

BLACKFRIARS

SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICS

THE MACHINE AND THE WORKER. By A. Barratt Brown. (Ivor Nicholson and Watson; 4/6.)

THE BOURGEOIS MIND and other Essays. By Nicholas Berdyaev. (Sheed & Ward; 3/6.)

The Principal of Ruskin College has written for the general reader a calm, dispassionate summary of the pros and cons of machinery, based on patient sifting of cold facts. Its particular value lies in its careful logical development and above all in its constant recognition that all evaluation of machinery must, in the last analysis, be ethical and eudaemonian. Its study would prevent much of the slick and untidy generalisations which abound on a subject which is as complicated as it is vital.

While stating forcibly the losses which have been incurred, and are likely still to be incurred, by the use of machinery, the author has little difficulty in disposing of some of the most impressive arguments brought forward by the neo-Luddites. His chapter on *New Skills for Old* deserves especially to be studied, as do the concluding chapters on *The Leisure Problem* and *Education for Leisure*.

It is not possible, as he remarks, 'to tabulate a neat list of gains which can be set out under separate heads like the credit side of a balance sheet with a neat list of losses over against them on the debit side. The business of ethical accountancy is not so easily susceptible of neat arrangement.' But he has produced something which is as near to a balance sheet as is possible. Not all his entries will be universally accepted, but all deserve to be seriously considered. Catholics will consider his answer to *The Ultimate Question* to be not quite ultimate; but they will benefit by having the question so clearly and accurately stated.

Having mastered the cold prosaic facts in Mr. Barratt Brown's book, the reader should turn to M. Berdyaev's *Man and Machine*, the second of the four essays collected in *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays*. Here the wider and deeper implications of the problem are faced in what may be called a prolegomenon to a philosophy of technique, similar in scope to, but far more profound, comprehensive and satisfactory than, *Der Mensch und die Technik* of Oswald Spengler.

The introduction of machinery has, in M. Berdyaev's view, brought into the world a new category of being, a new cosmos, which is neither organic nor inorganic. In so doing it has disturbed the accepted categories and, in the profoundest sense, ushered in a new era in the history of humanity. Like Spengler, but for better reasons, M. Berdyaev considers this an inevitable

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destiny from which we have neither ability nor right to escape. The 'idealization of the past' is as futile as it is false and cowardly.

The problem of technique is ultimately the problem of its repercussions on the spirit of man. In itself technique is, from this angle, neutral. Its direct attack is, not on the human mind and spirit, but on 'the heart . . . the centre of emotional life . . . which can scarcely bear the contact of cold metal . . . Technique strikes fiercely at humanism, the humanist conception of the world, the humanist ideal of man and culture.' Hence it strikes at human integrity and therefore, indirectly, but no less effectively, at the human spirit itself, the image of God, which it threatens to obliterate.

M. Berdyaev believes, no less than Spengler, in the power of mechanical technique to destroy its creator. Like Spengler again, he considers this to be an imminent menace. But, unlike Spengler, he does not consider it an inevitable fate nor urge us pitifully to stoic inertia and acceptance. On the contrary: 'We cannot admit an autonomous technique with full freedom of action: it *has* to be subordinated to spirit and the spiritual values of life—as everything else has to be. Only upon one condition can the human spirit cope with this tremendous problem: it must not be isolated and dependent only upon itself—it must be united to God. Then only can man preserve the image and likeness of his Maker and be himself preserved.'

This new problem which faces man in his perennial struggle for self-liberation and assertion demands new methods and a new approach. On the Christian, in particular, it makes imperious demands of courageous thought and action, of both of which M. Berdyaev gives our age a striking example. 'The way of man's final liberation and realization of his vocation is the way to the kingdom of God, which is not only that of Heaven but also that of the transfigured earth, the transfigured cosmos.'

VICTOR WHITE, O. P.

DIE DEUTSCHE KOLONIALPOLITIK UND DAS ZENTRUM, 1884-1914.
von Dr. Hans Dehl, unter Benützung von Akten des Reichsarchivs und Kolonialamtes. (Limburger-Vereins Druckerei).

An important contribution to a little-known chapter of colonial history and to the part played by the Catholic Party in the Reichstag, the so called 'Centre.'

For one thing this careful little study proves conclusively the mass of corruption, oppression and misarrangement, which seem inseparable from the beginning of any colonial venture: for another, that it was only the democratic method of bring-