Civilization and the Individual


Scientific and technological development, which has shrunk the size of the world immensely and brought human beings into closer contact with one another, has also created a danger of total annihilation of the human race. Amidst an increasing number of books written on the critical state of industrial civilization Professor John Nef's A Search for Civilization is least pretentious in its approach and most straightforward in its assertion.

Professor Nef, an eminent economic historian and chairman of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, who has authored War and Human Progress, Cultural Foundations of Industrial Civilization, and many other works, presents in this latest publication his clear conviction that resources to meet the complicated problems which we encounter in our age are to be found only within ourselves. It is in keeping with this thesis that the book consists of four parts, titled respectively Wisdom, Faith, Beauty, and Virtue.

The author is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the future of mankind. He places the primary emphasis on the inner strength of man. The resources in man, which have led us to seek the truth, to realize the good, and to create the beautiful, are the very vital force to be recognized in our search for civilization.

The word "civilization" is used in this book as it was understood in the eighteenth century. In that sense civilization means "something in process of attainment" and also "a better society than any known in history." The ideal of this kind of society is described by the author as follows:

The society we seek should serve the material needs of individuals, while raising them spiritually, by means of the love that is of God and which involves a giving of the self, to love their neighbors.

He stresses the point that if we are to endeavor to attain "civilization," it cannot be solely by means of materialism, as unmitigated materialism only "debases" human beings.

Materialism, whether practiced in a democratic nation or in a communistic one, has failed in reality to achieve its presumed goal. Contrary to the general belief, our actual experience has shown that material improvement does not necessarily elevate human beings at all levels. It does not help people to be more virtuous and serve their fellows with love. Neither does it help them create beauty. Instead of a new dignity of man materialism has brought a respectability to "vulgarity, bad taste, and cheapness" in our society.

Professor Nef is, however, concerned with qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of industrial civilization. He understands that human needs are both spiritual and material.

As a society is actually composed of individuals, the improvement of individuals is a basic task to be undertaken, if we are to strive for that "civilization." Of course, scientific knowledge is useful, but "the wise and humane use of this knowledge depends on the existence of better individuals." It ought to be understood that knowledge itself is neutral. On the education of better individuals, he writes:

The making of better human beings is a personal not a mass matter; it is a matter of excellence not of uniformity; it grows out of individual responsibility and effort, not out of techniques of mass.
education and mechanized social improvement.

Freedom, in Professor Nef’s thought, consists in choosing the right slavery; slavery to oneself is one of the worst forms of slavery, while “love is the highest form of slavery.” The search for civilization by individuals who have chosen the “right slavery” may well provide a means to cope with critical problems of our age.

Reviewed by H. W. PAK

Grand Strategy for the Cold War


The New Frontier of War is a serious book. The authors have not tried to satisfy any craving for novelty, the intellectually licentious habit of wanting to know more about Communism, while remaining as confused as ever in our determination to combat it. They soberly remind us of what we forget. Their purpose is educational, and they have achieved it brilliantly. The book is highly readable, it is well documented, it is useful, and it has a soul.

The title of this excellent book, as it sometimes happens, might be a disservice to its substance. It is not the authors’ intent to pretend that war has moved to a “new” frontier. There is nothing new in Soviet objectives or methods, nothing new in our inability to meet the Communist challenge on the political front. The authors are aware of the paradox of the “new” frontier. They know only too well that our defeats are political defeats caused by an excessive preoccupation with the “political” aspects of the cold war, the so-called battle of the minds, the realization that cold war problems are “inter-related,” all of them reasons that are invoked to rationalize inaction and to justify self-inflicted paralysis.

This means that there are great dangers in separating the Soviet threat insofar as it is a military threat from its psychopolitical aspects. A dichotomy which is compounded by the separation increasingly made and increasingly dangerous between atomic power and conventional warfare is here pointed out. Generally speaking, Communist political operations seem always on the verge of success, and they constantly overreach themselves. In relation to their scope and duration, they have not been a great success. If we want to avoid strategic decisions that could be gravely erroneous, the true distinction to make concerns the areas that are directly under the territorial weight of the Communist empire and the areas that the Soviet Union cannot keep, for geopolitical reasons, under the iron fist of its forces. There is a finality in every advance made by Communism on the geographic periphery of its empire, but not otherwise. Now the more we are impressed by the Soviets’ costly and adventurish undertakings outside of their normal sphere of action, the more we are inclined to drop our guard and to neglect effective containment of Communist imperialism on its old frontier and by means of military pressure.

What this country needs at present is a strategy of active deterrence. Mr. Johnson’s vigorous argument in No Substitute for Victory supports the opposite thesis. He drafts a blueprint for victory. The Kremlin should be informed that we intend to win. As a proof that we mean what we say, we should henceforth cease all intercourse with the