

Still Much to Be Learned

* Dr. Walter B. Pitkin, who achieved fame by writing "Life Begins at Forty," is retiring from his teaching post at Columbia University at the age of sixty-five. After thirty years of "saving young writers from starvation," at the Graduate School of Journalism by telling them what Americans are interested in, he is going to travel around the country studying consumer problems and figuring out what the post-war situation will be. If he is only half as successful in helping the long-suffering consumer as he was in helping a generation of aspiring writers, his pilgrimage will not have been in vain.

The American reading public will be glad that Dr. Pitkin is not going to retire into oblivion. It will hope for a continuation of the books and articles—engaging, chatty, inspirational, often wise, sometimes profound and, on occasion, a little foggy—that flowed in amazing profusion from his facile pen. He has enlightened, entertained, encouraged and amused. May he shine with equal brilliance in the field of economics which he is now entering.

That the versatile gentleman is still not entirely clear on matters economic was indicated by his statement in a recent newspaper interview, to the effect that the Chinese would develop some form of communism as a means of alleviating their misery. In almost perpetual hunger, they would inevitably seek an equitable distribution of the wealth of the country, he declared. But he predicted that the Russians would turn to capitalism. He pointed to the vast spread in wages from the worker up to the manager, which, he said, was much greater than in this country. "People like to hang on to what they have," he declared, "and communism, which arose from the misery of the people, is going to go out as soon as they get richer."

There you have it. Communism will alleviate your misery; it will provide an equal distribution of wealth; it will make you rich. And then you will abandon it because you like to hold on to what you have! Since when has communism alleviated misery? Since when has it made for an

equal distribution of anything but poverty? Since when has it made people rich? Since when have people abandoned what is making them rich?

Communism, like fascism and nazism, is merely one form of dictatorship—government ownership and control carried to the extreme. Have the great masses of people in the dictator countries of the world known anything but hunger under their dictatorships? Have any but the handful of exploiters in control grown rich?

Riches come from production. How do the dictator countries compare with our own in the matter of production efficiency? It took government-controlled Germany nine years to build enough plants and equipment to fight a war; it took government-controlled Japan twenty-five years; and even Russia, gallant ally though she be, required twenty years. American industry under free enterprise has done it in two years—built and tooled plants to turn out *one thousand times* the war materials we could make before the war.

Let the learned professor disabuse his mind of the quaint notion that communism is anything other than one of the less agreeable forms of slavery, and the even more groundless belief that it ever made a people rich. Let him learn where wealth comes from, how it is produced, why it is not produced in vastly greater quantities, and what hinders its equitable distribution. Let him realize that there are just two incentives for the production of wealth—hope of reward or fear of the lash. Hope of reward is the spark-plug of free enterprise, the principle of thrift, the desire of man to be a man, self-supporting and self-respecting, and not the galley-slave or pensioner of the State. It is the incentive which, operating in the American system of free enterprise, has in a few generations added more to the world's wealth than did all the previous feudalisms put together.

The consumer problem is merely how to get it. Just that and nothing more. Life may begin at forty; there is still much to be learned at sixty-five.

—C. O. STEELE