

[An article of Dr. Gordon H. Clark from The Witness. Note that the 'Clark' referred to in the article is economist John Maurice Clark]

NATIONAL COUNCIL ECONOMICS

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There are three parts to the work, the first two of which are written by well-known economists. Although these authors have disagreed with each other elsewhere, their differences are not stressed in the present composite volume. All or nearly all of them profess to see danger in excessive governmental power. Clark says, "Extensions of state power have unintended by-products also. And unmoral politics, like unmoral business, can fail to be directed to socially valid ends" (p. 41). To what extent Clark would extend state power and at what point stop, can only be guessed from his hope that the social and political changes of the recent past "can go far enough and fast enough to save Western society" (p. 51). Apparently he does not think that we have already gone too far.

Boulding also warns against too much centralization (p.65); he even criticizes liberal Protestantism for being ashamed of its history and for accepting Marxist criticisms of capitalism (p.82). Yet he seems to be opposed to having prices set by competition (p.79), and he holds that a spirit of orthodoxy in religion is inimical to economic progress (p. 6).

Heimann is more forthright and open than some of the others. Both capitalism and communism are anti-christian (p.140), and both should be avoided in favor of socialism (p.142). He praises the British Labour Party (p.143), advocates a strictly regulated flow of purchasing power (p.144) and a soak-the-rich policy of undramatic taxation, commends Israel because its economy is controlled by its labor unions (p.146), and then claims that this "is not a half way station between capitalism and communism" (p.145). On this point Professor Heimann is indubitably right: his position is not half way but seven eighths to communism, and if we go that far that fast, we shall not stop there.

Professor Vickrey also mixes a little conservatism with his radicalism, in that he opposes fair trade practices (p.173), but with this concession to American competition he asserts that confiscatory inheritance taxes are justified by forcing the heirs to become productive workers; that a man with a high I.Q. has no more right to the benefits of his work than has a farmer who has inherited land more fertile than his neighbor's (p.154); and that Christian missionary activity is not to have its extent determined by the financial support of those interested (p.159). These anti-christian and anti-american views are defended as demands of morality, although at several points in the chapter the author stresses the immense difficulty of establishing any ethical principles whatever. Professor Knight is supposed to be the conservative contributor to the volume, and indeed he closes with two pages of caution regarding political power. Otherwise he calls individualism monstrous, belittles individual ethics and personal goodness (pp. 206, 210), pours scorn on Hebraic-Puritanical religious traditions, and by centering attention on Romish abuses pictures Christianity as a great evil force (pp. 211 ff.).

The last two remaining chapters by theologians are perhaps the poorest in the book, religiously, economically, and intellectually. Out of the vague and obscure platitudes one gathers that the Reformers were failures because they failed to prevent the rise of capitalism; and what is worse, Calvin gave it aid and comfort (p.399); Christians accept private property as a concession to sin (p. 406); bad housing is unfavorable to salvation and Christians should establish the economic welfare that is the condition of salvation (p419); the Church should inspire its members to organize for political action that goes far beyond the guidance which the Church itself can give(p. 428).

The last chapter balances the evils of capitalism and the evils of communism until a reader cannot decide from the actual wording what the author wants. He assumes that Marxism takes root where there is poverty and distress, in spite of the fact that no nation has embraced Marxism voluntarily, in free elections, without armed force (p.437). He speaks of the prejudices of middle class life, its extravagant individualism, and its lack of a sense of justice (p,441). Every social group, he says, should have some concern for the general welfare, but "one must leave the concept of 'general welfare' somewhat vague" (p. 449).

The National Council of the Churches disclaims responsibility for the views of the several writers of the book it sponsored, but it would be interesting to know the answers to two questions. First, why, with one possible exception, did the Federal Council select all left-wing authors? Why were not some representatives of capitalism, liberty, and Americanism chosen? Why did they not ask chapters from Ludwig von Mises, Hayek, Walter Spahr, Henry Hazlitt, Lewis Haney, or a dozen other conservative economists? Second, what is the justification for spending the tithe money of Christian people for a course in economics – even if it were not one sided and anti-christian? All these authors have published their views in solid volumes; there seems to be no need for Christians to subsidize or propagandize secular economics.

These questions do not indicate that the book is unimportant, but rather the opposite.