

## Honoring a Prophet

(Being a review of *Fugitive Essays: Selected Writings of Frank Chodorov*, compiled, edited, and with biographical introduction by Charles H. Hamilton. Indianapolis: LibertyPress. 1980. 249 pp. \$9.00/\$4.00.)

By FELIX MORLEY

(Editors' Note: A few months before his death in 1982, Felix Morley wrote to FRAGMENTS: "I hope you will keep up your very refreshing little publication. Perhaps you may be interested in a review of Frank Chodorov's essays which I recently wrote for *Reason* magazine. That seems to be easily the best of the group which has sprouted on the West Coast." Since Frank Chodorov was one of the founding editors of FRAGMENTS, and Chuck Hamilton is a good friend, we were pleased—and honored—by Felix Morley's suggestion, and obtained permission to reprint his review. It is here reprinted, with permission, from the July, 1981, issue of *Reason*. Copyright © 1981 by the Reason Foundation, 1018 Garden Street, Santa Barbara, California 93101.)

In the original sense of *fugitive*, it is an unseemly adjective for the title of this important political study. There was certainly nothing of the runaway either in Frank Chodorov or in anything he ever wrote. Only in the derived meaning of "scattered" or "occasional" is *fugitive* applicable.

Frank Chodorov (1887-1966) was of that type of journalist who will never subordinate talent to ordinary reporting. Like Henry L. Mencken in this respect, he took from the stream of circumstance only what interested him, commenting thereon without fear or favor. Mencken had the force to dominate a big metropolitan newspaper and thus assured his caustic line on politics relative immortality. Chodorov was the better historian and philosopher but published for the most part in offbeat media with little circulation. This LibertyPress reprint should help to redress the post-mortem balance in his favor.

The book is divided into 11 parts, each concerned with varying samples of Chodorov's writings on themes as disparate as communism, education, isolationism, militarism, natural rights, political mentality, and taxation. One section comprises essays on Jefferson, George Mason, and Thoreau, as instances of a now vanishing American individualism. An earlier sketch is concerned with Robespierre, with whom "The desire to do good turned into the desire for power to do good, and so he did no good at all." The whole is bound together with a biographical introduction by Charles H. Hamilton. As this is deficient for a period about which I have inside knowledge, I venture to supplement it here. Dates are important.

My diary records that I first met Chodorov on September 1, 1949, as I was leaving for Europe to do some broadcasting and, incidentally, to promote *Human Events*, of which I was then president and, in effect, editor. I had closely studied Chodorov's well-named personal broadsheet, *analysis*, and concluded that it would be advantageous to both if the two small publications were merged. That which Frank Hanighen, Henry Regnery, and I had incorporated was deficient in the background where Chodorov excelled. As he was to write, in the final essay included in the present volume, "Only a historical expert can trace the New Deal of modern America to the New Deal of ancient Rome, or recognize Sparta in Moscow." At our initial meeting, in New York, Chodorov met my overtures halfway, and it was agreed that he would join *Human Events*, in Washington, as soon as we could cover his modest living expenses.

Unfortunately a policy rift between Hanighen and myself had developed sharply during my seven weeks in England, Germany, and France, when he necessarily exercised full editorial control. We had been as one in emphasizing the dangers in Roosevelt's alliance with Soviet Russia, since the Kremlin never made any secret of its desire to see "free enterprise" undermined in the United States. But when Russia had won, establishing Communist satellites throughout Central Europe, we would have to accept a highly unwelcome outcome largely of our own making. "The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on . . ." Just because we had blundered did not mean that we could now revise history to our own taste. The mission of *Human Events* should have been to discover some reasonable *modus vivendi* between the United States and the USSR. That outlook, I had ascertained, was also strongly held in Western Europe.

Hanighen, on the other hand, believed that it would be both justifiable and profitable to swing *Human Events* into a clearly anti-Soviet orbit, even though this meant more "entangling alliances," militarization, and centralization of government, which we had heretofore opposed. Argument against steering a collision course with Russia was met with the "soft on Communism" rebuttal. In retrospect I see this as the first

premonitory break in what had been a united and fundamentally isolationist Conservative front. This "New Right" seemed to me, and very much to Chodorov, to lean in the direction of National Socialism and away from the restoration of the balanced Federal Republic to which we both aspired. Goering's "guns versus butter" issue was up again.

Anyway, the policy of *Human Events* had to be clarified. So, on February 14, 1950, I called a meeting of its stockholders to decide whether or not the editorial direction should be unified. In effect, as he was well aware, this was a request to Henry Regnery to decide whether Hanighen or myself should henceforth play second fiddle. Regnery voted against unification, telling me later that he did not think I would in any case continue to run the publication indefinitely—a not improbable assumption considering the heavy strain of having to support my family by separate remunerative work. I therefore resigned as president and surrendered my stock while agreeing to continue editorial supervision until June 1 to give Hanighen time to reorganize. The whole affair was handled with a minimum of ill feeling for nobody wanted to see an end to the project on which we had all worked so hard.

Our clientele had respected the closely reasoned and objective argument which had distinguished *Human Events*. So it was natural for Hanighen to invite Chodorov to fill the vacancy caused by my departure. As I knew nothing of this in advance, I could not warn either that an impasse would result.

It came with Chodorov's remarkably prescient article, "Warfare Versus Welfare," printed in the *Human Events* of January 10, 1951, and reproduced in the LibertyPress symposium. This essay starts with the assertion that "the welfare state is headed for the mothballs." It concludes that "in the immediate future the direction of the American state will be toward the acquisition of power for war purposes, not eleemosynary purposes. The tendency will be more and more toward totalitarianism. That is unavoidable." This stark forecast was highly unwelcome to the New Right and quickly led to Chodorov's suppression as an independent writer. But it has in no way diminished his standing as a prophet.