

"Minority Problems": A Bogey-Man

By Frank Chodorov

An atheist I once knew told me that he regularly went to the Baptist Church in the little town in which he conducted a printing shop because his livelihood depended upon his doing so. He was a "minority," and avoided being a "problem" by conforming with the will of the dominant group in that town.

Everybody in that town of some two thousand inhabitants was a Baptist. But, as the town grew this homogeneity would not prevent the development of a "minority problem." In due time the railroad track would divide the population into a ruling class and an economically depressed class. The "wrong side of the track" always contains the majority of the people, but to those who control things they are a "minority problem."

The "minority problem" is a pressure-technique employed by the exploiting class to advance their own interests, at the expense of the exploited. In the natural order of things there is no such thing as a social minority—which is quite different from a political minority. Everyone seeks gratifications with the least effort, no matter what language he speaks, what his form of religious worship, what his color.

When this natural urge is given free rein the result is a decent human being, in any clime, in any period. On the other hand traits that are often more akin to those of a beast are brought into being by interferences with this simple, natural urge. A pedigreed dog or a mongrel will eat out of the same garbage can when forced by hunger. Differences of breeding or blood—particularly blood—disappear in a struggle for existence. All people are alike in that they seek to satisfy desires with the least effort, and in their resentment to interferences that force them to greater efforts than other men are required to exert for the same satisfactions.

Homogeneity does not exclude "minority problems"—nor are they indigenous to polyglot populations. Our own country is a conglomerate mass of races, colors, creeds so intermingled as to form a whole entirely indistinguishable from its component parts. Of course we have "minority problems," but these do not arise from the presence in our midst of culturally different groups. If we started to distinguish between the Swedes in North Dakota, the Germans in Milwaukee, the Mennonites in Pennsylvania, the Mormons in Utah, the French-Canadians in Vermont, the Spanish offspring in

New Mexico and the ex-Finns in Minnesota, if we attempted to unscramble the backgrounds that make up the population of New York City, where would we end? Our "minority problems" have, in fact, taken the form of race and color prejudice, very much as in Europe, and as our economic conditions deteriorate to that of the Old World these prejudices will become more sharply defined and more general. The self-interest of pressure groups will attend to that. But, at present our "minority problems" are mainly of the "wrong side of the track" variety.

A "minority problem" is merely a bogey man invented by the landed aristocracy and their satellites (mainly rotarians, lawyers and politicians) to direct the wrath of the people away from their parasitism. Where freedom prevails (as, to a large extent, it did prevail in our country during the era of free land) no such problems can arise. We never hate a customer, and he who serves us well is a friend whose language or religion we do not question. When, however, the specter of poverty becomes frightening, our jittery nerves make us easy prey for the "minority problem" scheme of those whose opulence is enjoyed at our expense. A hungry man does not reason.

The oppressed have a way of overcoming difficulties. To live, to secure satisfactions which they crave, they exert their reason and their will so as to overcome the obstacles placed in their path. They develop skills and artifices which enable them to hurdle difficulties, and for that very reason they become dangerous to the ruling class. Let us take a homely example—prize fighting. In this field of endeavor the Negro has at various times excelled. The Negro is not naturally a better fighter than the white man of similar physical strength who takes to this occupation. But the Negro knows that he must be better than the white man to secure similar recognition and emolument. The fortitude called forth by the obstacles placed in his path stands him in good stead in his climb to the top.

Whenever the Negro reaches the top in prize fighting there is always a hue and cry for a "white hope." The supremacy of the white race is suddenly threatened. Why? Why is it so confoundedly necessary to dethrone the Negro? Because he belongs to the economically oppressed group, and this example of success may exert a dangerous influence on that group.

This tendency is demonstrated in our southern states (where the Negro is economically lower than a slave) by the ostracism of Negro singers and actors. Here the "minority problem" takes the form of refusing to recognize artistic ability in a member of the oppressed group, lest such recognition tend to upset the status quo so satisfactory to the exploiters. Even the exploited white laborers—"white trash"—have been trained to take this attitude.

The most universal "minority problem" is that of the Jews. After thousands of years of oppression this group of people consists of merely a name, for what characteristics differentiates it from other people has never been agreed upon. A religion? Not only are there schisms and sects among them, but even when they reject all religious faith or adopt some Christian form they are still called Jews. A race? If so, what trait or character is indigenous to it, in all places and times? The Jews of Spain are as different from the Jews of Russia as are the other peoples who have lived in these countries for several centuries, and that they have largely intermarried with the peoples among whom they settled is a fact that accentuates the dilemma of the anti-semites. A culture? They have no common language, for their ancient Hebrew is known to comparatively few among them; and in the arts they have excelled only in the idioms of their adopted countries. A nation? If the measure of national entity is devotion to a geographical ideal, they have been patriots in the countries in which they happened to be born, and as soldiers in opposing armies have fought against one another.

What distinguishes the Jew from all other people is the singular characteristic of suffering universal hatred. He has always been a most

convenient "minority problem"—somebody to blame for unjust economic conditions. Is it not a significant fact that waves of anti-semitic feeling accompany periods when economic hardship is most prevalent? See how in Germany the oppressive conditions brought about by the Versailles treaty have brought a recrudescence of this ancient hate. And in America, where anti-semitism was in the last century merely an historic name, the hissing of that unreasoning hatred becomes louder and louder as depressions succeed each other with greater frequency and intensity.

That the Jew excels is merely indicative of the amount of oppression he suffers. Drilled into him for centuries has been the need of being better in order to live. He has tried to become commonplace by merging with his chosen environment, so that he might not feel the need of exerting so much effort to secure satisfactions. But economic conditions have ever resurrected him as a "minority problem." He will not be permitted to become ordinary. Oddly enough, the very excellence he achieves because of the greater effort he is forced to exert engenders further the hatred that is directed against him. It is a simple matter to inflame the hungry man against the apparently affluent. This was the method of Russian Czars; this is the method of Junkers in every country throughout the ages. The so-called Jewish problem will never be solved until the problem of poverty is solved.

Self-determination for minorities is a soporific invented to avoid searching for unsavory truths. Let us assume that every racial, cultural or ideological group in the world were self-determined into geographical entities. If within each new country some of the people obtained ownership of the land, would not the resulting poverty of the rest of the people create new "minority prob-

lems"? Would there not be unrest among the dispossessed?

Yes, the solution is self-determination, but for individuals, not for groups. And, it must be economic self-determination. Give individuals the opportunity to produce without hindrance or let from landlords or tax-gatherers, permit people to pursue whatever occupations they chose, to retain the products of their labor without paying tribute to monopolists, to exchange these products freely with one another, abolish all tariffs and restrictions—and there will be no "minority problems."

The dispossessed peoples of Europe, of every tongue, racial background and religious belief found in the free land of America the self-determination that was denied them in their monopolized countries. They lived harmoniously with each other, they built a nation out of their conglomerate cultures. But, because they brought with them the land tenure system that created "minority problems" in their native countries they sowed the seed of injustice that will destroy the nation they built.