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THE *Nation*

January 14, 1939

✱

A Challenge to Thomas E. Dewey

The Whitney Case— Closed Too Soon

BY I. F. STONE

✱

Why I Am a Marxist

BY HAROLD J. LASKI

✱

Democracy Wins in Chile . . . *Freda Kirchwey*

A Last Talk with Karel Capek . . *Erika Mann*

Sabotage in China *Editorial*

The Press and the NLRB *Mary Bartlett*

THE *Nation*

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The Shape of Things

★

THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY I. F. STONE IN AN article in this issue on the challenge of the Whitney case merit the attention of Congress. The failure of the Attorney General of New York and the nationally famous "racket-busting" District Attorney of Manhattan, Mr. Dewey, to go as deeply into this case as they might cannot be corrected by Congress. But the readiness of Chairman Douglas of the SEC to declare the Whitney case closed even after the resignation of Dr. Hutchins as a public representative on the Board of Governors of the Exchange warrants inquiry at Washington. Is the SEC so anxious to fraternize with President "Bill" Martin of the Exchange that it is willing to shut its eyes to facts which disturb the carefully built-up picture of a "reformed" Stock Exchange? Are the results of past New Deal investigations to evaporate in the warm but treacherous atmosphere of an era of good feeling between the Exchange and the SEC? Is our most important market, the market in which the value of the savings of the American people is in large part established, to be left in the hands of a sham "reform" administration? The unwillingness of the Exchange to inquire into the circumstances that enabled an embezzler to serve so long as its officer is apparent. Chairman Douglas's statement to Arthur Krock, "For the SEC, as for the Exchange, the Whitney case is closed," will be comforting at Broad and Wall streets but it should raise the alarm on Capitol Hill.

★

NOT SINCE DREYFUS HAS JUSTICE WON SO great a victory as in the freeing of Tom Mooney. The power of California's great capitalist interests sent him to jail and kept him there twenty-two years despite the fact that three official investigations indicated a frame-up. The power of organized labor and of its progressive middle-class allies has set Mooney free by the election of a governor pledged to pardon him. Culbert I. Olson, the new Governor of California, has covered his name with glory by his historic act. The Russian Revolution saved Mooney from execution—the cry of "Muni" set up by demonstrators before our embassy in what was then St. Peters-

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BOOKS *and the* ARTS

A LAST CONVERSATION WITH KAREL CAPEK

BY ERIKA MANN

X THE death of Karel Capek, the Czech author, is a great sorrow for all who knew his work, his noble and gallant bearing as a public figure, his animation, warm-heartedness, and talented intensity as a private person. The news came as a great surprise, very suddenly, although it was not really surprising. With a consistency that has no parallel for horribleness, the best, the most spiritual persons, the true representatives of every country, disappear from the scene in that country as soon as the fascist dictatorship comes to power. They flee, they are killed, they kill themselves—or they simply die: they let any disease germ penetrate their despairing bodies; an attack of gripe which under other circumstances would scarcely trouble them carries them off. An artist of Capek's rank and convictions could not breathe in a mutilated, fascist Czechoslovakia subject to Hitler's overlordship. And since to him as his nation's greatest poet, who combined high spiritual and literary qualities with genuine and deep-rooted patriotism, to live and work in a foreign language and a foreign land was inconceivable—and since on the other hand it was clear that he could not remain any longer at home—he lay down and died.

I spent a whole day with him immediately after the Munich "peace" pact. I drove out to his house in the country in a small open car placed at my disposal by the Ministry of Propaganda, which was still on a war basis. A soldier sat at the wheel beside me—a young lad in uniform, silent and very pale. His narrow Slav's eyes had an angry and defiant expression. The streets were choked with the retreating columns of the Czech army; silent, hanging their heads, the soldiers evacuated one village, one height, after another, though no enemy was visible. The sight of these strong, splendidly equipped troops drawing back, back, back without a struggle was painful because it seemed completely incomprehensible and unnatural. I speak to the chauffeur about it; he has tears in his narrow eyes as he shows me the fortresses and explains the wire entanglements and the air-raid defenses which had been built so joyfully. "We could have held out for months—alone if necessary," he says; and his face, the face of the deceived and betrayed Czech people, will remain forever in my heart and memory. When he sets me down before the beautiful old manor house which is my destination, he asks for three hours' leave. He would like to drive to his family in the little village of X—not far from here. "We don't know yet whether

Hitler will march in there," he says, "and my people are democrats—it would go badly with them."

I have known Karel Capek since the first of many visits in Prague. I know that he is very friendly with Benes, and I hope that he will be able to explain to me why Benes showed such inexplicable trust in powers which had announced clearly enough their treacherous intentions, why he had hoped and waited, as if paralyzed, like a rabbit held by the eye of a snake. Frau Capek, the renowned Czech actress Olga Scheinpflugowa, receives me. She is white as a sheet; one can see that she has been weeping for a long time. She tells me that Capek passed the night weeping and writing to Benes; never in my life have I seen so many men weep as in these days since the Czechoslovak Republic was condemned to death by its friends.

Capek, though his fine Slavic face was marked with melancholy—his dark eyes could be of a boundless sadness—was fundamentally cheerful by nature. He was a clear strong spirit who often found expression in sharp and extremely comic satire. His play "The White Sickness," which was produced with the greatest success throughout Europe, is a magnificently drawn up, aggressive, and tragi-comic indictment and exposure of the fascist dictatorship. The "white sickness" is a mysterious, revolting, and deadly disease which appears as a pestilence wherever fascism comes to power. In the end it brings down the dictator himself at the moment when, the desire and goal of his existence having been achieved, the chaos of the world war finally closes in. "The White Sickness" shows the brilliant, humorous, polished side of the poet. It shows Capek, moreover, as a fighter of quality who was able to wage war on the highest level and from the watch tower of the spirit.

"We have lost it, our battle," he says to me now. "It is all over. Of course I cannot live here any longer—but that is the least of it. I would go gladly if I might do so for good reasons." I answer that there could never be good reasons for him, Capek, to leave the country. "There could only be these abominable, vile, evil reasons." The white sickness, I say to myself, that and only that could drive this man away. "We will emigrate," says Mme Scheinpflugowa. "We will learn to speak and live where freedom still exists." The look which her husband gives her has the shoreless sadness of which I have spoken. Where? that look seems to ask; where, in all the

world? We speak of America and again it is the wife who is hopeful. "America is great and free," she says, and I add that Capek will be appreciated there. Instead of answering, Capek says, "What will Benes do? He will not be able to remain either." It was two days before the President resigned, but certainly Capek, his friend, already had knowledge of it. I ask my own questions about Benes. "I know, I know," says Capek, putting me off wearily; "he could perhaps have done otherwise, ought perhaps to have done otherwise. But don't you see—his whole life, the collective conception of the Masaryk state, the Benes state, our state, stood and fell with the idea of the Western democracies. If England and France betrayed this idea they betrayed us and delivered us up. So we were lost not only in a military and practical sense but within ourselves, when everything on which we had built crashed."

"But you yourself," I say, attempting a sanguine tone, which miscarries, "surely you will come to us abroad and go on with your work. This horror will have one good consequence for us: the scattered forces of our fighters will receive great and wonderful support from the Czech reinforcements." Again he does not reply directly. "Seek recruits for us across the sea," he says, "I beg you; and when I am no longer here tell the Americans that Czechoslovakia should not be allowed to perish. We must have aid, economic aid at least, to keep alive."

"But we are going, aren't we?" asks his wife in an imploring voice. "You do not want to stay here?" Capek shakes his head, but it does not look like a decisive no; this head-shaking is in final despair. "Here I cannot stay—" he says. His voice does not fall, and the sentence has the effect of being unfinished.

Even when I bring the conversation around to his books, to "The Newts" or "Hardudal," he does not cheer up. "Imagine to yourself something on the order of 'Hardudal' if I had to write it in a foreign country," he says. And, indeed, this most poetic and most moving of his books is so truly "Blood and Soil" in the best, in the real, sense of the words that the Nazis must turn pale with envy. "But 'The Newts,'" I say, "is read in many languages. The story of these sly clever creatures which were first trained by man for all sorts of uses and which finally, turning into a mob without soul or morals but with dangerous technical skill, plunge the world into ruin—this story is so contemporary and exciting, so convincing, and in addition so comical and entertaining that it wins friends everywhere." "Perhaps," he says, again with the languid gesture of denial. At the sound of this "perhaps" his wife bursts into tears.

Karel Capek is dead. He could not remain in Czechoslovakia—he said so—but neither would he have been able to live outside. The loss to the world is great. The victims claimed by the "white sickness" have been increased by one more, a heavy and terrible sacrifice.

BOOKS

Notes by the Way

JOHN A. KOUWENHOVEN'S "Adventures of America, 1857-1900" (Harper, \$3.50) exercises the same appeal as the current play about Abraham Lincoln. It is a collection of prints from *Harper's Weekly*, with commentary, which recreate more vividly than written history the humor and tragedy of provincial America growing into an industrial nation. Like the family album it induces a pleasant nostalgia for a vanished era and a warm sense of the past. The wood engravings of Thomas Nast—which prove that the static quality so often found in woodcuts of today is not necessarily inherent in the medium—are the most striking pictures in the book. And they remind us, among other things, that although we have come to think of the present as a pictorial age, no contemporary cartoonist has matched Nast's achievement in breaking the hold of the Tweed gang in New York by his great series of cartoons directed to that end.

William Murrell, in his admirable "History of American Graphic Humor" (Macmillan, \$7), of which the second volume, covering the period from 1865 to 1938, has recently been published, ascribes the decline in the influence of the political cartoon to the collapse of the widely circulated weeklies in which they appeared and to the fact that every important newspaper in the country now prints at least one cartoon a day, which perforce dies with the day. The law of diminishing returns operates in this field as well as in others, but perhaps another reason for the decline of the cartoon as a decisive political weapon is to be found in the parallel decline of American politics from a struggle between two parties fresh from an actual civil war over real issues to a mere struggle for public office. Nast, the Republican, was himself caught in this decline, as Mr. Murrell's book demonstrates, and the most powerful cartoons of this century have sprung from an opposition far to the left of both the Republican and the Democratic Party. Inevitably their circulation, and therefore their influence, has been limited by the obstinate refusal of the inhabitants of the land of opportunity to accept as real or relevant the struggle between classes, as opposed to the fight between two political parties whose basic assumptions are after all identical. The old *Masses* was propelled into the main stream of American popular thinking by its opposition to the war, and its cartoonists and editors had the distinction of being directly attacked by the government.

Since then many of our best cartoonists have labored in the obscurity to which, so far, the American public has condemned radicalism. Less radical though very accomplished artists such as Edmund Duffy, Rollin Kirby, and D. R. Fitzpatrick fit better into Mr. Murrell's diagnosis: the influence of their work has been diluted by the very ubiquity of cartoons, including their own daily output. The question arises, however, whether a left liberal weekly like *The Nation* which speaks to that fairly wide section of opinion represented by the left wing of the New Deal is not neglecting an important

THE *Nation*

March 25, 1939

“In Spite of the Gestapo”

Underground in Nazi Germany

BY KLAUS AND ERIKA MANN

✱

You Can't Appease Business

BY KENNETH G. CRAWFORD

✱

Are the Balkans Doomed? *Albert Viton*

Supreme Court—Strike-Breaker *I. F. Stone*

Loving Hitler Less *Freda Kirchwey*

What Odds on Recovery? *Keith Hutchison*

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The Shape of Things

★

THE FRENCH CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES BY 321 votes to 264 and the Senate by 286 to 17 have in effect suspended the Constitution of the French Republic and suppressed democracy in France until the end of next November. A dictatorship has been set up which will almost certainly be of a quasi-fascist character and which may lead to the establishment of a fascist regime in France. The new law authorizes the French Cabinet "to take by decree until November 30, 1939, all appropriate measures to maintain and increase the strength of France." The power to legislate by decree is thus unlimited, for there is no authority in France except Parliament able to decide whether any given decree comes within the scope of the law, and Parliament will be silenced until after November 30. After that date the decrees must be ratified by the Chamber before the end of this year, but will the Chamber then be allowed to meet?

★

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCEPT THE PRETEXT that Daladier will use his dictatorial powers only for national defense. If that is true, why did he refuse to agree to any limitation? Why did he insist on being given power to dissolve the Communist Party or establish a press censorship unless he intended to use the power? The censorship will probably be applied in the first place to press telegrams, and there will be one more European country where foreign correspondents are prevented from telling the truth. The fact that Daladier has asked for and obtained dictatorial powers certainly does not mean that he will adopt a firm policy toward Germany and Italy. Such a policy would have the support of the very people against whom the powers will primarily be used. Daladier would not have had the support of all the friends of Hitler and Mussolini in the Chamber, as he did, had they believed that a real stand was to be made against the totalitarian aggressors. P. J. Philip, the Paris correspondent of the *New York Times*, who is exceptionally well informed about the intentions of the French reactionaries and pro-fascists, said in his dispatch Sunday: "Some quarters believe that French diplomatic action is more