



Sterling North Reviews

Plowshares Into Swords; Hinterland Kampf; Low

By Sterling North

ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY; the Story of American War Production. By Donald M. Nelson. Harcourt, Brace. 439 pp. \$4.

1. Donald M. Nelson, wartime production czar, has at least three ardent convictions: (1.) Stalin doesn't want war; (2.) Some of our top army men are a danger to democracy; (3.) In a pinch Americans can buckle down, cooperate and outproduce the world.

"Arsenal of Democracy" is a tough, outspoken, fact-packed book. It is a valuable, highly significant, totally honest record of America's battle to turn plowshares into swords. It is definitely not light summer reading.

Furthermore, it is going to make some of Nelson's enemies and critics sizzling mad.

This Hannibal, Mo., boy led the life of Tom Sawyer in his youth. He came up by way of chemical engineering and merchandising until he was in a top spot with Sears Roebuck. Called to Washington in 1940, he suffered through the middle-headed days of OPM, SPAB and other alphabetical monstrosities until, on January 15, 1942, F. D. R. made him chairman of the War Production Board. Then things began to happen.

We were fighting with our back to the wall and Nelson knew it. RFC's stockpiling of rubber had been mishandled. We were short on aluminum and copper. We had the greatest industrial potential on earth—but we hadn't even begun to convert. Nelson and a few other men close to Roosevelt knew that our Pacific fleet had practically been blown out of the water at Pearl Harbor.

Nelson pays the highest possible tribute to Baruch, without whose advice we might have failed; to Morgenthau who was in there pitching long before Pearl Harbor; to Knudsen, top production man and patriot; to the late Sidney Hillman, a true "labor statesman" whose contribution to war production was far beyond anything his critics imagine.

From this you might imagine the WPB chief had "liberal" leanings. Certainly not consciously. He speaks of "liberals" and "intellectuals" in mildly sarcastic quotes. He defends Roosevelt as definitely "not leftist." And despite his ardent protestations in this book, nobody can say that Nelson did much for "little business."

He had only one idea in mind, and that was to boost production: tanks, planes, synthetic rubber (and what a headache that was), high octane gas, aluminum, copper—in fact, all the sinews of war, while keeping alive the highly essential civilian production scaled down to its irreducible minimum.

High Army brass scoffed at the need for farm machinery or even coal mining machinery. According to Nelson they curtly refused to let him in on any of their plans. Nelson feels he had to fight the Germans, the Japs and the Army all the way. He feels that he got along excellently with labor, management and even Congress.

There are dozens of news and feature stories buried in this book.

How three Sears Roebuck mail experts ordered a 100,000-letter mail jam for Nelson in a matter of days.

How Big Steel fought at tremendous odds to get through a "lock."

Why the auto industry couldn't "part" a wheel.

Plowing gears into machine guns.

The seventeen Congressional committees investigating rubber. Why only 150 out of 184,000

Huey Pro and Con

"All the King's Men," Robert Penn Warren's novel about a southern dictator, will be the "book on trial" next Monday over WHN at 8 p.m. Orville Prescott will defend, Dawn Powell will prosecute and Sterling North will be judge.

manufacturers got the big orders (maybe Nelson doesn't know it, but that was the beginning of the end of the American way of life).

And there will certainly be repercussions from Nelson's statement that he never knew a dishonest dollar-a-year man.

Of utmost importance are Nelson's final conclusions. If we are to save even the shreds of American democracy, civilians, not army men, must be at the top even in wartime. His second conclusion is that from personal contact with Stalin and the Russians he is certain that they do not want war.

In any case, Nelson estimates the cost of such a war at 600 billions, more than twice the cost of the last war. He is certain that neither capitalism nor democracy could survive such a war.

Coming from a man who has just been through it, those words should carry weight.

To Avoid Civil Strife

REVOLT OF THE SOUTH AND WEST. By A. G. Mezerik. Duell, Sloan and Pearce. 290 pp. \$3.

2. Know what a Mississippi school teacher earns? From \$200 to \$599 per year. At that, the school mam was better off than the average southern share-cropper.

Whose fault? Partly yours and mine. Speaking as an Easterner, I am keenly aware that the high standard of living in the North and East is partly at the expense of the South and the West.

Adverse freight rates, tariffs that favor industrialized regions, patent pools, monopolies that fight regional industry—all contribute to keeping vast areas partially blighted.

With the single exception of California, there is not one Western or Southern State with an assessed valuation equal to the total assets of several of America's billion-dollar corporations—those fictitious "persons" claiming "due process" immunity under the sadly perverted Fourteenth Amendment.

Some years ago Fortune Magazine mentioned in passing an astonishing and highly inflammatory statistic:

New York City would have an adverse balance of trade amounting to one billion dollars a year (in its commerce with the rest of America) were it not for an item called "services." Rome used to call it "tribute."

The picture can be overimplied. Backward regions are not blameless, as the prejudiced author himself is forced to admit. Local high and big-city and literary are only in part the product of lower per capita income, which again is only partially the diabolical work of Danyankes and Wall Street financiers.

When Mezerik calls Huey Long and his sort "Northern Quislings" he is talking nonsense when he

places part of the blame for Southern racial prejudices on Northern shoulders he is dealing in dangerous half truths.

But it is very hard to argue with his well documented picture of living conditions in blighted areas (shocking health and educational deficiencies). And he gives chapter and verse when he outlines the fight being waged by eastern industries against anything but branch plants in the South and West. His chapter on the fight Big Steel has put up against steel-making in the West is particularly convincing and incriminating.

Mezerik quotes Truman and others on the frightening growth monopolistic corporations made during the war. They definitely threaten democracy in what might be called vertical and horizontal fashion. Vertically they threaten small business everywhere. Horizontally they threaten regional business of any size. How are we to cope with them?

In the constructive concluding chapters Mr. Mezerik answers this question to his own satisfaction. He is an ardent admirer of TVA and looks forward with keen hope to the "inevitable" establishment of other Valley authorities. And he ends with a plea for decentralization, if only to save America from atomic destruction.

A lively, significant and controversial book by an economist who isn't running for office.

Graphic Prophet

YEARS OF WRATH; A Cartoon History: 1931-1945. By David Low, with a Text by Quincy Howe. Simon and Schuster. 328 pp. \$3.75.

3. At first glance it is highly ironical that such a fallible prophet as Quincy Howe should be writing the text for a book of cartoons by so accurate a prophet as David Low. But hindsight and foresight have seldom experienced so happy a mating.

As Mr. Howe now realizes, "Since 1931, David Low has seen the world steadily and seen it whole."

Never for one moment an isolationist, the hard hitting British liberal saw Jap aggression in Manchuria as the opening gun of world conflict. He lambasted the League of Nations for glossing over Jap aggression. In four slashing cartoons drawn a decade before Pearl Harbor he outlined Jap aims as clearly as did the Tanaka Memorial.

From 1933 on he was a fiery and brilliant critic of the Nazis. While appeasers and apologists were excusing or lauding the war-mongering, Jew-baiting brown shirts, Low was drawing cartoons as bitter as anything by Daumier or Forain, completely accurate in their caustic implications.

Hoare and Laval never fooled Low for a minute. While the fascists were jumping Ethiopia Low was jumping the fascists including the British variety. His understanding of the Spanish civil war was keen, and needless to say anti-Franco. He called the turn on appeasement right down the line to Munich, never letting Chamberlain forget for a single day what a fool he was.

Low knew the Anglo-Saxon world would finally have to fight Germany and Japan. His cartoons show that he was anywhere from six to 10 years ahead of the political thinking of the Tory party in England. He rubbed in their insularity and political illiteracy every time Germany made another aggressive move—which was often. Hitler himself was violently annoyed by the cartoonist and is said to have made diplomatic representations attempting to silence his graphic criticism. It was one of Hitler's early failures, a typical example of his misjudgment of the inner strength of democracy.

Low is a world citizen, a top flight political thinker, a prophet with a high batting average—and, oh yes, one of the world's finest cartoonists.



Authors Are Like People

Race Relations—No Nick Carter Stuff

By Clip Boutell

"Race relations are improving in the South, I think," said Owen Dodson, Negro poet and playwright whose first book "Powerful Long Ladder" has just been issued by Farrar, Straus & Co. "There is an awareness down there that something is wrong," he continued as we attacked our luncheon at the Ritz.

Mr. Dodson, who is executive secretary of the Committee for Mass Education in Race Relations, had just returned from a trip through the South where he was gathering material for a documentary film and he explained that it was heartening to find people occasionally apologizing for their discriminatory behavior. "They'd say, 'Sorry, I'd do it, but they won't let me,'" added Mr. Dodson. "They were a little ashamed of their taboos and wanted to shift the blame."

For a young man of 31, Owen Dodson already has a considerable literary production. A series of his plays was used for morale purposes while he was in the Navy. His "A Garden in Time" was produced by the American Negro Theatre in 1945, and one of his pageants was witnessed by 20,000 people at Madison Square Garden.

He is working on a novel, and, while we were discussing it, Frank Yerby's highly successful pot-boiler, "The Foxes of Harrow," somehow popped into the conversation—"The Foxes" being a deliberate attempt by another young Negro to make money after having first tried serious protest fiction.

The mention of Yerby's novel inevitably led to "Gone With the Wind." Owen Dodson chuckled. "You know what got me mad?" he said. "When I read 'Gone With the Wind' I enjoyed it." . . .

MGM Prize Novel

Well-confirmed rumor has it that the winner of the MGM Annual Novel Award will be "The Sacred River" by Mary Renault, when the official announcement is made on Sept. 9. This is the prize that includes a minimum payment to the author of \$125,000 and a possible additional \$50,000 depending on the book's sales. Miss Renault has had three previous novels published by Morrow, who will bring out the prize-winner in the fall of 1947.

And speaking of the MGM contest, I was astonished to hear this sad tale concerning it: "Mister Roberts," that wonderful novel by Thomas Heggen which appeared three weeks ago, was entered and survived all the preliminary eliminations. It was, according to my informant, one of the final dozen titles under consideration at the time it appeared. The publisher had apparently forgotten that the novel had been entered in the contest when the publication date was set, and, by being issued before September 9, it was automatically rendered ineligible for the prize. . . .

How to Be a Spy

I spent a delightful hour talking with an indefatigable Frenchwoman, Madame Louise Weiss, who is the author of a plump, three-decker novel entitled "La Marseillaise," which is a current hit in France and of which the first two volumes are already available in French from Brentano's in this country. Madame Weiss is in New York on a brief visit, representing L'Illustration and Petit Parisien. During the occupation, she was the famous Valentine, secret agent of the resistance and editor of the underground paper New Republic.

"It is most difficult to be all of a sudden a secret agent," said Madame Weiss. "Everyone, because they had read Nick Carter and Sherlock Holmes, thought

that they could fool the Germans. But they would talk too much and write too much. I didn't make too many mistakes.

"When I was hiding out from the Gestapo with a peasant family, I carefully removed my name and every mark from my clothes, but I forgot the license on my cocker spaniel. The people spotted it immediately, they told me later, but luckily they did not give me away."

Madame Weiss's novel, by the way, has not yet been signed by any American publisher.

Signs and Portents

Cleaving a sheep and examining its entrails, watching a flight of birds, musing over the pattern of the tea leaves in your cup, or just plain guessing—they are all equally valuable in predicting the sales of a book. But some publishers are superstitious. Lippincott, for instance, believe that there is a good omen in the fact that Elizabeth Ann MacMurray of Dallas has sent them an enthusiastic wire after reading an advance copy of "Mr. Adam," by Pat Frank, which is being published on Sept. 11. Miss MacMurray was also the first bookseller to climb on the band wagon for "The Egg and I." . . .

Sid Lippman and Sylvia Dee, composer and lyricist of "Chickory Chick," etc., are doing the songs for Max Shulman's musical show, "Barefoot Boy With Cneek." They sang some of the songs after Doubleday's cocktail party last week, and I suspect George Abbot will have a hit on his hands when the show opens this winter. . . . Phillip Duschnes is bringing out "Carrousel for Bibliophiles," a treasury of literary oddities edited by Bill Targ of World Publishing. . . .

"East River," the new novel by Sholem Asch, author of "The Nazarene," etc., has been purchased by MGM. It will be published by Putnam's in October, and I gather that it is one of the finest things he has ever written. . . . The Viareggio Prize of 100,000 lira has been awarded to Silvio Micheli for his novel, "Pane Duro," recently published by Einaudi in Italy. . . . Reynal & Hitchcock will issue "Under the Volcano," a novel by Malcolm Lowry, some time next year, and Frank Taylor describes it as possibly the most important novel to be published in English since Joyce's "Ulysses." . . .

Peace at Any Price

It is a sure sign that peace is breaking out again when the talking-dog stories start appearing in the papers. And the step from talking dog to talking mule is not a great one, so it is not so surprising to find David Stern III writing about one of the latter in his book "Francis," which is coming in November from Farrar Straus. Anyway, here is a nice bit of dialogue from the first chapter. The narrator is a young second lieutenant who has just rolled into a ravine to find himself sharing it with a G. I. mule.

"The mule was looking at me with mournful brown eyes. Its lips were moving.
"Who's speaking?" I demanded.
"I am."
"Who is I?"
"Me . . . the mule."
"Don't be ridiculous," I said.
"Coming from a second lieutenant, that's almost ironic," said the voice. . . .

