

INTRODUCTION

Along about 1935, in response to the so-called “challenge” of communism, America was blanketed by a literature of crypto-collectivism. There were neo-technocrats and “planners” by the score; the Keynesians and “middle way” journalists were out like night crawlers after a vesper shower. If numbers and the sort of thing that passes for intellectual journalism in this country were ever definitive, the cultural climate of our nation would have been altered beyond recall in those years. But one of the grand lessons of history is that you can not break the continuity of a culture or a tradition unless you are prepared to liquidate *all* those who have known the *douceur de la vie* of the old regime.

Lenin said it long ago: to make collectivism stick in a land that has known the blessings of individualism, you must catch a whole generation in the cradle and forcibly deprive it of tutors who have learned the bourgeois alphabet at their mothers' knees. In a land of republican law this is impossible; no matter how clever or omnipresent the collectivist propaganda may be, a few culture-carriers of the old tradition will escape. They may be reduced to publishing broadsheets instead of books; they may be compelled to conduct their straggling classes in dingy rooms in old brownstone fronts. Certainly they will have a hard time getting posts on a university faculty. But they will be still hanging around—and still talking—when the tinsel begins to wear off the latest Five-Year Plan or government-sponsored Greenbelt colonization scheme. Their books and pamphlets, ready for the

chance encounter that sparks all revolutions or "reactions," will fan the revival of the old tradition that periodically displaces the callow presumptions of the "new."

A recent preoccupation with my own intellectual autobiography has led me to reflect on the culture-carriers who brought me back to what I had originally soaked up unconsciously in the individualistic New England of my childhood. One of these carriers was Albert Jay Nock, whose "Our Enemy the State" hit me between the eyes when I read it in the thirties. Another potent carrier was Franz Oppenheimer, whose concept of the State-as-racket (see his epochal book on "The State") was too formidably grounded in history to permit of any easy denial. Still another carrier was Garet Garrett, the only economist I know who can make a single image or metaphor do the work of a whole page of statistics. Then there was Henry George, the Single Taxer, and the Thoreau whose doctrine of civil disobedience implied a fealty to a higher—or a Natural—law, and Isabel Paterson, the doughty and perennially embattled woman who wrote "The God of the Machine." Finally, there was a man who sometimes spoke in parables and who always had a special brand of quiet humor, Mr. Frank Chodorov, whose lifetime of broadsheet writing and pamphleteering has been brilliantly raided by Devin A. Garrity of the Devin-Adair Co. to make this book.

Frank Chodorov is 65 years old, which means that he has been around. But he has the intellectual resilience that one would associate with the age brackets of the twenties and the thirties if the young of 1952 did not seem so frightened, so recessive, so pinched and so antique. The formal biography of Mr. Chodorov says that he once lectured at the Henry George School of Social Science; that he revived and edited *The Freeman* with Albert Jay Nock from 1938 to 1941 (*The Freeman* is one of those magazines that is always coming up

out of its own ashes, like the phoenix); that after one of the intermittent deaths of *The Freeman* he published, wrote and edited his own four-page monthly broadsheet called *analysis*; that he is currently engaged in editing *Human Events* with Frank Hanighen in Washington, D. C.

A craftsman from the ground up, Frank Chodorov has always made his own words pirouette with the grace and fluidity of a Pavlova. Beyond this he is one of the few editors alive who can make individual stylists of others merely by suggesting a shift in emphasis here, an excision there, a bit of structural alteration in the middle. To talk over the luncheon table with Frank Chodorov about the problems of writing and editing is a liberal journalistic education. But this is only the least important part of the education that one can absorb from him when he is expanding in his own ruefully humorous way.

Listening to Mr. Chodorov, you won't get any meaningless gabble about "right" and "left," or "progressive" and "reactionary," or liberalism as a philosophy of the "middle of the road." Mr. Chodorov deals in far more fundamental distinctions. There is, for example, the Chodorovian distinction between social power and political power. Social power develops from the creation of wealth by individuals working alone or in voluntary concert. Political power, on the other hand, grows by the forcible appropriation of the individual's social power. Mr. Chodorov sees history as an eternal struggle between social-power and political-power philosophies. When social power is in the ascendant, men are inclined to be inventive, creative, resourceful, curious, tolerant, loving and good-humored. The standard of well-being rises in such times—*vide* the histories of republican Rome, of the Hanseatic cities, of the Italian renaissance, of nineteenth century Britain and of modern America. But when political power is waxing, men begin to burn books, to suppress thought, and

to imprison and kill their dissident brothers. Taxation, which is the important barometer of the political power, robs the individual of the fruits of his energy, and the standard of life declines as men secretly rebel against extending themselves in labor that brings them diminishing returns.

According to the Chodorov rationale, *all* the great political movements of modern times are slave philosophies. For, no matter whether they speak in the name of communism, socialism, fascism, New Dealism or the Welfare (sometimes called the Positive) State, the modern political philosophers are all alike in advocating the forcible seizure of bigger and bigger proportions of the individual's energy. It matters not a whit whether the coercion is done by club or the tax agent—the coercion of labor is there; and such coercion is a definition of slavery. Nor does it matter that the energy-product of one individual is spent by the government on another: such spending makes beneficiaries into wards, and wards are slaves, too.

Mr. Chodorov is a mystic, but only in the sense that all men of insight are mystics. His mystical assumption is that men are born as individuals possessing inalienable rights. This philosophy of Natural Rights under the Natural Law of the Universe can not be "proved." But neither can the opposite philosophy—that Society has rights—be proved, either. You can say it is demonstrable that a State, as the police agent of Society, has power. But if there is no such thing as natural individual rights, with a correlative superstructure of justice organized to maintain those rights, then the individual has no valid subjective reason for obeying State power. True, the State can arrest the individual and compel his temporary obedience. But it can not compel his inner loyalty; nor can it keep men from cheating, or from the quiet withdrawal of energy. The rebellious individual can always find ways of flouting State power—which makes it dubious

that Society (or the collectivity of men organized to compel individual men; has rights in any meaningful sense of the word. A collectivity can not have anything which its constitutive elements refuse to give up.

Since the human animal must make either one mystical assumption or another about rights, Mr. Chodorov chooses the assumption that accords with the desire of his nature, which is to protect itself against the lawlessness of arbitrary power. He is mystical in the same way that James Madison and Thomas Jefferson and the rest of the Founding Fathers were mystical; and he is religious enough to believe in Nature's God, which is to say that he believes in Natural Law.

The utilitarian argument is that Natural Law does not apply in the field of ethics, since it is not demonstrable that a thief will always be caught and punished, or a murderer apprehended, or a polygamist forced to relinquish his extra wives. But if there is no Natural Law of Ethics, then any system of ethics is as valid as the next—and the choice of fascism or cannibalism is no "worse" than the choice of freedom as defined by John Locke. Mr. Chodorov's answer to the utilitarians is that men are diminished and blighted under certain ethical systems, whereas they flourish under other systems. And it is demonstrably the nature of man to prefer life to death, or to the slow agony of death-in-life that goes with slave systems.

Mr. Chodorov never labors his principles in either his writing or his speaking. Nor does he indulge in debater's tricks. He prefers a good parable to formal argument, and he is at his best when he is raiding the Old Testament to make a modern point. His essay on "Joseph, Secretary of Agriculture," which is a simple recapitulation, with Chodorovian "asides," of the Old Testament story of Joseph and the Ever Normal Granary, tells us all we want to know about Henry Wallace and the Brannan Plan. This essay is first-rate enter-

tainment. But it is also good instruction; like all good teachers, Chodorov knows that instruction is always improved when it comes in the form of entertainment. What he offers in his essays as entertainment is, of course, worth ten of the ordinary political science courses that one gets in our modern schools. It is a measure of our educational delinquency that nobody has ever seen fit to endow Mr. Chodorov with a university chair. But his successors will have chairs once Mr. Chodorov has completed his mission in life, which is to swing the newest generations into line against the idiocies of a collectivist epoch that is now coming to an end in foolish disaster and blood.

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