

Why Youth Goes Communist

By Frank Chodorov

(In the following article, giving the human side of the problem of Economic and Political Democracy vs. Communism, Mr. Chodorov introduces the series, "Why I Am Not a Communist: Science and Philosophy vs. Marxism," by Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and Harry Gunnison Brown, which will be a feature of the March issue of The Freeman.—The Editors.)

Do the colleges teach communism? That question has alarmed many parents. The answer is quite unimportant. The fuss and fury which has been aroused over the question, the newspaper notoriety heaped upon communistic collegiate organizers and organizations, the accusations against professors, the adroit and equivocal rejoinders, even court actions, all this is merely cover-all to hide the real problem, which is:

Why do college students become communists?

That communist doctrine and dialectic are extra-curricular subjects to which the students are much exposed in some lecture rooms is ridiculously obvious. But, flatulent jingoism is concurrently taught in history courses, from textbooks in which social trends and forces are presented from the point of view of privilege. Why are the students more influenced by communistic flubdubbery than by the more blatant, more firmly entrenched bunk of social history?

Worried parents and indignant Legionnaires would do well to analyze the ready acceptance of communism on the part of groping, querulous youth before condemning it. Scolding may satisfy the righteous indignation of the scolder; it doesn't help the scolded.

In the late 'teens or early twenties one has but few fixations on social and economic questions. But that is a period of wild groping. Curiosity is whetted by keen personal interest. What am I going to do when college years are over? In what kind of world will I be forced to live? How will I live in it?

The weaning years of high school and college are difficult. That difficulty finds its greatest expression not in communism, but in the alarm-

ing increase in the number of adolescent mental cases—dementia praecox. Psychiatrists tell us that what this disease is, what causes it, and how to cure it are questions they cannot definitely answer; but they know definitely that it is a product peculiar to our civilization, since it is not prevalent among uncivilized peoples. To the parent who has seen the promising mind of childhood wrecked in adolescence, this is a terrible price to pay for civilization. Ask the father who knows. He will tell you that communism is far less undesirable than dementia praecox. A "red" mind is at least an active, functioning mechanism; there is hope for it. There is little hope for an anti-social mentality that has ceased to will, that seeks refuge from reality in the dreams of sub-consciousness, that frequently finds only in self-destruction surcease from the struggle with civilization.

Civilization, not communism, is on trial. With all its impossible ideology, its warped reasoning, its raucous shibboleths, communism has at least the saving grace of attempting to re-phrase this civilization. Its intent is laudable. Which is much more than can be said of the fathers who protest most loudly against communistic teaching in our schools and colleges.

Why do college students become communists? Because communism seems to have a more rational answer to the problems of life, as recorded in the public press, as observed by them in their meagre contacts with life itself, than the answer they receive from either their parents or the "social sciences" they study. Because they know that the persistence of poverty in spite of increasing wealth production is incongruous, that charity is a lie, that industrial depressions, strikes, crime

and occupational diseases are all manifestations of a sick society. Because they know that at any moment they may be called upon to butcher their fellow-students of other countries against whom they harbor no grievance. Because they know that thrift, industry, honesty, morality, kindness and all the other Christian virtues have not brought that era of good will on earth which was promised to them in Sunday school. Because they know that the flowering of romance in marriage will have to be deferred for a long time because of economic handicaps. Because they know that they will not be able to get jobs when they graduate, that for long years they will have to live upon their parents' incomes, or upon the verge of starvation.

How do they know this? From their newspapers, magazine articles, radio talks. From their research work in history, economics, sociology. From the graduates whose story of struggle and frustration they hear in fraternity rooms. From their clear, unbiased, analytical observation.

Youth registers the tempo of its period. Maturity is influenced by the standards and the scruples of its own earlier years, and is inclined to measure present trends by these influences. Youth is not so bounded. What it sees it evaluates in the light of its meagre knowledge, and with its emotionalism. The evaluation is honest because it is untrammelled by prejudices. If it is a false evaluation, not in accordance with experience, the fault is with maturity in withholding salient information. Youth may not have wisdom, but its innate honesty detects and detests untruth.

The World War ushered in a period of almost complete abandonment of social values. The recent imminence of death and destruction gave the lie to those standards of life about which their parents prated. If life itself was so cheap, could the way of living be of much value? The recent carnage belied the value of morals; the wealth that a forced production brought to those who did not fight



made a mockery of heroism; the destruction of both life and wealth showed the utter futility of preparation for living. Only today counted. And so, youth jazzed its way into maturity. To its parents, to its teachers who spoke of human values, it gave but scant heed. They were part of a past that created the great slaughter; why listen to them?

The 1920's passed. Came the tempo of the 1930's, of which the most important fact is Depression. The hideous monster of poverty stalks throughout the world. While maturity prates about "two chickens in every pot and two pots in every garage" youth sees with unbiased eye the very evident fact that it will grow up in a world not of its own making, not to its own liking. The teachers of economics, the men who ought to know, talk of cyclical depressions, of the inevitability of unemployment, of the permanent problem of relief, of charity as a continuous institution—of a world in which poverty is an ever-present, unavoidable ulcerous condition.

Such teaching does not square with the hopefulness that is the essential motive of youth. Such teaching sounds not only false but also traitorous. Youth did not ask to be brought into this world; being here it demands the right to so shape it that life will be worth living. If maturity has nothing better to offer than a continuous condition of economic slavery, then it is a confessed failure. Why listen to a failure? There must be a way out of this social crime of poverty. Ah! Here is a plausible way out — Communism. Sounds very reasonable, very promising. Let's go.

The influence of college education on the ideology of students is much over-rated. The system of requiring "points" toward the socially-necessary degree is an assurance that the courses studied will soon be forgotten. Question any student within a year after completion of his course on economics and—unless he is majoring in that subject—he will display profound ignorance of it. The same is true of any other required subject toward which he did not happen to have a strong inclination.

The professors who impressed him, the friendships acquired, the social and extra-curricular life he engaged

in will influence his reactions to life much more than the subjects he studied. Since this is so, it is begging the question to blame college education for the growth of collectivistic thought among students. A course in Marxism would have as little effect as a course in psychology or chemistry on the ideology of youth—if Marxism did not offer the promise of that fuller life which youth inherently feels is its due.

Youth wants an ideal. Youth wants hope. Neither parental scolding nor the puritanical driving out of the "demons" he has acquired will accomplish the intended result; rather, such methods will merely strengthen his emotionalism, to the exclusion of all logical processes.

To cure youth of communism you—parents, Republicans, Democrats—you must first be honest. Do not tell him that this is the best of all possible worlds; such a statement stamps you a liar. Do not offer the old platitudes of morality, thrift and industry as cures for our economic and social ills; history disproves you. Do not preach the hypocrisy of the American Liberty League; that invites contumely.

Rather, say what you know. Say that the persistence of poverty in the midst of plenty is due to privilege. Confess that the legal right of a few people to take from most of the people the product of their labor is the reason why most of the people are poor. The way to abolish pov-

erty is to abolish privilege. The greatest privilege of all is the private ownership of the earth—the source of all wealth. To abolish this privilege all we have to do is to collect the rent of land, which is the measure of that privilege. All this without uprooting society, without violence, without dictatorships, without any fatuous attempt to recondition human nature. All this within the scope of that political mechanism which history has proven the greatest safeguard of human liberty—democracy. Say that and you wed youth to truth-seeking, not myth-building.

Democracy—that is the ideal to hold up to youth. But a real democracy. Not one identical with the laissez-faire doctrine of the last century, the doctrine of robbery within the law made by the robbers. Rather, the democracy of a fair field and no favor. Economic democracy.

Hold forth that ideal to youth and he will drop communism, for against tyranny freedom will always prevail, in argument or in struggle. And with that ideal goes the promise—a promise that follows logically from fundamental principles—that a society freed from economic shackles will act as rationally and as decently as any group of people who are free from want and the fear of it.

And so — parents, Republicans, Democrats—do not blame the colleges for teaching communism. Blame yourselves.