Book Reviews

Russia, the Atom and the West. George F. Kennan. Harper, New York, 1958. 116 pp. $2.50.

This slender volume, like Machiavelli's *Prince,* has a significance out of all proportion to its size. It has been more widely debated, denounced, defended, or deplored than any comparable postwar book on foreign affairs. The extraordinary attention which the book has received is due, no doubt, in part to the reputation of its author. For George Kennan writes as one having authority. He is not only a distinguished historian and student of foreign policy but has been a leading practitioner of the science and art of international diplomacy. A long career in the foreign service, including assignments as American ambassador to the U.S.S.R. and counselor of the Department of State and director of its Policy Planning Staff, has given him a knowledge and perspective not commonly found among the movers and shakers of our contemporary world. Moreover, the essays deal with a subject matter—Russia, the atom, and the West—toward which no thoughtful citizen of the free world can be indifferent.

The five Reith lectures, delivered over BBC—plus a sixth essay, on Anglo-American relations—focus attention on some of the most explosive problems of contemporary world politics. Central to all of these is, of course, the Russian challenge. The spectacular achievement of the Soviet Union in science and technology, of which the sputnik is but a symbol, her growing military might, and her skill at diplomatic maneuver and political propaganda have aroused fear and misgiving of panic proportions in the free world. Our own response has been characterized by frantic self-depreciation of our own heroic achievements in nearly every field of endeavor; "crash" programs for the training of scientists and engineers; radical shifts in military procurement policies, from strategic bombers to guided missiles; and widespread talk about putting aside the normal goals of a healthy civilian economy for the Spartan objectives of a garrison state. In a word, we are being told that our salvation in education, national defense, economic policy, and diplomacy—lies in becoming as much like the Soviet Union as is possible within the limits of our indulgent, loose-jointed democratic culture.

Kennan takes sharp issue with this point of view, which, he says, has caused us to "believe that every Soviet gain is automatically our loss and to see our salvation as dependent on our ability to outpace Russia in every single phase of her economic progress." This belief on our part has enabled the Soviet Government to exploit her own achievements for political and propaganda purposes. "It has endeavored at every turn to present itself as participating in an all-out competition with the Western countries for industrial growth and then to interpret every element of its economic progress as a triumph for its own system of economy and a defeat for the Western World."

A more objective and realistic appraisal of Russian economic development would see it not as a product of some *mystique* inherent in communism or a totalitarian society but in terms of a "large and vigorous population, rich in talents of every sort . . . [and] a territory liberally endowed with resources which permit successful industrialization everywhere." Moreover, the rate of Russian economic growth must be interpreted in terms of the base from which that growth began. Given the human and natural resources of the Soviet Union "and the spirit of the modern age," rapid industrialization was inevitable. Nor, says Kennan, should we view this with alarm; "It will be a happy day for everyone when they too have solved their problems of production and can join us in grappling with some of the deeper more subtle, and more significant problems that lie at the end, rather than at the beginning, of the economic rainbow." If the United States is to meet the Soviet challenge, we had better apply ourselves "to our own American failings . . . to the racial problem, to the conditions in our big cities, to the problems of education. . . ." In final analysis, he says, "Whether we win against the Russians is primarily a question of whether we win against ourselves."

Most men of good will in America would agree with this analysis. But would the rulers of Soviet Russia? Our fear arises not from Russia's rapid industrialization or her spectacular achievement in science and technology but from the possible uses to which these may be put. It arises, in short, from the threat of Soviet military might coupled with an ideology that sees international politics almost solely in terms of a friend-enemy relationship. So long as Russia's leaders, obsessed with paranoid fears of "capitalist encroachment and aggression," see Russia's own welfare and security as dependent upon the triumph of world communism, even men of good will in the West will be unwilling to accept Kennan's apparent quietism.

When this form of political paranoia is accompanied by a vast military establishment, including a large stockpile of atomic weapons, and by a demonstrated willingness to employ not only propaganda and subversion but violence as instruments of policy, who can say our fears are groundless?

Kennan does not deny all this but rather demurs to it. Admitting Soviet obsessions and paranoia, admitting too the deliberate alienation or isolation of the Russian people from the international world of reality, he argues for a policy calculated to mitigate, if not to cure, these ills. Now that substantial atomic parity exists between Russia and the United States, Kennan believes that the fearful possibility and the catastrophic character of modern nuclear warfare can be a force for peace—if only through stalemate. Nuclear weapons have become such effective instruments of mass annihilation, and the certainty of instant retaliation has become so generally recognized, that neither of the great powers dares risk an all-out war, although the possibility of such a calamity must not be ruled out. Short of all-out war, however, the conflict between Russia and the West will go on, with economic and ideological weapons and here and there outbursts of violence to achieve local or limited objectives. Kennan does not, however, share Henry Kissinger's belief in the possibility—not to say desirability—of so-called limited wars being carried on by domesticated or "tactical" atomic weapons. "Can we really suppose," he asks, "that poor old Europe, so deeply and insidiously weakened by the ulterior effects of the two previous wars of this century, could stand another and even more horrible ordeal of this nature?"

The agony of this generation is not to be resolved by limited wars or by all-out war but rather by a progressive reduction of international tension to a point where constructive and realistic diplomacy can again play its proper role in the politics of nations. To this end Kennan proposes a policy of military disengagement in Europe and of friendly interest and watchful waiting in Africa and

Asia. "I would only say," he writes, "that it seems far more desirable on principle to get the Soviet forces out of Central and Eastern Europe than to cultivate a new Germany for the purpose of opposing them while they remain there." And if we are to get the Soviet forces out of Central and Eastern Europe, we shall have to withdraw our own forces from most of Europe. Once this mutual withdrawal has been agreed upon, a number of things become possible. Unification of Germany on the basis of free elections will become feasible—provided a united Germany is neutralized as between NATO and the U.S.S.R. Only when Soviet troops are withdrawn from the present Russian satellites such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia can there be any hope for the development of free democratic governments in those countries. But, as in the case of Germany, a condition of their freedom will be a policy of neutrality as between Russia and the West. Neutrality and demilitarization (save only for paramilitary police) would be a small price to pay for their independence and the progressive relaxation of international tension in Eastern Europe.

It is on some such terms that Kennan would attempt to mitigate, if not to cure, the political paranoia that afflicts the government and people of the Soviet Union, and to free Europe from the paralyzing fear of nuclear war.

There are calculated risks in this, as in any policy. What if the Russians—who are not above lying and breaking agreements when it suits their purpose—were to "move in" on Europe once our own forces had moved out? Would this not leave us with no other alternative than all-out nuclear war on the Soviet Union, and thus invite the very catastrophe we seek most to avoid? To these questions Kennan offers two answers. "We must get over this obsession," he says, "that the Russians are yearning to attack and occupy Western Europe." The Soviet threat, he argues, is primarily political, not military, and when the defense of Europe becomes a problem for Europeans without "the armed forces of the United States and Britain," the people of Europe will show more initiative, energy, and imagination to that end than they now exhibit. Their major problem would then be one of "internal health and discipline . . . to prevent the conquest and subjugation of their national life by unscrupulous and foreign-inspired minorities in their midst." But would not the withdrawal of American and British forces from Europe give aid and comfort to the already powerful Communist minorities in France and Italy, for example? To prevent this, Kennan urges the strengthening of Europe's own defense forces and, more especially, establishment of paramilitary or territorial militia, trained to put down internal uprising and subversion. "I can give personal assurance," writes Kennan, "that any country [that does this] . . . will have little need of foreign garrisons to assure its immunity from Soviet attack."

It is this note that Dean Acheson has labeled "messianism" in Kennan, and one is led to wonder whether, on balance, Europe can more safely rely on Kennan's "personal assurance" than on the armed forces of NATO, including the United States and Britain.

There is much more in this book that deserves comment. Kennan's views on foreign aid are a strange mixture of neo-isolationism, moral indignation, and faith in a kind of Machiavellian power politics. "I . . . reject the suggestion," he says, "that our generation in the West has some sort of cosmic guilt or obligation vis-à-vis the underdeveloped parts of the world. The fact that certain portions of the globe were developed sooner than others is one for which I, as an American of this day, cannot accept the faintest moral responsibility." If we are told that without our aid this country or that will go Communist, Kennan would say, "Very well, then go. American interest will suffer, but yours will suffer first." Besides, he says, a "sizable portion of mankind has more respect for power and success than it has for principle." Just what, in the light of all this, he means when he says, "If we are to help each other in this world, we must start with a clean slate," I am at a loss to know. As though in politics or anything else one *ever* starts "with a clean slate."

Whatever one may think of Kennan's specifics, his book represents a refreshingly high level of argument and analysis in the most difficult science in the world—the science of politics. Moreover, as James Reston of the *New York Times* has observed, Kennan can write. "Much of the political debate in this country," Reston says, "sounds like the droning of two old bagpipes." Not so in Kennan's case. Learning and wisdom are combined with a brilliant prose style, as for example, in his comment on the changing technological realities of present arms competition and their consequences. "Are we," he asks, "to flee like haunted creatures from one defensive device to another, each more costly and humiliating than the one before, cowering underground one day, breaking up our cities the next, attempting to surround ourselves with elaborate electronic shields on the third, concerned only to prolong the length of our lives while sacrificing all the values for which it might be worthwhile to live at all?"

If this is to be our future, he would say, "let us divest ourselves of this weapon altogether; let us stake our safety on God's grace and our own good consciences, and on that measure of common sense and humanity which even our adversaries possess; but then let us at least walk like men, with our heads up so long as we are permitted to walk at all."

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Human Protein Requirements and Their Fulfilment in Practice. Proceedings of a Conference in Princeton, [N.J.] United States (1955). Sponsored jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the World Health Organization; the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. J. C. Waterlow and Joan M. L. Stephen, Eds. Wright, Bristol, England. 193 pp. $2.

The rapid increase of world population has led to the fear that the human race may outrun its food supply. Although there exists no danger that energy food may become short in the immediate future, as far as protective foodstuffs are concerned, many areas of the world are suffering already from serious deficiencies which are particularly detrimental from the standpoint of the healthy development of children. While the more spectacular vitamin deficiencies have been given proper attention, it is only lately that the need for a well-balanced protein intake containing adequate amounts of all essential amino acids has been emphasized. Thanks to the endeavors of numerous scientists and such international organizations as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, we have gone a long way not only in recognizing the requirements for proteins of a certain amino acid composition in the various stages of human development but also in meeting these needs cheaply and economically in areas of malnutrition.

In this respect the Princeton conference of 1955, arranged by the abovementioned agencies with the assistance of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, was a great step forward, inasmuch as it not only arrived at quantitative determination of protein requirements but also removed the specter of protein starvation due to inadequate supply of animal products. In this respect results obtained in feeding mixtures of certain seed proteins, such as soybean, peanut, cottonseed, and sesame cake flour, are very promising, especially in children's diets. Since many of these products can be obtained as by-