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A Woman Journalist Studies Young Britain [II.]

RADICAL BUT NOT COMMUNIST

WE published last week the first of two articles for "Foreign Affairs," by Barbara Ward, foreign editor of "The Economist," in which she developed the argument that although Young Britain is radical, it is not Communist. Here is her second and concluding article.

WHEN they talk of control, quite a number of young people are thinking not only of State control but of popular control. How do we protect ourselves against the bureaucrats who are supposed to be serving us but may very well make the apparatus of the State their private property? This is a problem which worries the young intellectuals more than the average run of young men and women. It has been crystallised into a phrase coined, I believe, by Stephen Spender after a lot of experience with youth in the National Fire Service. The phrase is "We and They"—we, the people, and they, the government, the boss class, the ruling clique. It epitomises the drift in democracy towards passive citizenship and the dependence of great masses of people on small active groups in the parties, in business, in local government, in the co-operatives and in the trade unions who do the governing while the rest are content to play follow-my-leader.

If this account of young opinion in Britain seems somewhat confused, that is in part at any rate because it reflects the uncertainties that exist in young people's minds. The remarkable thing is not that the outlines are foggy, but that on the whole the substance is as clear and unanimous as it is. I think it is safe to say that 80 per cent of the young people between 20 and 30 want roughly the same programme, and that the main points in it have been mentioned. This unanimity ought to breed confidence and hope. So far, it has not done so. The existence of a uniform body of ideas is at once the most encouraging yet in many ways the least important aspect of young opinion in Britain to-day. "Between the idea and the reality falls the shadow." Young people do not know how they are going to see their idealism translated into practical action.

The Leaders Are "They"

The first obstacle is enormous ignorance of how the present system works. ABCA officials have been astonished over and over again to find men and women ignorant even of their most ordinary rights as citizens. There is no clear picture of the structure of government or of how the ordinary man can insert himself into it. There is equal ignorance about Factory Acts, town planning legislation, the health services, the civil service, what the Beveridge plan really means. It is hard for people with education and experience to realise what a brake on action the feeling is that you don't know the ropes, that you are likely to make a

fool of yourself, and that the whole business is so complicated that you had best keep out.

This bewilderment, of course, feeds the "we-they" feeling.

"They" are the know-alls, the people who manipulate the system, the men with educated accents, the trade union official who understands the regulations, the manager who quotes scientific formulae, the Labour Exchange official who knows Subsection 2 Paragraph B3 by heart. Men and women can go through life constantly if subconsciously frustrated by the sense of being run by other people in a world that is somehow unaccountable. This sense develops easily into active hostility to "sinister vested interests." It is particularly strong in the Army, where the completely undifferentiated military life makes the men hyper-conscious of discipline and the running of their lives by the "brass hats." When their officers are incompetent, or when reforms of which they read in *Picture Post* or the *Daily Mirror* take months to be put into effect, the sense of frustration and cynicism tends to swamp other more hopeful or co-operative reactions. Again and again in ABCA discussions, the men's attitude is "Oh, yes, we want such and such a reform, but 'they' will jolly well see we don't get it." "They" is not often analysed very carefully; but the dominant figure is undoubtedly the boss class in industry. "Vested Interests"—the insurance companies believed to be fighting the Beveridge Report, for example—are an almost universal bogey.

Party Leaders

The party leaders, apart from Mr. Churchill and Sir Stafford Cripps, do not stir much interest. It is widely assumed that Mr. Eden would become Prime Minister were anything to end Mr. Churchill's term of office. Sir Stafford's popularity is increasing steadily with young people. His connection as Minister of Aircraft Production with Joint Production Committees has earned him new recognition and wider contacts. Herbert Morrison's recent cycle of speeches made a strong impression on young people at the manager-civil servant level. But this relative interest in a few eminent figures is no substitute for interest in, or readiness to, work for a political party.

The parties are probably the most discredited sector of British politics. The predominance on the Conservative side of men who are qualified for their seats in Parliament by the fact that they can afford them and of retired Trade Unionists on the side of Labour

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