

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A Fifty-Year Project

ALONG CAME 1950, and the Sunday supplement writers had something new to engage their talents. The achievements of the human race, especially the American branch of it, during the first half of the nineteenth century made good copy. Every accomplishment of note, in science, art, industry and sports, received proper notice. Except one. And that one achievement of the last fifty years is far more important from the long term point of view than anything the newspapers have paid attention to. It was the transmutation of the American character from individualist to collectivist.

The replacement of the horse-and-buggy by the automobile is startling enough; but is it as startling as the contrast between Cleveland and Truman? This is not to compare the two presidents, but to point out the remarkable change of the people they presided over. Cleveland's remark that the government could not take care of the people who took care of it was made because Americans thought that way; today, the handout principle of government is accepted by all good Americans, from pauper to millionaire. At the beginning of the century the tradition of individualism that had held up since the Revolution was still going strong; by 1950, that

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tradition had been washed out by the caustic of socialism.

Anybody can make a machine, but the unmaking of a national character is the work of genius. The accomplishment is too great to be ignored. A study of how it was done is in order, and it ought to be undertaken at once, before the American individualist becomes the subject of speculative archaeology. There are still some living remnants of the species, and the traces of how our forebears thought and behaved have not been entirely obliterated. A thorough analysis of the character transformation may well serve the twenty-first century in its disillusionment, and it might well help them find their way back to a sense of freedom; provided, of course, such a work should escape the bonfire of past values that always lights up the road to socialism.

At least one chapter of the book should deal with how the collectivistic seed was implanted in the soft and fertile student mind forty-odd years ago. That's how it all began. Collectivism is, after all, an idea, and the usual way of acquiring an idea is by learning. The followers of Marx are fond of saying that socialism is the inevitable product of the forces of history; but this manure of inevitability is the fertilizer they use to aid the idea of socialism in taking root after it has been planted. If the thing is to come anyhow, why have they been so assiduous in spreading the idea? Why did they bother to organize students' socialist clubs if socialism was "in the nature of things?"

Just how socialism first invaded the campus is not recorded. Perhaps a student or two became infected at some street corner and brought the germ in. The glorious promise of socialism gave it easy access to the idealistic adolescent mind, insufficiently fortified by reason or experience. At

eighteen, one is ready to take up for every underdog, real or imaginary, and the opportunity to remake the world is most inviting. Very few students paid much attention to the importation when it first appeared; one had enough to do to get over the hurdles of the rigid curriculum. Besides, one had to prepare oneself for the arduous task of meeting the problems of life as an individual. That was the reason for getting an education—to take care of yourself, not society. While that tradition prevailed socialism made little headway on the campus.

The idealistic pretensions of socialism did capture a few hearts. While its vibrant and challenging slogans fed the nascent revolutionary flame of youth, their intellectual vanity was flattered by the "scientific" claims of socialism; they knew all about surplus-value, which the others did not pretend to understand, and that made them an élite. The "science" was aided, and abetted by such fighting words as "workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains" and the knight errantry of the fuzzy chin was aroused to the full. Truth to tell, those who espoused socialism were among the most volatile, imaginative and articulate students; the fact that they were ignored by their classmates simply added to their ardor, for it fed that sense of superiority that makes for martyrdom. They made some headway with a few, particularly those who could not break into the fraternities or could not make the varsity team.

In those early days the socialistic students were unorganized. They were held together by the bond of the unwanted, and their principal occupation was mutual conversion. When they got hold of a possible proselyte, they put him to disadvantage by ready speeches gotten out of their

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extracurricula reading, mostly pamphlets, and the prospect was overpowered, not convinced. They attracted some attention by their self-assurance and by their audacity, which was their purpose in the first place. But, on the whole, they cut little figure on the campus.

Shortly after the conclusion of World War I the organized socialistic student group began to appear on the campus and the apparatus of proselytizing was set up. Unauthorized posters, advertising "noted" speakers adorned the bulletin boards, and often the promise of enlightenment was augmented by the offer of refreshments. Conversion through the media of dances and punch was found to be even more effective than through literature and argument. The membership of these clubs grew.

Between the two world wars the socialists got going on their "inevitable" idea in good earnest; they pushed it along with all the organizational ingenuity they possessed, and they possessed plenty. Lenin had taught them that one need not wait on the slow process of evolution, that history could be hurried. The teaching of "scientific" socialism was suspended and the necessity of "dynamism" was emphasized. Action for the sake of action was what counted. Marx was spoken of and revered, but far more important than an understanding of what he taught was the doctrine of solidarity and the policy of movement.

The organizers paid special attention to the mass-mind on the campus, the mind that would eventually make the rules for other people to live by. Their efforts were aided by the general disillusionment that followed the war with the Central Powers. Taking advantage of this frame of mind among the students, the socialists set themselves up as the

prophets of pacifism. Many a student became a socialist—that is, joined a socialist club—simply because he was opposed to war; which was all right with the doctrinaire leadership, whose goal was numbers, not understanding.

To make trouble for trouble's sake is a fundamental of socialist strategy, and the students' clubs followed that principle at any and all occasions. Their *esprit de corps* was thus improved. Nothing favored their purpose more than involvement in a strike. It gave them opportunity to harangue crowds, pass out leaflets, do picket duty, charge police, get themselves arrested and martyred. It was a lark to be sure, but a lark glamorized by a "noble" purpose. Active participation in some labor trouble was a dementing influence far more effective than intellectual agreement.

By the time the New Deal came around these socialist clubs were well organized. They had become intercollegiate in scope. At national conventions the boys and girls settled all the problems of mankind, national and international, present and future. They debated and resolved, resolved and debated, and went back to their respective campuses thoroughly exalted. They attracted much attention, and among those attracted were the sons of the detested capitalist class, boys who were thrilled by the prospect of expiating the sins of their fathers on the altar of the "public good," meanwhile flattering their egos by the attendant publicity. Money to carry on the socialistic crusade was thus made easier to come by.

The effects of two decades of organization and propaganda soon became evident. Thousands of graduates of these socialistic clubs had gone out into the world. It was natural that they should enter fields in which ideas and

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opinions are the main stock in trade, and where training in organizational methods came in handy: the teaching profession, labor unions, social work, law and politics, and, most important, the publishing business. Working themselves into important positions, they eased the way for a supporting cast recruited from the socialist clubs. Jobs for the faithful became plentiful; for non-believers the opportunities became more difficult. Since the third decade of the century, therefore, a pedagogue of known individualistic tendencies has found employment difficult, and an anti-statist writer has found little market for his wares. If a book of that type does get into print, it is given short shrift by the reviewers (graduates of the socialist clubs), and its chances for wider readership are thus choked off; on the other hand any piece of socialistic bilge is boosted into a masterpiece. The clan takes care of its own.

The New Deal was the product of this extra-curricular work in the colleges. When the "emergency" hit Mr. Roosevelt, he had nobody to turn to for advice but the graduates of the socialist clubs. The business men were in the main devoid of any knowledge of fundamental economics, and were too bewildered by the turn of events to be of much use in the situation. The loud-mouthed theoreticians were more sanguine; besides, the books they had had published qualified them as "experts." It would be interesting to know how many of the professors who came to the aid of Mr. Roosevelt had been associated with the socialist clubs in their college days.

The apparatus of the New Deal was most favorable for the "inevitable" idea, for it provided the sustenance necessary for effective propaganda work. No longer were the

socialist workers dependent for their living on voluntary contributions; the taxpayer now fed them well, and they worked better on full stomachs. Thus it has come about that a bright young man cannot afford to entertain individualistic ideas, assuming that he has hit upon them, because such ideas carry a decided economic disadvantage. The best jobs go to those most loyal to the new Americanism.

The character of a nation reflects the way it thinks. American thought in 1950 is collectivistic because the seed of that kind of thinking was planted in the most receptive minds during the early years of the century. What we have now is the fruition of careful and assiduous husbandry.

The climate of the times favored the socialists. They could point up the manifest injustices and incongruities that had developed under the prevailing system of private property, which made no distinction between property gained through productive effort and property acquired by political privilege. The growth of monopolies, the ruthlessness of their practices, presented an easy indictment of private property as a whole. It was a damaging indictment and the heart of youth was so touched by it that calm examination and analysis was precluded. The fact that monopoly is the product of politics, and that socialism was the ultimate of politics, did not occur to them, and the monopolists were in no position to bring up the matter. Socialism, of course, proposes to substitute public for private monopoly, claiming that with the "profit motive" eliminated the evils inherent in monopoly would disappear. The inference is that under socialistic management monopoly would be an instrument for public good only; which is a variation of the "chosen

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people" doctrine, and that catered to the conceit of the neophyte socialists.

Then the obvious incongruity of the "boom and bust" economy helped the socialistic idea along, particularly as it came up with a plausible explanation and a cure; the going capitalism could offer neither. Again, the recurrence of war under capitalism was a condemnation that youth could understand, and since socialism insisted it had a preventative it was accepted sight unseen. Youth loves, never analyzes, a panacea.

Abysmal ignorance of their own philosophy, plus a smug complacency, put the practicing capitalists at a disadvantage in meeting the challenge of youth. They had been in the driver's seat too long to consider dislodgement a possibility. Somewhere hovering over their beclouded heads, but not bothering them at all, were the ideas of Locke, Adam Smith, Jefferson and the other libertarians of the preceding two centuries; these were like heirlooms gathering dust in the closet and never taken out for examination or appreciation. The only economic ideas the capitalists had a working acquaintance with were those conducive to piling up profits, like protective tariffs and other special privileges. As for the doctrine of natural rights, which is the foundation of capitalistic thought, it meant nothing to them except the right to exploit their fellow-man. Preoccupation with the business of making money, by any and all means, dulled whatever intellectual capacity they might have had. The best they could offer to inquiring youth was their own affluence as a demonstration of the excellence of the *status quo*, which youth could see was far from excellent.



Under the circumstances, the idea of socialism took root and flourished. The question now, at the half-century mark, is whether it is destined to crowd out the remaining vestiges of individualism in the American culture. It would seem so. But, socialism is only an idea, not an historical necessity, and ideas are acquired by the human mind through education. We are not born with ideas, we learn them. If socialism came to America because it was implanted in the minds of past generations, there is no reason for assuming that future generations will come by that idea without similar indoctrination; or that the contrary idea cannot be taught them. What the socialists have done can be undone, if there is a will for it. But, the undoing will not be accomplished by trying to destroy established institutions. It can be accomplished only by attacking minds, and not the minds of those already hardened by socialistic fixations. Individualism can be revived by implanting the ideas in the minds of the coming generations.

So then, if those who put a value on the dignity of the individual are up to the task, they have the most challenging opportunity in education before them. It will not be an easy or quick job. It will require the kind of industry, intelligence and patience that comes with devotion to an ideal. And the only reward they can hope for is that by the end of the century the socialization of the American character will have been undone. It is, in short, a fifty-year project.

Perhaps the job should be begun by going after the pre-adolescent mind, even in the kindergarten grade. The socialists, it may be recalled, did not neglect to turn nursery rhymes to their use, and since the advent of the comic strip,

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the communists (or advanced socialists) have employed this medium of indoctrination. But, that is a specialized effort that could be well deferred until the college mind, the mind that will soon enter the active arena, is taken care of. The assault must begin on the campus.

Assault is the proper word, and the proper attitude, for the proposed job. The possibility of winning over the faculty might well be dismissed, simply because the faculty is largely beyond redemption; it is both the cause and the effect of the condition that is to be corrected. The professor is by and large a product of the socialistic clubs and socialistic education of the 1920's and 30's, and thus is committed to perpetuate that line. Here and there an atavism will be found, and it will be welcomed; but the safe thing to do is to write off the faculty. That tactic, moreover, will find favor with the students, particularly those endowed with the gift of intellectual curiosity; to be able to controvert the dicta of the professor is always a sophomoric delight. To win the student over to the idea of individualism it is necessary to equip him with doubts regarding the collectivistic doctrines insinuated in the lecture rooms, or the text books. If the suggested undertaking should apply itself to a refutation of the "adopted" texts, especially in the fields of economics and government, a veritable revolution could be started on the campus; socialism is replete with dictates unsupported by empiric data, and therefore lends itself to easy refutation.

The apparatus for initiating the project suggests itself. It would consist of a lecture bureau manned by a secretariat and a corps of competent lecturers. The business of the bureau would be to arrange for lectures on the campus.

The lecturers—who might also be organizers, though this is not necessary, since the students interested in the subject would organize themselves—would have to be acquainted with socialistic theory, so as to point out its fallacies. Whatever the subject matter of the lecture, the doctrine of the primacy of the individual must be emphasized; thus the student will be presented with a point of view not met with in his text book and will be able to challenge the text and its professorial protagonist.

However, it is unnecessary in throwing out the idea to detail an entire program. Once started, the project would develop momentum of its own; the students will see to that themselves. It might be suggested that the lectures be followed, or preceded, by the organization of Individualistic Clubs, and that intercollegiate affiliation be instituted. Prizes for essays on individualism would do much to stimulate thought, and a publication offering an outlet for articles would be necessary. Out of such activities would come an *esprit de corps*, based on the understanding and enthusiasm for a "new" idea. The individualist would become the campus radical, just as the socialist was forty years ago, and the halo of intellectualism would descend on his brow.

Is the effort worth while? To which one could offer as answer another question: What in life is more worth while than the pursuit of an ideal?