

PROCRUSTES: THE FATHER OF MODERN STATESMEN

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GREEK mythological and theological lore presents us with the strange figure of Procrustes, a legendary being characterized as half gangster, half prince (the evil analogy between the two "professions" is as well known to us contemporaries of Hitler and Stalin as it was to the ancient Greeks), who derived immense pleasure in "equalising" his unhappy prisoners. In accordance with the primitive means of those bygone days, this Greek "statesman" used an ordinary bedstead on which, with the help of his slaves, he was able to fit his prisoners; thus those of them that were too small had their arms and legs stretched with thongs until their bodies were extended so as to adapt them to its length; those, on the other hand, who were too big had their feet and heads cut off in order to make them fit right. (From which we can readily see that under a "dictatorship of equalisation" the little people are better off at least than the big ones!) His invention, which was known as the "Procrustean bed", passed not merely into history, but also into popular parlance.

His disciples are, of course, most numerous in the Communist camp, which to a certain extent represents the most direct and uninhibited version of the Procrustean bed in modern form. It is in fact unfortunate that Communism still worships before the altar of the theorist Marx, as if he were really its foremost protagonist, rather than the practitioner Procrustes, whose maxims are, after all, put into effect in such thoroughgoing fashion by Communism.

But at any rate, the influence of Procrustes the "statesman," extends far, far beyond this notorious sixth of the earth's surface, with its adjoining satellites. The general philosophy and practice of all modern states reverts to Procrustes. It is the philosophy and practice of equalitarianism, of artificial stretching the little people, and of forcibly reducing the big ones! The modern Procrustean bed, so far as economics is concerned is known as "national economy"; politically it goes under the slogan of "equal rights for all"—without recognising the fact that side by side with equal rights there must be corresponding duties on the part of everyone; culturally, it bears

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the trademark "era of the common man." The role of Procrustes is played by the modern State, while those of the servants, or those who attend the job of heaving and hauling, and whacking off over-dimensional legs and heads, is played by the bureaucrats—who are quite as soulless automats as the erstwhile slave tormentors who carried out the supreme will of their Greek lord and master.

In order to prove that we do not indulge in mere rhetoric, here are a few factual examples that will illustrate what has been said in the foregoing.

In a recently published book by H. W. Seman, we find the following quotation from the well-known representative of the Labour Party, Dr. Edith Summerskill: "A woman giving birth to a child produces one of the most important little cogs in the machinery of State." There is perhaps no other single sentence that more adequately expresses the spirit of the Procrustean statesman than this comment by the British Marxist. An infant characterised as the most important particle of machinery for the iron moloch known as the State, while the happy mother, depicted as the "producer" of this tiny cog, is joyful of the signal honour bestowed on her in permitting her to twist such an important little screw into the gargantuan State machine—what an idea!

The world in which this modern Procrustean rack is being erected is graphically described as follows in the *Sunday Times*: "The walls of our prison chamber are drawing closer and closer together: the remaining space for freedom of action is shrinking daily. From week to week the ceiling of opportunity is sagging lower. The inmates are compelled to contribute more and more to the support of a rapidly increasing army of wardens. From month to month food and drink are diminishing in quantity and quality. There no longer is any attraction to independent endeavour. Socialism, as understood by us, is like a race without prizes, monotony without hope, war without victory and statistics without number or end."

One might be inclined to disregard such anguished voices emanating from the Procrustean bedchamber and see in them nothing more than a minority clamour which need not be taken too seriously. (After all, Procrustes and his slaves did not take these pitiful shouts seriously either, but continued undisturbedly their gruesome task).

But even those learned professors who examine the Procrustean bed with all the disinterested objectivity they can

muster arrive ultimately at negative conclusions. Thus the University of Chicago publishes a book *The Politics of Equality*, which devotes itself to a thoroughgoing investigation of the past Socialist phase in New Zealand and, precisely because of its dispassionate analysis, arrives at some frightening conclusions. We are told in the opening chapter, "The Policy of Equalitarianism", that the book has to do with an inquiry into the theory and practice of Procrustean statesmanship—the additional point being made, moreover, that New Zealand was actually an ideal field for this modern teaching, it being a country whose size, climate and natural resources approximate that of Italy, except that by comparison it has only 1½ million people to feed.

Despite this initial advantage in its favour, the results of the policy of equalitarianism were absolutely appalling, particularly from a cultural point of view. "Equalitarianism has led to a frightening degree of incompetency"—this is the summary conclusion of Professor Lipson's scientific inquiry into the Marxian-Procrustean theory and practice. Hence the world must forego any hopes that a Donatello or a Michelangelo, a Raphael or a Leonardo da Vinci will come out of a Marxist society.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that economic equalitarianism is the only means employed by the modern Procrustean bed. On the contrary, economic equalitarianism is very effectively augmented not only by the intellectual and spiritual levelling process as it exists under Fascism and Bolshevism, but also as it has come into popular usage in the democracies. It is a well known fact, of course, that next to the police department in the dictator countries, the "bureau of enlightenment and propaganda" is the most important instrument of the Procrustean statesmen. It may come as an unpleasant shock for honest democrats, however, that this intellectual and spiritual levelling process is also proceeding with giant strides in the democracies.

For example, they will be amazed by the article "State Thought Control", published in an issue of *Human Events*, by Representative Forrest A. Harness, chairman of the Congressional Investigation Committee on Publicity and Propaganda.

The aforementioned article reveals, albeit somewhat sensationally, the great danger to freedom of thought inherent in an elaborate system of State propaganda, and, moreover, points out what a colossal machine this "intellectual Procrustean bed"

constitutes today in America. Whereas in peacetime there was absolutely no State propaganda in the U. S. A., expenditures for this purpose have mounted steadily, not merely during the war years, but especially in the post-war years, from \$28,000,000 in 1941 to almost \$75,000,000 in 1946. Since 1946, they have soared well beyond that, particularly for propagandising universal military conscription.

Congressman Harness warns the American people that if Government bureaux succeed in moulding public opinion to fit their devious plans, then we shall have arrived at a point where we are harnessed to a system of State thought control that is exactly the same in practice as that of the dictatorships.

How terribly inefficient was poor old Procrustes of ancient Greece, who had to content himself with "equalising" only the bodies of his unfortunate victims, whereas his modern counterparts are able to level off and cripple even the spirit and soul of their victims!

When, one wonders, will some Theseus appear, who as in mythological times, shall slay Procrustes and free mankind from the scourge?