greater freedom recognized by Christian thinkers, the freedom of truth and being; the freedom enjoyed by the organism which has achieved its purpose. Liberalism refused to recognize the purposive nature of the universe. By rejecting the order of Finality Liberalism has created a barren waste where man is free, but to the question what he is to do with his freedom Liberalism has no answer.

It is because they offer an answer to this question that the modern totalitarian systems receive so many adherents. To their solution of the problem of freedom Liberalism can offer no resistance because they are aiming at an organic freedom, the possibility of which Liberalism has denied. Liberalism has only succeeded in freeing men from things, from political inequalities and restrictions, but in doing so it has denied the fundamental nature of man. It has destroyed the hierarchy of values existing in the spiritual order which should be the norm of political and social conduct. It has broken the link between the spiritual and natural orders denying man's connections with the former, with the result that it has unanchored him and set him adrift to be carried away by any totalitarian surge.

Separated from the trammels of a spiritual world, unhampered by the claims of the order of finality, the freedman of Liberalism is left with no standards to judge the conflicts raging in society. Disillusioned about his liberty he gives himself up easily to some false absolute, race, nation, or class. In the service of such an idol he hopes to receive the liberty which he lost in denying the law of his being.

Above all the freedman of Liberalism has lost faith in political machinery. Liberalism promised to make him politically independent by giving him the vote. Having destroyed the hierarchical organization of society in the name of freedom, Liberalism has destroyed the status of its freedman offering him nothing more than a security which is founded on contract alone. The freedman is free to vote and work for whom he pleases.

In the name of freedom Liberalism has removed all control both material and spiritual of the economic forces. The liberation of these economic forces has tended to the enslavement of the individual. It is useless to tell a man to rally to the instruments which he feels to be forging the

## LIBERTY AND LIBERALISM

fetters of his slavery. This is the reason why so many join the ranks of Fascism or Socialism. These systems are felt to offer the prospect of some control of the forces which the individual feels to be the danger to his liberty.

Neither Socialism or Fascism offers any real hope. Socialism establishes even more firmly the primacy of the economic, while Fascism only erects an equal tyranny in the name of another material idol. Both systems are secular in their essence and seek to deny, equally with Liberalism, the spiritual order which alone can guarantee a true freedom.

Secular totalitarianism cannot be successfully opposed by its secular opposite, but only by a reaffirmation of the synthesis which it is the ever-present task of Catholic Philosophy to maintain. The truths denied by Liberalism must be re-established. Freedom must be shown to depend on the recognition of a spiritual order. For a barren individualism must be substituted a true teaching as to the nature of personality. The development of personality depends on the recognition of the moral law and the principle of finality. The denial of these must result in the establishment of secular tyranny whether economic or political. For this reason Liberalism is helpless to resist the modern totalitarian systems. They contain a grain of truth which Liberalism has denied. The organic nature of freedom must be recognized. The "consciousness of necessity" which the communists claim to be the basis of freedom must be shown to be the consciousness of the necessity of the Redemption to re-establish the fallen dignity of man. The Christian claim for freedom from earthly tyrannies must be founded on the recognition of a more real world, the world of spiritual values, to which man must give his allegiance or else be enslaved like a beast "to be disposed of according as he is useful to others."

BERNARD ALEXANDER.