

What Has Become of Communism?

BY FRANK CHODOROV

THOMAS JEFFERSON said, "When once a man has cast a longing eye on offices, a rottenness begins in his conduct."

The soundness of this observation is brought home in the present character of the communist movement. Whatever one thinks of the ideology, one must recognize the essential honesty of purpose displayed by its devotees in years past—previous to the incrustation in office of the Stalinites. In Czarist days, and during the uncertain years of the revolution, up to the time that successful office-holding warranted the exile of Trotsky, the communist was always a sincere zealot. Today the movement has lost its idealism in a riot of careerism. There are dupes who still make sacrifice for "the cause." But their leaders are just plain job-hunters, using a hunting technique that is a peculiar combination of Tammany politics and soap-box demagoguery. With the "party line" as the lash, and the promise of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as the lure, they drive their mobs into a perfect political machine more effectively than any boss.

This is very evident in America; in every country where communists have secured a hold zealous idealism has been replaced by sordid expediency. The recent "platform" of the American Communist party, with its lip-service to democracy, the United States Constitution, and other erstwhile "bourgeois banalities," is, while it fools nobody, the straw that shows which way the communist wind is blowing.

The American system of indirectly dispensing doles to the unemployed through a hierarchy of petty officials has given the communists here a main chance. By sliding into a key position in the WPA it is a simple matter for a communist office-holder to dispense jobs among the faithful. This infiltration grows fan-like. The net result is an increasingly large number of "comrades" germinating in an area of dissatisfied dole-receivers. The party war-chest grows alike.

In other ways the depression has fed the maws of this careerist movement. Planned economy is so akin to communist thought that it was not surprising when our government decided upon this perilous course the sailors hired for the cruise must come from those who could read its charts. From labor unions famous for Marxist tendencies, from college halls where the Marxist jargon has been refined to almost a meaningful thing, came the men to handle the rudder of regimentation. Surely, one could not expect from the business man trained in a competitive field advice on how to plan a non-competitive

(or more regulated) order. It is a fact that radicals in office become quite respectable—which means that once ensconced in the jobs the continuance of that personally pleasurable condition becomes more desirable than any general economic change. Therefore, revolution is something to be talked about, not to be done. Not now, anyhow. Of course, these counsellors of state need many secretaries and field workers. More jobs for "comrades," more sinews of war for the party.

Considerations of technique required the organization of groups like the Organized Unemployed, American Labor Party, American Workers' Alliance, and various college peace and youth movements, with labels not so odious to the American mind as "communism." The dissatisfaction of the American people with both the brutality of conservatism and the futility of planned economy, (and the continuing poverty), makes them easy prey for these millenium-promising movements with innocuous names. So they have been "joining up" in large numbers. Large organizations not only provide jobs in themselves, but they are in strategic position to demand jobs from vote-seeking politicians. The communists have learned the art of political horse-trading.

And so from a revolutionary movement communism has become purely a careerist movement. To be sure, there is the soul-satisfying explanation that all this is in preparation for the ultimate fight—world revolution. But fighters are not trained on cream puffs. The revolutionist in a soft job loses his zeal for revolution, and soon learns that the only thing worth fighting for is the job.

What we now have to fear from the communists is not a sudden upset of our social and political order, but an increasingly burdensome bill for the support of these careerist jobbers. Eventually, of course, this drain on our production will depress the returns to labor and capital, further increase our national debt, further reduce our recuperative powers. There will be revolution, but not the communist kind. It will probably be a gradual economic attrition, an adjustment that will make it possible for production to continue, and for producers, by some Hitlerian compromise with economic fate, to continue to live, however unhappily. It may even be necessary to erase the national debt or most of it, by fiat—and start all over building a new national debt and another Sisyphean crisis.

THE land question . . . means hunger, thirst, nakedness, notice to quit, labor spent in vain, the toil of years seized upon, the breaking up of homes, the miseries, sicknesses, deaths of parents, children, wives; the despair and wildness which spring up in the hearts of the poor, when legal force, like a sharp harrow, goes over the most sensitive and vital right of mankind. All this is contained in the land question.

CARDINAL MANNING in a letter to Earl Grey.