Talking It Over:

History Happens to All

By Bertram D. Wolfe

MY publishers complain that they are not selling books. Since the Munich crisis, people have sat with ear glued to radio and eye to newspaper, too restless, too excited, too uneasy to break open more solid works. History moves rapidly, and with apparently fateful inexorability towards fearful climaxes. Men and women in isolation shake their heads bewildered at the daily budget of shocks in the morning's news; regard each other with scared faces, too frightened to formulate their thoughts; do not even dare ask themselves what can be done to stop the juggernaut which threatens to overwhelm the world.

Yet books are more important than ever now, to aid in interpreting the headlines, to help in reading between the lines of print, to give understanding of what can, what should, what must be done. Books—the right ones, of course—such works as are not only organizers of thought but organizers as well of the actions of great masses of men—and such journals of honest and thorogoing interpretation as this one, assume an importance that may well prove decisive in determining the fate of man. The idea, provided it takes possession of masses, becomes itself a mighty material force.

"HISTORY," it has become obvious, happens to us all. Wars are no longer the concern merely of dynasties and men-at-arms. Price levels, money rates, production figures, are no more the exclusive affair of money-changer, merchant and manufacturer. Modern wars and depressions are totalitarian: the rural cottage, the urban tenement, the unfortified town, are all included in their scope. A line dips on a production chart and a million men and their women and children are condemned to starve. A color area enlarges or contracts on the cartographer's map and a million more are uprooted from their homes, dumped across frontiers, driven up and back across the surface of the inhospitable earth. A finger points at a speck upon the map, and, on the morrow, a town's buildings are in ruins, its streets piled up with dead, and men and women and children wander bewildered and homeless not knowing where to turn.

Assuredly, history happens to us all. No one is exempt. Yet it happens differently to three different categories of men. There are those to whom it happens, and they do not even know what struck them nor why. Their fate is subhuman, like that of animals; their bewilderment, their anguish, their unconsolable misery are unrelieved by even a gleam of comprehension. Next, there are those who at least understand in some fashion what is happening to them. Small consolation; yet a jobless man who comprehends that it is not his own "shiftlessness" and "lack of ambition" but a vast socially-caused depression which determines his joblessness, is at least saved in his self-respect, helped by the knowledge that he is one of millions in a similar plight, and already on the road to sensing a remedy. Finally, there are those who attain to that higher level of comprehension which not only knows what is happening and why but understands as well what to do about it. These make up the highest level of our class and species: not mere victims nor mere comprehenders, but active and conscious makers of the history of their time. It is these men and women who make up the body of militant trade unionists and still more the membership of such organizations as the Independent Labor League.

ALONE and in isolation man is a poor feeble creature to face the overwhelming natural and social forces which beset him. He can only wring his hands in anguish, gaze at wife or friend in scared surmise, give vent to his fears in vain prayers or empty curses. But so soon as he unites with like-minded fellow-men, his whole potential changes—understanding deepens, will revives, hope elevates his head, courage straightens out his spine, determination causes his fist to clench; his strength is multiplied manifold, incalculably; he feels within his grasp the possibility of altering and determining his own fate. That is the real meaning of the existence, the real privilege of membership in the Independent Labor League whose paper you now hold in your hand. Twist and wriggle and evade as you will, history happens to you as it does to us all.

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was not altogether unconnected with preparation for the "possible war." Today, the "hidden plane of a possible war," no longer hidden, has emerged uppermost: it is the plane of the Fourth New Deal.

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(4) J. H. Clapham: An Economic History of Modern Britain (1938).

History Happens to All

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Surely—else you would not be a reader of this paper—surely you are not on that lowest subhuman level of those whom history "happens to" and they know not what has hit them. Likely you belong to that second group of those who rise to the level of comprehension of the forces that shape our age. Why not, reader, take the next step, the step that brings you into the ranks of the conscious, collective makers of the history of our time? We need you, for only by your entrance and those you in turn will bring with you do we gain in strength for our huge tasks. And you need us, for alone you must realize that you are as naught. Why not avail yourself of the invitation? It is extended in comradeship and the strong stress of mutual need. History happens to you anyhow. Why not help to make it happen right?

The Stalinist Mafia

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Stalinist G.P.U. showed its hand in the proceedings.

There is still a stranger aspect to the situation. Three months ago, largely for sentimental reasons, I requested the State Department to return to me my wife's letter with the envelope, and imagine my surprise when upon receiving it, it came minus the postage stamps and with the cancellation postmark completely obliterated chemically and then scraped with a fine, sharp instrument! The work of the G.P.U. was completed by the State Department.

What they have done to my wife and child in Russia, I can only too well imagine. What they are trying to do to me is obvious. What protection can any one have against Stalin's Mafia, even in this