

THE TAMING OF TECHNIQS

GERMAN economic and sociological theory has always tended to follow a line of its own, away from the general Western European tendency. In the days when the English "classical" theory, incarnated in John Stuart Mill, had provided a lucid and logical complexus of interlocking "laws" for the whole of the economic activities of society, the German "Historical School," in the person of Roscher, denied there was such a thing as economic theory at all, merely the study of actual economic facts. Against this theory (or lack of it), and against new-arisen Marxism, the "Austrian School" erected a powerful theoretical structure in defence of Capitalism. The Germans, curiously enough (in view of the industrial development of Germany), as opposed to the Austrians, always tended to react against Industrial Capitalism. Schmoller, who succeeded Roscher as the Archimandrite of the "Historical School," preached the preservation of the handicrafts as the sole bulwark against "domination by the monied interests"; and this tradition was carried on by Max Weber (the inventor of the famous theory of the origin of Capitalism from Calvinism), and by Werner Sombart.

Since the death of Weber in 1920 (he accompanied the German delegation to Versailles), Sombart has shared with Schumpeter and the Catholic Spann the distinction of being one of the three biggest men in German social science. The reaction of this triumvirate to the Nazi Revolution would therefore be interesting. Spann's reaction is not available. I have not yet seen any account of a book of his published since the coming of the Hitler régime. Schumpeter's reaction can be deduced from the fact that he now holds a professorial position at Harvard. He was never a member of the "Historical School"—he it was who invented the difference between "static" and "dynamic" economics. He lauded Capitalism as "dynamic" economic society, and in fact produced a most profound and abstract theory to explain its workings, derived partly from Marx. Despite the

influence of Marx on his thought, however, Schumpeter was always a fervent partisan of the Capitalist system, and considered that ever under the reign of monopolistic capitalism the "dynamic" technical progress of society would continue to unfold. He has gone.

There remains Sombart, the man who understands more about the historical genesis and development of Industrial Capitalism than anyone else living; and its most confirmed enemy. His reaction to Hitlerism was sure to be interesting; and his reaction—*Deutscher Sozialismus*—after a time-lag of four years, has now come to hand in an English translation as *A New Social Philosophy*.¹

His position is that of a fine independence. While admitting his political support of the Hitler régime, he hardly alludes to it, and develops a plan of his own for the rehabilitation of German life which, while having contacts with the policy of Hitler, in no way derives from it.

If Sombart were dictator of Germany's intellectual life instead of Goebbels, Catholics would have nothing to fear. I have never seen a treatise on Sociology, written by a non-Catholic in Sombart's position—professor of Sociology in the University of a Capital city—in which the name of God is so constantly brought in, and with such belief and fervour. I suppose Sir William Beveridge—the former director of the London School of Economics—is Sombart's opposite number here. One may look in vain for the name of God in his works. Add to this the numerous quotations from *Quadragesimo Anno*, (how many times have Keynes or Lionel Robbins quoted *Quadragesimo Anno*?); his expressed admiration for Catholic social teaching; and his declaration (in opposition to the earlier anti-rational position of the Historical School) that he places himself in the tradition of Aristotle and the Scholastics.

Sombart has certainly not become a conformist National-Socialist. He expresses his right to his own opinion in no uncertain terms, and denounces the "chthonic" cult of the dark gods in such terms that obviously the Nazi cult of race and blood is meant. In express terms also, he declares his

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belief in a transcendent personal God and the eternal destiny of man as the possessor of an immortal soul. A "God" as a mere pantheistic manifestation of the race will find no apologist in Sombart; and if men of Sombart's calibre and position still stand out for their convictions, there is hope for Germany yet.

His book is certainly worth studying by all interested in the social sciences; and it is of particular interest to English Catholics, intrigued as we are (and divided) by the problem of Industrial Capitalism. For this reason, that in this country official University Economics and Sociology stands as a solid bloc in favour of the régime. To question the entire usefulness or the future of Industrialism—except from a Socialist standpoint—is to be labelled as a crank. (One may perhaps except the quasi-Distributist predilections of Professor Tawney.) But here is a representative of official University Sociology who detests the Industrial system, and discusses a way, if not to end it, at least to cripple it.

In abstract theory Sombart would prefer a clean sweep of the machines and the installation of a purely peasant-handicraft regime, as "best suited to a just political economy." This is the position represented in Germany by Paul de Lagarde, in Italy by Gina Lombroso (the criminologist's daughter), and in England by the more extreme Distributists. But in view of the actual position this is impossible. One must give up one's ideas of the "best possible" social system for a compromise with actuality. "One might prefer to blot out the last one hundred and fifty years of our history and begin again where we were in 1750. But that is simply impossible."

Accordingly Sombart stands, not for the abolition, but for the restriction and rigorous control of the Industrial System. In his plan the peasant-handicraft economy stands as the norm, to be encouraged by the State, to which the mass of the citizens should belong. Entire industries should be de-mechanized, such as the boot and shoe and the tailoring industries, and replaced on a handicraft basis. And this central peasant-handicraft economy should be surrendered by a legal thickset hedge. "The economic world of the

peasant and handicraft labourers should be surrounded by legal barriers of the state to protect them from the penetration of the capitalistic spirit."

The Industrial system would be entirely subordinate. For the actual needs of to-day its presence might be considered necessary, to a certain extent. "Industry and the industrial class might even be welcomed as a driving, stimulating and alluring element in the state. But they could not serve as the foundation of the state."

Technics is to be tamed. An indifferent thing in itself, scientific and machine technology becomes positively evil when under the driving power of the Capitalist "spirit of gain." Sombart devotes a section of his book to the "taming of technique." Certain inventions are simply to be placed in museums. Every machine which conflicts with the claims of the peasant-handicraft economy to be the normative system is to be ruthlessly extirpated. Mechanized agriculture, in particular, comes under the ban of Sombart's wrath. Future inventions are to be rigorously examined by a state committee and banned if they are judged to have a disturbing influence on cultural values.

This, says Sombart with satisfaction, will put an end to "Progress." "We renounce 'progress'." "The only justifiable reason for the desire for innovations in the past, on the part of the economic forces, lay in the fact that our population in the last century increased so rapidly and, as a consequence, the German people 'outgrew' its clothes, that is, its economic apparatus. But now, since we have entered the ranks of the stationary peoples, this reason also disappears. All in all, we are now ready for a stationary economy, and ready to send the 'dynamic' economy of capitalism back to the devil, from whence it came."

The similarity of these conceptions to those contained in that book of Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown*, which had so poor a reception in this country and so startling a success in France a couple of years ago, will be recognized.

It begins to seem as if, in another few decades, the English intelligentsia, clinging to its belief in Industrialism and technical progress, will be hopelessly outmoded, and a laughing-stock to the Continental thinkers.

W. P. WITCUTT.