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Backgrounds of Conflict

Ideas and Forms in World Politics

by Kurt London

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To Reuben H. Markham
great American
indefatigable foe of tyranny

Preface

When the idea of writing this book was conceived, the United Nations were still on the defensive. The issues at stake were beclouded and a better understanding of "what we are fighting for" was urgently needed. The revolutionary and ideological character of the Second World War was widely misunderstood and there were many who believed that a compromise could and should be worked out between the aggressors and the democracies.

Since then it has become evident that any compromise with the Axis powers would in reality lead to the defeat and ultimate destruction of democracy. But even after the unconditional surrender of the Axis nations has become a fact, Axis ideologies must be expected to linger among the peoples of these nations. The battle of the isms will not be halted by an armistice. At the same time, the effects of Nazi-Fascist propaganda and indoctrination will be felt in other countries inside and outside of Europe. A durable peace cannot be won until these convictions have been overcome. Walter Lippmann has warned, "Whatever our sympathies and opinions happen to be we must not pull the bedcovers over our heads, hoping that, if we do not hear too much about the ideological conflict, it will somehow subside."¹

Certainly if the philosophies and practices which led to the Second World War are to be successfully contested they must be understood. It is the purpose of this book to present some of the facts concerning the origins and development of these philosophies and practices in order to provide a basis for sound diagnosis and prevention. For, if peace is to be preserved, intellectual preparedness is as important as military preparedness.

It is not sufficient merely to examine the machinery of governments. An understanding of the broad outlines of the political philosophies which inspire their laws and determine their types of administration is essential. The forces which shape the educational and cultural experiences of a people are as important to the world

¹ U. S. *War Aims*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1944, p. 145.

as is their economic and political organization. Some acquaintance with historical backgrounds will help students to understand how we have come to such concepts as "total" and "global" in the realm of world politics. It is appropriate that such concepts should be made the subject of study in college courses in the fields of political and social sciences, history, and education.

No attempt is made to present novel theories or startling speculations. This book is designed rather to give the reader a grasp of basic ideas dominant in world politics so that he may be able better to judge which convictions should prevail.

At the beginning of the discussion the purpose has been to clarify political terms and concepts. A major portion of the book is devoted to a survey of the anti-democratic systems of government, particularly to Nazi Germany, the most dangerous foe of democracy. Considerable space is also devoted to Soviet Russia, democracy's ally in the struggle against Hitlerism. While the Soviet Union is totalitarian, when considered in terms of objective political analysis, its aspects and goals differ widely from those of Nazi-Fascist totalitarianism. The attention given to Russia is justified by the fact that the peace of the world is likely to depend upon collaboration between the Soviets and the Western democracies. Such collaboration will be rendered less difficult if the peculiarities of Soviet Marxism are made plain. France has been included in the discussion because her tragedy provides an object lesson for citizens of all democracies. Time alone will tell whether France herself has learned this lesson but since she is expected to play an important part in the preservation of Western civilization, an appraisal of Vichy and its antecedents must be realistic rather than romantic.

The parts on Great Britain and America are intentionally brief, designed mainly to illustrate some important aspects of democratic theory and practice in order to contrast them with totalitarian ideologies. It has been the author's purpose to suggest the implications of these systems for those who plan to maintain the peace and to provide the basis for an "intellectual defense" of the principles of democracy.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. George D. Crothers of Columbia University, and Dr. René Albrecht-Carrié of Queens

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K. L.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

June, 1945

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