

The Three Basic Rights ✓

In a letter to a Communist friend, printed here by permission, JOHN S. CODMAN, Boston business executive, holder of degrees from Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, tennis enthusiast, erstwhile professional vocalist, and long a crusader for freedom, enumerates some basic human rights, examines them in the light of their possible attainment under a capitalistic, as compared with a communistic, economy, and poses some pointed and pertinent questions concerning present-day Russia which we would all like to have answered.

Mr. Codman is the author of Unemployment and Our Revenue Problem, originally published as a series of articles in the old FREEMAN; How to Secure the German Indemnity, Ground Rent—The Natural Municipal Income, and numerous articles. His writings on how the first World War could have been financed are as timely today as when they appeared twenty-six years ago in Forward (Boston) and the Boston Traveler.

* I am at home again now and I want to thank you for remembering me, when I was in the hospital, with a copy of Earl Browder's book, *Victory and After*. I have read it from cover to cover, and I have great admiration for the writer's strength of purpose in pro-

ducing such a well-written and constructive book under very difficult circumstances.

Browder says little about communism in his book but nevertheless he says enough for me to realize that I cannot agree with his economic views and, what may appear strange to you, for much the same reason that I cannot agree with the economic views of most of those whom you might call my capitalist friends. What I mean is that they, and you communists also, seem to me to have lost confidence in individual liberty. Both of you appear to me to believe that liberty has been tried and somehow found wanting, and therefore the only hope is to give much power to a central government whose duty it will be to take care of the individual citizens on the theory that they cannot take care of themselves. My own opinion, as I will explain later, is that true liberty has never been tried even in this country and that, instead of less liberty, what we need is more.

According to Browder (page 84) you American communists hold as your "most distinctive programmatic demand—the advocacy of socialism for our country," but at the same time, on page 82, Browder makes this very wise statement: "Such a profound revolution as the change from a capitalistic economy and social system to that of socialism in the United States is impossible even to debate on a national scale, without endangering the effort for victory, until this war has been won."

Nevertheless, in advocating socialism as the ultimate goal, you American communists are moving away from true liberty to make government the master rather than the servant of the people. In this re-

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spect you are aligned with all the other socialists, even though you may disagree widely over details. In fact from my point of view you are in the same general class as the Nazis, the Fascists and the Falangists although you certainly do not contemplate any such harsh socialist state as they desire, but rather more, I suppose, a benevolent socialism of the Edward Bellamy type, difficult to secure and still more difficult to keep. The "New Deal" is also obviously socialistic and this was true long before the war became an excuse for it. Even the old stand-pat Republicans are socialistic in action despite the fact they would maintain that socialism was anathema to them. They have always advocated government interference with foreign trade and still support our meddling system of taxation so destructive to industry.

Now you may well ask me how it is that all these groups mentioned above are turning to some kind of socialism and away from liberty. Can they all be wrong? Yes, in my opinion they are, and the reason is the failure to understand the faults in our present social order. Browder's point of view will do as well as any other to illustrate this lack of understanding.

On page 173 of his book, Browder says "according to our understanding of imperialism, its abolition requires the abolition of capitalism itself." I grant that this may be true, but it all depends on what is meant by the unilluminating term "capitalism." The term itself gives no hint of what is really the matter with our social order. Browder expresses rather vaguely his idea of capitalism on page 172 as follows: "Such problems are inherent in the economic, social and political order which dominates Great Britain and the United States. That order is what is generally known as capitalism in that stage of development in which monopoly capital holds the dominating position."

Now I would probably go as far as Browder in denouncing our present social order which in my opinion is unjust and stupid, buttressed as it is by economic ignorance, but I am not prepared to discard it with all its features—good, bad and indifferent, and to adopt in its stead some form of socialism which, however benevolent it may be, is nevertheless a move toward tyranny rather than toward liberty. I prefer to ask myself what is the matter with our social order and how can it be corrected? And is it not possible, as I have suggested already, that the remedy lies in more liberty, not in less?

It is often said that we must preserve in this country equal economic opportunity for all individuals and our system of free enterprise. However, we cannot preserve what we have never had. At no time in this country's history has there been either equal opportunity or free enterprise. In other words our political freedom has never enabled us to secure economic freedom and the consequences of our failure are every day becoming more serious. In what way have we gone wrong? Without going into detail, I would say that the trouble has been our failure to recognize the true right to property.

In Mr. Lewis Browne's book, "Something Went Wrong," page 244, he states that Lenin believed that the root of all social ill was private property. However that may be, I do not know whether such is now the view of the American Communists. For my own part I believe that private property is vital to our welfare, but it is essential to my view that this right should be based on a sound principle.

There are really three basic rights which are essential to true liberty, namely, the right of the individual to employ himself in production, the right to hold as private property that which he produces, and the right to trade freely with all other persons domestic or foreign. If we fail to base our social order on these three rights, then the Declaration of Independence which proclaims to all men the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, becomes a dead letter. That we have failed in every one of these particulars is my belief. I therefore maintain that we have never had true liberty and, such being the case, that we have no excuse for supposing that liberty has failed and that our people must in consequence be abandoned to the protective custody of a paternalistic, socialistic state. The following is a brief summary of how in my opinion we have failed.

1. The right of the individual to employ himself in production.

This right is violated by our system of land tenure which permits private property in land without adequate compensation to the community for the privilege. By this means the socially created rental value of land, which should be collected by the community to defray the expenses of government, is appropriated by private parties, and thus the government is forced to raise revenue by taxation which in turn is a violation of the second essential right, the right of the producer to his product.

2. The right of the individual to hold as private property that which he produces.

This right is nominally protected by the fifth amendment to the Constitution of the United States which reads: "nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." It is, however, constantly violated by our federal, state and municipal methods of raising revenue by means of a grotesque system of miscellaneous taxes, taking private property without any relation to just compensation in the shape of government service. These taxes tend to destroy the incentive to produce and are a terrible burden on the industry of the country. They are necessary only because of the failure of our governments to collect from the title holders of land the full value of their privilege, namely the socially-created rental value of land.

3. The right of the individual to trade freely with all other persons.

This right is obviously violated by the tariff taxes on foreign imports whether for so-called protection or for revenue purposes, and in the domestic field by sales taxes and other taxes levied on business transactions. And even the free trade between our states, of which

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how about free speech, etc.

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poor organization.

we have rightly been so proud, is now being greatly interfered with by numerous restrictions by one state against another in many varied forms.

I wish now to express my entire agreement with Mr. Browder's statement on page 254 of his book, as follows: "It is the extreme of unreason to assume that only the unlimited demand of war can bring forth the maximum production of our economy, while peace must necessarily be accompanied by idleness and stagnation. This perspective is entirely unacceptable to the common sense of the people. If we can produce battleships, tanks, planes, and all the matériel of war in such quantities, in war time, there is no valid reason why we cannot produce an equal amount of values in the peacetime needs of the population when the war is over."

It is liberty, however, not government planning which can best overcome the absurd, but serious, situation to which Browder calls attention.

In closing I want to ask for some information which perhaps you may have about the Russian government. Obviously the world in general has been entirely mistaken as to the durability of the Soviet Government and more especially has completely underrated the power of its military forces. The Soviet Republic has

surprised the world. How has it succeeded? You may answer that it is due to communism, but I would like more specific information, not so much about the political system in Russia, but rather about the economic. I would greatly appreciate it if I could get the answers to the following questions:

What system of land tenure has been adopted? Is private title to land permitted and, if so, is adequate payment made for the privilege? If not, does the government secure its revenue by leasing locations on the land, or does it resort to taxation? Specifically does it levy taxes on imports from foreign countries?

Since one good turn deserves another and you have done me a good turn, I am reciprocating by sending you a copy of "Protection or Free Trade" by Henry George. I would particularly recommend that you read the last ten chapters of the book, that is chapters 21 to 30 inclusive.

Professor John Dewey of Columbia University has made this statement about Henry George. "No man, no graduate of a higher educational institution, has a right to regard himself as an educated man in social thought unless he has some first hand acquaintance with the theoretical contribution of this great American thinker."