
How to Curb the Commies

The trial of the communists in a New York court may have some educational value. The “sensational” evidence will be informative to those completely ignorant of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. That such ignorance should obtain, however, is not the fault of the communists, for they have made it a point these past hundred years to inform the world of their revolutionary intentions. They never made any bones about it. Their profuse literature is, as a whole, a call to arms; not only is the proletariat urged to get into the proper revolutionary frame of mind, but broad outlines as to strategy and even tactical details are offered in their manuals. The communistic cabal has never been secretive. Hence, one having the slightest acquaintance with their literature cannot get excited about the court “revelations”; the best the newspaper accounts offer in the way of interest is the counterespionage of the FBI, which brings the story up to the true-detective level.

From what has thus far transpired it seems that the communists look upon the trial as another opportunity to advertise their wares. They never miss a point. Should the accused be

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judged guilty (which they fervently hope), an attempt will be made to turn the higher courts into publicity agencies, and if in the end the eleven should be sent to jail they will serve the cause of communism by their martyrdom. The dupes, the proletariat now contributing liberally toward the cost of the defense, will be properly fired by such a turn of events. Hence, the juridical affair, whatever its outcome, must be put down to the profit side of their grand campaign.

As the defendants assert, the evidence being adduced indicates that their ideas are on trial, that they are being prosecuted for harboring thoughts deemed inimical to the public welfare. Even if it is proven that they have conspired to overthrow the government by force, the fact remains that conspiracy itself is only an idea. People of like mind agree to do this or that, but until they act, separately or in concert, the agreement remains an idea. If the communists are convicted of conspiring to bring about revolution, the judgment is long overdue, for ever since Marx gave them the *Communist Manifesto*, in 1848, the communists have been at it—by their own admission.

The case against the communists involves a principle of freedom that is of transcending importance. It is the right to be wrong. Heterodoxy is a necessary condition of a free society. When two people are in disagreement, both may be wrong, but both cannot be right. The very fact that I reject communism indicates that it is, from my point of view, erroneous; if I judged it to be sound, I would accept it. It would then cease to be “wrong” and would become “right.” However, the important thing is not the wisdom I display in the choice of ideas but the right to make a choice. It is important to me, for the freedom of selection is necessary to my sense of personality; it is im-

portant to society, because only from the juxtaposition of ideas can we hope to approach the ideal of truth.

Whenever I choose an idea and label it "right," I imply the prerogative of another to reject that idea and label it "wrong." To invalidate his right is to invalidate mine. That is, I must brook error if I would preserve my freedom of thought. When I presume to be in possession of "absolute truth," and maintain that those who disagree with me not only are in error, but are wickedly or sinfully so, I lay myself open to similar judgment; in the end, then, the "absolute truth" becomes a matter of power to constrict thought.

If there is anything characteristic of America, and for which Americans can be thankful, it is that it is an area in which thought has been permitted to run riot. To be sure, our history is not free of political efforts to put limits on what people may think. Men have been legally punished for holding theological concepts at variance with those of the ruling group; for being atheists; for objecting to war; for believing that they have a right to buy and sell in the open market; for condemning slavery; for advocating birth control; for teaching the theory of evolution; for harboring art values that in the eyes of the law constituted obscenity. In every case, the authorities sought to get at ideas by inflicting punishment on those who held them; in every case, freedom of thought was the issue. It is to the credit of the American genius for freedom that ultimately the right to think as one wishes prevailed, even though too often some were made to suffer for it. Somehow the citadel of thought has held firm, and the right to be wrong has added something to human dignity.

The issue is up again. Is it wise, is it safe, to punish those who advocate communism? Granted that this doctrine is in

itself a vicious denial of human dignity, the issue is not the doctrine but the right to hold it. If men are punished for espousing communism, shall we stop there? Once we deny the right to be wrong we put a vise on the human mind and put the temptation to turn the handle into the hands of ruthlessness.

But, it will be asserted, a primary tenet of communism is this very denial of free thought; if its advocates come into power they would do harm to all who entertain ideas contrary to their "line." That is true. On that point too the communists have been explicit; their insistence on the "absolute truth" of their doctrine puts any divergence from it in the category of sinful and dangerous error, not to be tolerated. It is known that when they are in power they are more ruthless in attacking unorthodoxy than was the Holy Inquisition. It is also a known fact that their doctrine undergoes the mutations dictated by political exigency and is therefore orthodox only as it serves those in power. The danger, to those who hold freedom as the highest good, is not the ideas the communists espouse but the power they aspire to. Let them rant their heads off—that is their right, which we cannot afford to infringe—but let us keep from them the political means of depriving everybody else of the same right.

This is hardly a difficult job; in fact, the tactic by which they hope to climb to power is extremely vulnerable. In the lingo of prizefighting, they telegraph their punches. They have never made a secret of the fact that their plan of attack on society consists of the use of the labor movement, and particularly its strike technique, to foment riots, to attack property and violate life, so that under cover of confusion they may take over the reins of government. Hence, the curbing of the communists can be effected by the exercise by the government of the only

function for which it has any competence, the only justification of its being: the protection of life and property. If this function, this duty, were punctually and relentlessly performed at all times, and especially during strikes, the communists would be as harmless as a high school debating team.

Illustrative of the way a few policemen, instructed to do their duty, can frustrate the communist method is the story of a recent taxicab strike in New York. There is no evidence that the communists had a hand in this affair; nevertheless, it demonstrates how to reduce their offensive method of harmlessness. A self-appointed union leader went through the usual procedure of stirring up trouble: meetings, a demand, a strike vote, a call upon the 12,000 operators to quit work. It was all done in the apple-pie order characteristic of a commissar-led venture. The city government, however, sensed that it would be politically profitable to do its duty in this case; it decided to protect life and property. Perhaps this decision was dictated by the manifest unpopularity of the strike among the cabdrivers, one-third of whom are in business for themselves and the rest are partially on their own. At any rate, the police protection afforded the operators and their customers reduced violence to a few isolated incidents. Life and property were safe. Within a week all the city's taxicabs were doing business as usual, and the strike instigator was reported to have skipped town.

Contrast this taxicab strike with the 1934 rumpus, also in New York. At that time a "liberal" mayor of the city, courting the labor vote, did not proffer protection of life and property. Even within sight of policemen (who were reported to have turned their backs upon such incidents), taxicabs were overturned and drivers were beaten up. Hoodlums invaded their homes and applied persuasive treatment. The engineers of the strike achieved their purpose, of course, but only because the

city government was derelict in its duty. Had they been communists, bent on the major strategy, had the strike involved a number of industries and a couple of hundred thousand workers, they could have taken over the government, lock, stock, and barrel.

The strike, regardless of all rationalization, is an organized attack on life and property. It is a miniature war. Theoretically there can be a peaceful strike, but actually there is no such thing. Violence is an essential part of its technique. Those workers who would prefer to continue working are intimidated or beaten into conformity by shock troops, often mercenaries in the pay of the leaders. The right to work, which is the right to live, is denied to all who would take the jobs vacated. Meanwhile, the right of property is invalidated in that capital is compelled to remain idle, its value to diminish; the owners are forcibly prevented from employing their capital. The sit-down strike, in which the strikers take physical possession of the plant, is an outright violation of property rights, and the picket-line is a prelude to the destruction of property. The strike, presumably a protest against prevailing wage rates or working conditions, is in fact an instrument of force directed against life and property. So long as it is permitted to operate as such, the government is remiss in its duty.

That is the obvious fact. Whether workers profit by the strike, whether wages are raised or working conditions are improved, is beside the present point, which is that the strike technique plays right into the hands of the communists. Were they deprived of it, their whole revolutionary program would go awry and they could enjoy their palaver to their hearts' content. The menace of communism will not be removed by investigations, by legal prosecution, or by legislation outlawing its advocates;

all such measures are dangerous in that they open the way to attacks on freedom of thought. To curb communists the government has all the power it needs or ought to have. If the communists succeed, it will be only because the politicians, by neglecting their duty to society, become their accomplices.