

Reviews

POLITICAL MESSIANISM, *The Romantic Phase*, by J. L. Talmon; Secker and Warburg; 25s.

NATIONS AND EMPIRES, by Reinhold Niebuhr; Faber and Faber; 25s.

The analysis of the history of political ideas is a difficult business. We are never confronted with a pure dialectic of ideas in which the conclusions of later periods are logically related to the premises of earlier periods. It is rather that elements in the theories of lawyers, theologians and philosophers are married to the interests of groups that for one reason or another are striving for power in society. Of course, once a position has been adopted, from whatever motives and for whatever reasons, logical compulsions, as even Marx and Engels admitted, do play their part. This is most evident in the field of law, where there is often an unmistakably logical development; but it is possible even outside the field of law to trace the logical development of theories of politics, though why certain logical developments should have occurred and others have been inhibited are matters for historical investigation; for even those developments that exhibit logical connections are not, as it were, autonomous and free from social pressures. For example, we may allow that Max Weber and Tawney have shown that later Protestant social theories are logically related to certain ideas in early Calvinism; but the later development of capitalism which provides the context within which these ideas are to be understood was only possible with the development of double-entry book-keeping and the rationalization of the economic process in general; and *these* are not logically derivable from early Calvinism but are conceptual and practical innovations (and in any case have a pre-Calvinist origin).

Professor Talmon has already in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* shown himself to be one of the best living historians of political ideas. In that book he showed that there are connections and parallels between the doctrine of Rousseau, in particular the doctrine of the General Will with its implication—so vital to the whole moral theory of Kant—that there is a distinction between my empirical will and my real will, so that the compulsions of the State may represent what I *really* desire and may thus confer freedom upon me, and the theory and practice of modern totalitarianism. He continues the same line of argument, though in a more detailed way, in his new book. Now he takes his data from the socialist theories of the nineteenth century, all of them related in one way or another to the theories of the French Revolution. He sees them all as having a certain religious core, as does the liberal nationalism he also analyses. They are all of them in a sense messianic movements, and as such they all of them are related, in ways they themselves would neither recognise nor admit,

to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The notion that Marxism, as distinct from the plainly utopian theories, is a scientific rather than a romantic and messianic theory is, Talmon believes, a delusion. It is a structure of rationalizations given a scientific form but having a messianic foundation and a messianic hope. Superficially Talmon's conclusion is melancholy. He rightly sees the centre of gravity of world politics as shifting to the East and he faces, as we all must, the possibility that the industrialization of the East may take place within the framework of totalitarian regimes. He writes:

'The question arises whether in the absence of an active prophetic tradition from the political history of the Eastern civilizations, the adoption of political Messianism may not stop with the organizational aspect, with the moral postulate left out. In which case the Messianic revolutions may just become reduced to vast industrial revolutions, helping indeed countless millions of utterly downtrodden people to recover eventually a measure of humanity, but entailing too frightful a cost in the process. The power machines built up at an enormously precipitated pace may become a means of asserting national or racial peculiarity against a civilization not only very alien, but one that had in the past caused much injury and humiliation through its dynamic self-assertiveness.'

All the same, Talmon argues, these conclusions do not mean that man's moral autonomy has been destroyed. The stakes are now much greater: quite simply they have become, to be or not to be.

Dr Niebuhr takes an even wider canvas than Professor Talmon. He discusses the whole history of the western world from antiquity to the present day with a view to analysing our present international predicament. It is a disappointing and even a *tired* book, full of high-level generalizations not closely related to the phenomena they are designed to explain and too often falling into vulgar rhetoric or sheer unintelligibility. An example of the former: 'For [Theodore] Roosevelt was conscious of American power and lusted for the glory of the nation in world affairs in a different context than [*sic*] Wilson's moral glory'. Of the latter: 'But the system [i.e. Chinese Communism] which, according to our official dogma, is fated to extinction has meanwhile gained enough power to influence the Russian strategy, chiefly by exchanging loyalty to Russian hegemony for the tangible benefits of technical equipments and guidance'. What is fundamentally disappointing, though not unexpected, in Dr Niebuhr's treatment of the great political issues of our day is that he nowhere faces the fundamental challenge to the Christian conscience of such an issue as that of nuclear warfare. Any attempt to embody a moral absolute in an actual historical situation he seems to think romantic and utopian. It is significant that he says of Catholic asceticism that it is 'escapist'. He overworks the concept of ambiguity. The following passage is a typical example of his approach to the problems of world politics.

'The facts of current history refute both the simple secular moralism of our culture and the moralistic versions of the Christian faith which pretend there

is a moral answer to the nuclear dilemma, or a moral way of removing the ambiguity of power and dominion in the community. Modern history has given us a vivid illustration of the fact that the history of communities accentuates, rather than mitigates, the moral ambiguities of our existence, particularly the ambiguities of our common life. Only a religious faith and a humanism more profound than many extant varieties can make sense out of these terrifying facts of modern history, particularly those facts which prove that all historic responsibilities must be borne without the certainty that meeting them will lead to any ultimate solution of the problem, but with only the certainty that there are immediate dangers which may be avoided and immediate injustices which may be eliminated.'

The sound is forced, the notes are few.

J. M. CAMERON

INDIA AND THE WEST, by Barbara Ward; Hamish Hamilton; 18s.

This is a survey of the, primarily, economic relations between India and the West from the point of view of immediate needs and future action. Miss Ward shows convincingly that our forms of government cannot be transplanted and expected to survive in the economically poor soil of the 'underdeveloped countries'. There must also be a more dynamic and generous strategy initiated in the West if the West itself is not to suffer. The concepts of 'free democracy' and 'parliamentary government' often seem at best luxuries, at worst vapid when compared with the impressive, if ruthless, achievements of totalitarian rational planning.

India is chosen as the focus of this work for various reasons. It is one of the largest and most efficient military forces of Asia; upon its success in liberal government very probably depends the future of Japan's 'precariously open society'. It has the plans ready and the proved initiative in both its public and private sectors to justify massive capital assistance. It is sometimes suggested in the European press that India's five-year plans are the extravagancies of doctrinaire socialism. It is not sufficiently realized that India cannot hope to survive as a free state unless she completes with maximum speed the work which the British left so lamentably unfinished. Miss Ward is more generous to the British record in economic matters in India than some Indian writers. Nevertheless the results of over a hundred years of colonial economics emerge quite clearly. Miss Ward is understandably less concerned, however, with castigating 19th century *laissez faire* than with warning against its half-hearted successor: the disposition to prevent the final failure of India's plans rather than a lively will to make them succeed.

The book urges with far greater detail than can be summarized here, and with sophistication, the development of a scheme similar to Marshall aid and points out that what is needed is a sum amounting to something less than half