A DOZEN young peasants and workers from the Telengana district of Hyderabad State live in the Central prison in the city of Hyderabad. They have been in one prison or another since they were about 18; they are now about 25; they are subject to life imprisonment.

We are old friends. I first learnt of them when I admired the work they did in freeing their Telengana country from landlords and money-lenders—work destroyed with difficulty by an invading force of the Indian Army. Then, when they were sentenced to death by 'special tribunals' on framed-up charges, I was able to show my admiration in practical form by appearing for them before the Supreme Court of India. I succeeded only in getting them reprieved; but that was a basis for friendship. I wasn't able to visit India again until December, 1954; but I then visited them in their prison.

Even if we had not been friends, they are worth crossing the world to see. They welcomed me with the traditional greeting of India, a garland of flowers, and gave me a book with all their signatures in it. So simple to sign, you think? But most of them were wholly illiterate when they were arrested, and they have all taught themselves in prison, to read and write in their own language of Telugu, whilst several of them have learnt English too. Nor have they studied only languages in prison; they study Marxism and Leninism profoundly, and work steadily and enthusiastically to prepare themselves to lead their people in freedom in the near future! (Nor is their optimism unjustified.) And meanwhile they are demanding facilities to sit for their University examinations.

Our long talk together was a very interesting and stimulating experience for me. These eager, keen, healthy, and spirited young men cross-examined me from prepared notes on every political problem of every continent. They wanted details of every political case I had conducted since last we met—of all of which they knew something. They displayed a pretty full knowledge of the political events and problems of the time. It was more a study circle than a jail visit. When they had exhausted their prepared questions, they asked me to tell them something they did not know! It was not easy to find a topic on which they were not already informed; on the contest then raging in the French Chamber over German re-armament, for instance, they knew as much as I did.
I asked if they needed anything. ‘Thank you’, they said, ‘our friends give us pretty well all we need; but we would be grateful for a subscription to the *Labour Monthly*’.

What a future such young men promise to the world. And what is the good of the past trying to imprison the future?

**THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTY**  
REGINALD BRIDGEMAN

**REVOLT** of subject peoples against foreign domination is an outstanding feature of human society today. In the struggle for national freedom blood is flowing in Asia and in Africa. Unrest grows in Central America, the West Indies, and throughout the Middle East. It is met by fierce imperialist repression. Britain is no longer the supreme imperial power. By means of the vast export of capital the U.S.A. has taken the lead, and the American Government utilises its position in the ex-enemy countries to force them within its economic control. The British people witnesses the steady curtailment of Britain’s own political and economic independence, with the armed forces of the U.S.A. encamped in many parts of Old England. At such a moment the publication of an anti-imperialist novel, epic in character, by an author of the international status of James Aldridge, is so significant an event, that *Labour Monthly*, which does not ordinarily include novels among its reviews, has decided to make an exception.*

The author’s homeland is Australia. As a war correspondent in the Soviet Union he gained experience of the new Socialist civilisation. His earlier novel, *The Diplomat*, with its pictures of war-time diplomacy in Moscow, and of the Kurdish tribes in Persia, was enthusiastically received. There is poetry in the writing of James Aldridge as well as profound political understanding. In this study of a people subjected by imperialism, and especially of the question of leading subject peoples in revolt Mr. Aldridge has been influenced by Lord Byron, and very deeply by Colonel T. E. Lawrence of Arabia. In *The Prisoner of Chillon* Byron proclaims that the spirit of liberty burns brightest in dungeons. During the British occupation Indians spoke of their country as one vast prison. Today in Kenya and Malaya large numbers of the people are confined in concentration camps.

*Heroes of the Empty View, by James Aldridge. The Bodley Head. 400 pp. 12s. 6d.*