

## *A Diplomat's Conscience*

**A Study in Diplomacy: The Story of Arthur Bliss Lane**, by Vladimir Petrov, *Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1971. 302 pp. \$12.00.*

A MORE FITTING TITLE for this book might have been "A Study of a Strong Personality in the Tortuous Paths of Diplomacy." Arthur Bliss Lane was indeed a strong personality, as is amply borne out in this chronicle and appraisal. As Chief of Mission, he became involved in three major developments in the diplomatic history of the United States. The interrelationship between the personality of the protagonist on the one hand, and the ponderous—and not always intelligent—procedures of international diplomacy on the other hand, constitutes a fascinating appraisal of both.

The historical part of the book (extremely well researched) is largely confined to events which occurred during Mr. Lane's assignments as Minister to Nicaragua (1933-1936); Minister to Yugoslavia (1937-1941); and Ambassador to Poland (1945-1947). In all three posts crises arose which were perplexing and troublesome to

the United States Government, and in all three cases Mr. Lane found himself at odds with his own government. Furthermore, in two of these cases (Nicaragua and Poland) he had to preside over what he considered to be failures—even though the results were due to circumstances far beyond his control. In the third case, Yugoslavia, even though his efforts were “successful,” Mr. Lane was subsequently besieged by doubt as to the wisdom of the course he and his government had followed.

It is beyond the scope of this review to give a detailed account of the political, diplomatic and military developments which took place in those three countries at the times indicated. However, a few guideposts may be helpful.

The American intervention in Nicaragua terminated when the last contingent of United States Marines left Corinto on January 1, 1933. The bipartisan, nonpolitical *Guardia Nacional* had been organized to preserve order and guarantee free elections, but the guerrilla leader Augusto Sandino was still at large in the hills and continuing his banditry with some success. In Washington the Good Neighbor Policy was being launched, nonintervention was accepted as sound policy, and, as usual, there was emotional support for democratic regimes in Latin America as contrasted with “military dictatorships.” This was the situation when Arthur Lane arrived in Managua in the fall of 1933. He soon perceived that the *Guardia Nacional*, under Anastasio Somoza, was becoming a political force as well as the only organized official military force. In February, 1934, Sandino came to Managua to confer with President Sacasa regarding a possible accommodation. This created bitter resentment within the *Guardia Nacional*, and on February 21 Sandino was apprehended after leaving the Presidential Mansion and summarily shot. Lane then became even more apprehensive that the elected government of President Sacasa would be replaced by a military regime under the control of Anastasio Somoza, chief of the *Guardia Nacional*. Lane repeatedly

urged the State Department to issue a public declaration expressing “support for a legitimate government and stating American opposition to any would-be revolutionary regime which might come into power through an overthrow of such a government.” The State Department, however, adhering to a policy of nonintervention, declined to issue any such statement. This prompted a series of heated interchanges between Lane and the Department, but led to no change in the situation.

Lane departed from Managua in March, 1936; Somoza was elected President in December of the same year. Lane may have considered this to mark the failure of what he had conceived to be his mission, but Dr. Petrov sums up the matter thus:

No American envoy, no matter how wise or skillful, could have prevented Anastasio Somoza from seizing power in Nicaragua in 1936 unless, of course, the United States government had been willing to intervene with military force.

In the case of Yugoslavia (1937-1941) Lane was confronted with a quite different set of circumstances. Following the outbreak of the war in 1939 Prince Paul, the regent of Yugoslavia, was subjected to strong pressures from Nazi Germany on the one side and from Great Britain on the other. In Washington Sumner Welles informed the Yugoslav minister that any arrangement between Yugoslavia and Germany going beyond a mere nonaggression pact “would place Yugoslavia outside the pale of sympathies of the United States government.” However, the Yugoslav government was well aware that if Hitler were not given some accommodation, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country would be seriously endangered. Accordingly, on March 25, 1941 Yugoslavia adhered to the Tripartite Pact. Two days later opposition elements overthrew the government in a *coup d'état*, with British encouragement. Hitler reacted immediately and violently to this challenge, and on April 6 the Nazis invaded Yugoslavia in force and Belgrade

was bombed. Although the British had played the most important role in this development, Lane had encouraged the anti-Axis elements and might well have considered that his mission had been successful. Nevertheless, the brutal crushing of the country, and the inability of the United States to render any practical aid, preyed on his conscience. As Dr. Petrov points out,

. . . it was inevitable that rather than being pleased with the successful completion of his mission, Arthur Bliss Lane was now besieged by doubts caused by the enormity of the tragedy about to befall Yugoslavia.

The greatest heartbreak of all was yet to come. In his assignment as Ambassador to Poland from 1945 to 1947, Lane was caught squarely between the ruthless and Machiavellian tactics of Stalin and the reluctance of President Roosevelt to take a firm stand in resisting Communist expansion. The agreements made earlier at Teheran and Yalta may have seemed reasonable when interpreted by Americans, but in fact they sounded the death knell for a free and independent Poland. At a relatively early date Lane foresaw that Stalin's objective was the complete subjugation of Poland. In a memorandum dated April 5, 1945 to the Secretary of State, Lane pointed out in detail the perfidious nature of the policies and actions of the Soviet authorities in regard to Poland, and stated flatly: "Appeasement or apparent appeasement can be as dangerous to United States interests in 1945 as it actually was in 1940 and 1941." The serious nature of the developing situation was evidently not fully comprehended in the highest circles in Washington. In fact, in April, 1946, the United States Government approved the extension of a substantial credit to the Polish Government, which by then was controlled by Moscow. Lane protested most strenuously, not because of any lack of sympathy for Poland, but because the political implications of such a loan could only serve to strengthen and consolidate the Soviet en-

slavement of the country. Once more Lane had lost a bitterly contested struggle with his own government.

The end was now in sight. Elections were held in Poland on January 19, 1947. They were thoroughly controlled by the Communist machinery, and made a mockery of the commitment to "free and unfettered elections" as agreed by Stalin and Roosevelt. With Moscow in full control of all Poland, Lane—well known as a supporter of a free and sovereign Poland—could no longer serve usefully as United States Ambassador there. He returned to Washington in March, and on March 25, 1947, President Truman accepted his resignation "with great reluctance."

From the foregoing historical summaries, necessarily brief, certain conclusions may be drawn. Arthur Bliss Lane was a true democrat, in the sense that he believed governments should rest on the consent of the governed. He attempted to prevent the establishment of a dictatorship in Nicaragua. He detested the arrogance and ruthless aggression of the Nazis. He later came to oppose with equal vigor the expansion of Communist totalitarianism with its attendant cruelties. Time after time he was at odds with his own government, simply because he was deeply conscientious and had the courage of his convictions. The views he expressed and the recommendations he made were not always, and not necessarily, those most suited to the interests of the United States in the broad world picture. They were presented, however, honestly and frankly. At all times his acts were inspired by a deep sense of loyalty and patriotism. It is inconceivable that Arthur Bliss Lane, even in the midst of a heated argument with the Department of State, would even think of turning over "top secret" documents to a newspaper. Only after he ceased to be a career officer and ambassador, and then with the acquiescence of President Truman, did he unburden his soul regarding what he considered the mishandling of the Polish problem. In his book *I Saw Poland Betrayed* Lane sets

forth the record of this unfortunate episode of history.

It is true that history is in large measure the result of economic determinism. It is likewise true that the clash of ideologies has had a profound influence on the course of history. But the reader of Dr. Petrov's study—and I hope there will be many—cannot fail to be impressed by the impact of the human factor even in the broadest and most complicated world problems. The character and personality of human beings are a major factor in crucial decisions made by governments. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin; Hull and Welles; Truman and Acheson—all influenced history not merely as instruments of economic policies or ideological ideals, but because of their character and personality. In his own fields of action the personality of Arthur Bliss Lane—his zeal, energy, honesty and patriotism—undoubtedly had an effect on the handling by his government of the problems with which he was confronted. This effect—quite distinct from any results achieved—was a healthy one.

Reviewed by PAUL C. DANIELS

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### *The Void and the Vision*

#### **Between Nothingness and Paradise,**

by Gerhart Niemeyer, *Baton Rouge:*

*Louisiana State University Press, 1971.*

vii + 226 pp. \$8.95.

THE EXISTENTIAL SOCIETY stands between the concept of nothingness in the revolutionary total critique, and the dreams of perfection in some new order of the human world. Those who are neither concerned with destructive rejection, nor with some form of perfectionism, have accepted the actual society in which we live, though they may have standards of reform or im-

provement which are impractical. What Professor Niemeyer is dealing with, thus, is not a pragmatic or empirical nothingness. His examination of the total critique is grounded in a philosophical tradition, which in its criticism of modern Gnosticism finds its exemplars in Jewish prophets, Socrates, and St. Augustine. These men provide a "philo-ontic total critique that is neither nihilistic in thought nor destructive in practice." In a longer study one would naturally expect a more detailed examination of the pragmatics of the contemporary state. However, there was apparently neither the space nor the inclination in the author's mind at this time for such an enterprise.

The author begins his study of the revolutionary total critique of society in the French enlightenment. The writers he studies are Meslier, Morelly, and Abbé de Mably. This leads into an examination of one of the first of the great revolutionaries, Gracchus Babeuf (executed in 1797) and his followers. After this, the writers who rejected the momentary society in the name of the laws of history provide another approach to the golden future, that is Turgot, Condorcet, Fourier, the Hegelian chiliasts, and Marxism in general. Says Niemeyer:

Marx's critique has demonstrated a pervasive power, to be sure; other modern total critiques as, for instance, the national myth, Freudian psychoanalysis, existentialism, have found it impossible long to continue their negation without entering into some kind of an alliance or merger with Marxism. There is, therefore, some justification in treating Marx's critique as the core of the total critique of society in modern times, so that the investigation of its structure could well serve purposes of insight into other types of total critique.

A study of "Totalitarian Activism" follows the analysis of Marx. Here we have mainly a study of Lenin in his relations with his contemporaries in Russia and Germany. When one reaches this chapter in the