

- BOOK REVIEW -

ASSIGNMENT IN UTOPIA

By Eugene Lyons. (Harcourt Brace and Co.)

(Reviewed by George Gillespie, M.A.)

Eugene Lyons spent six years in Moscow as correspondent of the United Press. On the spot from 1928 until 1934, he witnessed the liquidation of "Nep" and the period of the first Five Year Plan. This book is the story of what he heard and saw. It is a slashing attack—detailed and authoritative—on the Russian Government and on the methods it has used and is using to bring socialism to the Russian millions.

And since Mr. Lyons went to Moscow convinced of the rightness of the Marxist program, the book is also the tale of how direct experience of Russian realities brought one intelligent man—a radical by temperament, background and training—to bitter disillusionment.

Mr. Lyons actually left the employ of the Soviet government (in the New York bureau of Tass, the official news agency) to represent the United Press at Moscow. Before that he had enjoyed a full and varied career as a radical journalist. He had worked for the I. W. W., covering the trials of labor agitators all over the United States. He was in Italy to witness the splitting of the Italian Left parties that preceded the rise of Mussolini. Almost from the first, he was prominent among those working for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti in Boston.

Bound for Russia, the new United Press correspondent therefore prepared to enter a promised land of freedom and justice, a country at last whose government was concerned only with human happiness. And he was resolved to write this view of Russia into his news stories. To him, the Russian assignment seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to serve humanity by making the idea of communism more acceptable to the readers of the papers his agency served. Of the generosity of his motives in this, of the sincerity of his admiration for the Russian experiment as he sailed from New York, there can be no question.

What Mr. Lyons reluctantly saw, when the facts finally broke through the prejudices he had brought with

him, was that Russia was, in the fullest sense of the word, a tyranny. The power of the State was absolute. It rested on overt force, complete economic control, press censorship and an all-pervasive secret police. Ruthlessly, it was using the hapless human material it controlled in a series of gigantic social experiments, some of them disastrous, all of them appallingly costly in terms of human suffering. All considerations of justice, decency and humanity were cast to the winds. Millions starved, or wasted in concentration camps, or were shot outright, in a titanic effort to apply pure Marxism in a society barely emerging from feudalism. And the "materialism" of the Prophet was there to justify the ruthlessness.

Relentlessly, Mr. Lyons sets down that almost incredible tale of suffering and degradation. On one side stands the mass of the Russian people, powerless, poverty stricken, the guinea pigs in a vast sociological laboratory. On the other, their rulers, the inheritors of a revolution that had promised bread, land and freedom. The leaders are borne along by a monomaniacal urge to build the state that shall be unlike any other in history, and count no cost in human blood and misery too high in achieving it. Some of the subordinate leaders are similarly sincere, but over the whole bureaucratic structure lies a miasma of place-getting and-holding, petty tyranny and opportunism. All the revolutionary in Mr. Lyons cried out against this betrayal of every ideal the revolutionary spirit has ever invoked.

Not that "Assignment in Utopia" will give much comfort to Hitler and Mussolini. A vigorous and detailed onslaught on the Russian Government and the Communist Party, it also contains a chapter entitled, "Tour of Tyrannies," in which it is asserted that the atmosphere of Rome and of Berlin differ only superficially from that of the Russian capital. Describing a visit to Rome, he remarks flippantly: "At least the weather is different from Moscow."

For it is the basic thesis of this book, the deepest meaning that the author has been able to read out of all his experiences and his thinking, that what is wrong with the Russian government is philosophic—it has no conception of justice and the dignity of man. And that is precisely what he sees in the governments of Hitler and Mussolini—in non-essentials they differ from the Russian

model, in fundamentals, the three are as one. Their "common element" is "contempt for men and women as such."

"Until the dignity of life, the importance of human happiness, a respect for truth, and a horror of slavery under any guise are restored as motivating ideals if not as functioning realities, the economic or racial or national Utopias will remain inhuman monstrosities."

But the book is more than a mere structure of facts and arguments propping up a thesis, however serious. It ranks among the best of the books of reminiscences that distinguished foreign correspondents are writing today. Its 650 pages are crammed with the vivid impressions of a man who knows how to observe as well as analyze and think. The Russians and their ways, living conditions in Russia, the personalities of the leaders are there as well as lucid and detailed accounts of the economic and sociological aspects of what has been happening in Russia. There are interesting chapters on the treason trials. And through it all runs the story of how the writer gradually reached the conclusion that loyalty to his ideals compelled him to tell the truth, not to defend the Kremlin by qualifying or suppressing it.

CREATIVE REVOLUTION

J. F. T. Prince. (Bruce Publishing Co.)

(Reviewed by John A. MacDonald, '38)

Revolution is in the air. There may not necessarily be a bloody one but there must be a real revolution to ameliorate present economic conditions. In other parts of the world it has already taken place and many peoples have even bartered their political liberty when faced with dire economic necessity. They have turned to soulless Bolshevism and lately to the new Swastika worship. We are enmeshed in a ruthless laissez-faire system which is slowly thinning the life-blood of the country. What should be our remedy?

In his one hundred and six page volume Father Prince sets forth the problem in a penetrating and fearless manner. From his abundant information and fine background he examines the question and shows clearly that the only antidote for the shortcomings of our modern society is

Christian social reform. Quotations could be made from every page, for all of them fairly bristle with the pithy comment and sharp comparison of the author as he urges a return to the principles of that greatest of all revolutions—the triumph of Christianity over ancient Paganism.

The greatest part of the work treats of Communism, and, in dealing with its supporters or opponents, the writer does not mince words. First of all, he deplores the downright ignorance of many who profess to know something about the movement. He asserts that, "Slight as is his real appreciation of the Church, the educated Bolshevik has perhaps greater superficial knowledge of Catholicism than has the average Catholic of *applied communism* or of a *communistic theory* which is buried in tomes of an obtruseness beyond his patience." His desire is to point out the immense damage done through "pietistic journalism" or "the pink pose of professors and *littérateurs* who delight more in the freedom than in the accuracy of thought." It is these people who are so easily led, often at the instigation of Capital, to brand hysterically any labor movement as Communistic, whether it is good or otherwise.

In asserting that the higher types of both Christian and Bolshevik are not psychologically different in some respects the author says "that in making his sacrifice the Bolshevik, animated by an economic chimera, does for Nothing what the Christian, animated by the charity of Christ, does for the greater glory of God and the hope of eternal reward." It must not be thought, however, that Creative Revolution is in any way an apologia for Communism. The whole problem is reduced to a reasonable, unprejudiced basis of fact, and, in doing so, the author is obliged to castigate severely all those who, by creating or by tolerating social injustice in any form, have contributed to the replacement of the cross by the sickle in the hearts of many. Wishing to give credit where due, he demonstrates that the Socialists—and their extremists, the Communists—are sincere but have set out on the wrong track. Their greatest error follows from the belief that it is Society that makes the man, whereas it is in reality man who makes Society.

Since Fascism is not a great evil in this country the author refutes it briefly and takes up the question of that enormous malignant product of the individualism of the Reformation, Liberalistic Capitalism. He compares this

system with Communism in that they are "similar beasts, provided with similar offensive apparatus, seeking to devour the same prey." It is not difficult to see that under the present despotic domination of Capital, which now only masquerades as being Democratic, Materialism and Mannonism rule and man is considered merely as the *homo economicus*, "political entity," such as he is judged to be in the totalitarian state.

In appealing for a *genuine* Christian Revolt which the world has yet to experience since the time of Christ, he gives living Catholicism as the only solution. "There need be no *program*, for Catholicism is the whole of life." The following of these principles would be adherence to the one and only sure Democracy—that which recognizes the rights of all without distinction. These rights, which uphold the dignity of the individual as a personality and of the family as a social unit, are the same ones which have been fought for by such men as Cardinal Manning, Bishop Von Ketteler, and the Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI. As a parting shot, he exhorts those who have not the courage to act, to at least have the honesty to see.

This book, which has met with immediate and well-deserved enthusiasm, should be in the hands of all who are interested in social justice. Although it does not contain definite plan of action, the clear, novel and fearless treatment of Fascism, Communism, Liberalistic Capitalism and *Practical* Christianity is well worth careful reading and digestion.

THE CRISIS OF OUR CIVILIZATION

Hilaire Belloc. (Cassell and Co. Ltd.)

(Reviewed by Charles McQuaid, '39)

A series of lectures delivered by Mr. Belloc at Fordham University just a year ago have resulted in his new book of the above title. It is the author's belief that our Christian civilization is covered by a dark shadow of death, and, unless steps be taken to remedy the situation, it will follow the path of our Grecian and Roman antecedents which led to destruction.

His treatise is divided into five main parts, each of which treats of different phases of the growth and maturity of Christendom, and of the malady now characterizing it.

The first of these deals with the five hundred years of growth, in which the Catholic Church took what was good from the Graeco-Roman Empire and enlivened it with Her doctrines. It laid the foundations, during that time, of a structure of unified culture and philosophy which could stand firm against the pressure to be exerted within and without for the following thousand years.

Once solidly founded with its roots deep in the hearts of men, Christendom bursts into flower in the early Middle Ages, showing forth its greatest glory during the thirteenth century. The following two centuries of doubt and dissension gradually withered some of that bloom and made the way clear for the storm that was to follow.

This storm, the Protestant Revolt, sprung from Germany and played havoc with the unity of Christendom. Religion and culture—civilization—began to disintegrate. Conflict between rich and poor arose where both formerly lived side by side in peace; nationalism threw former allies against one another; the absence of universal standards has brought us, in the twentieth century, into a state of chaos and despair. As a reaction against the struggle between the Proletariat Capitalism, Socialism has broadened into Communism.

Thus, civilization has reached its crisis. Catholicism or Communism? We must either live by the principles upon which Christendom was founded or destroy them entirely. It is imperative that a choice be made in the immediate future.

And with this, Mr. Belloc brings us to his chapter entitled Restoration. In it he sets forth some suggested remedies to the acknowledged evils which have dragged what was once civilization into a state of chaos. They are based on the culture of Christendom and common sense, with temperance as opposed to the extremes of our society—monopoly, concentration of wealth and property, usury and competition. Only by the curbing of these, along with the reestablishment of the guild principle and all that it entails, in brief, a Catholic atmosphere, does he see the salvation of the modern world.

The book itself is two hundred and fifty pages of very good reading material. Written by a man with full control of the pen, and only after thorough study of the subject, it is authoritative in its line, and should, when widely read, cause considerable comment.