

VII. THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

WE HEAR a great deal about "the American way of life." Since we have been officially informed that it is to protect this "American way" that sixteen million of our boys must register for military service next week, and that fifteen billions of dollars have been appropriated this year for war preparations, it seems natural that we should inquire a little closer into just what is this "American way of life," anyway.

The American Bankers Association met in convention at Atlantic City not long ago, and also dedicated itself to the defense of the "American way of life." The bankers were a bit more specific than the President in defining just what they mean. They defined it as a way "based on free enterprise in a capitalistic economy." That is, we are being conscripted and are preparing a great military machine in order to keep our national economy in the hands of our small class of capitalists, by war if needed, and to keep these capitalists free of any serious interference. That is the basic thing about the so-called "American way of life," for which we are all of us supposed to be enthusiastically prepared to lay down our lives to preserve unchanged.

This "capitalistic economy" has indeed dominated America more and more since our establishment as a nation. It made the United States the "richest country in the world." But who has these riches? Is it the American people? Unfortunately, no. The mass of the people, those who do the work and produce the riches, have for generations been receiving proportionately less and less, and during the past ten years especially, have been receiving absolutely less and less. The rich are growing richer, the poor are growing poorer;

the number of the rich is constantly decreasing; the number of the poor is constantly increasing. The "American way of life," as the Bankers Association understands it, has put our country under the absolute control of a handful of monopoly capitalists.

The most astounding news item of a generation was revealed the other day—but practically suppressed by the newspapers. It was the investigation by a government body which revealed that effective control of United States economy lies in the hands of *three families*. Studying the two hundred largest corporations (excluding banks), which, in the words of the conservative Senator O'Mahoney, of Wyoming, "account for the bulk of activities in manufacturing, mining, electric and gas utilities, transportation and communication," the Senate Committee found, (1) that over half the stock is held by 75,000 individuals; (2) that a group of thirteen families, owning 8 per cent of the stock, occupy a decisive position of control over the whole; and (3) that in this group of thirteen families, more than half of the ownership and the most decisive control lies in the hands of three families, the du Ponts, the Mellons and the Rockefellers.

A few other official government statistical findings will round out this side of the picture: Among all corporations, the 5 per cent which are biggest own 77 per cent of the assets, and receive 86 per cent of the profits. Among this group, the very biggest, considerably less than 1 per cent of the total, represent more than half the assets and profits. Among all the banks of the country, 1 per cent hold 89 per cent of the resources.

WEALTH GROWS, MEN DECAY

And what is happening to our people? The National Resources Committee tells us the following: More than one million families have a yearly income below \$250; 17 per cent of America's families and single individuals have an income of less than \$500 per year, and more than one-fourth of them less than \$750, while almost half of the population come under the bracket of less than \$1,000 per year. This shows that the great majority receive far less than the

Government's own figure of the minimum required for an adequate livelihood. The famous but now forgotten "one-third of the population ill-housed, ill-fed and ill-clothed" must be revised to read two-thirds.

It was many years ago, long before these terrible contrasts had arisen, that a famous poet uttered a great truth, when he said:

*Ill fares that land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.*

The "American way of life," as defined by the American Bankers Association, has brought our country the greatest accumulation of wealth and the deepest decay of men ever seen in our history. Ten millions of unemployed, and a majority living below the level of decency, is matched at the top by a Brenda Frazier who blows in \$35,000 in one night for a "coming-out party"; by a Barbara Hutton who spends millions of the Woolworth profits buying up stale European titles; by a Doris Duke Cromwell, who buys her playboy and ignoramus husband a nice Ambassadorship, and is now negotiating for a Senator's seat; by the "ten best-dressed women of America" who boast of spending a million dollars per year each on their clothes. This is the finest fruit of that "American way of life" which, in the classical words of the American Bankers Association, is "based on free enterprise in a capitalistic economy."

It is the bankers' definition of Americanism that guides both Democratic and Republican parties, both Roosevelt and Willkie. Both refer to Jefferson and Lincoln to justify their position, but both ignore the fact that monopoly has long ago wiped out "free enterprise" for the masses, based on free land and the frontier of a virgin continent, which for Jefferson and Lincoln was the basis of democracy, not the "capitalistic economy" of the Bankers Association.

Mr. Willkie, in defending his capitalist system in the speech at Pittsburgh last week, quoted at length from Lincoln's message to Congress of December, 1861. But he did not quote that part where Lincoln declared the foundation of "the American way of life," as

he understood it to be, not the "capitalistic economy" of the Bankers Association, but that "large majority" of the people who "belong to neither class—neither work for others nor have others working for them." Lincoln, in that same address, warned that majority who were neither capitalists nor wage-workers to:

...beware of surrendering a political power which they already possess, and which, if surrendered, will surely be used to close the door of advancement against such as they, and to fix new disabilities and burdens upon them, till all of liberty shall be lost.

Similarly, Jefferson defined the "American way" in non-capitalist terms, in a letter to Adams in 1813, which said:

Here every one may have land to labor for himself, if he chooses; or, preferring the exercise of any other industry, may exact for it such compensation as not only to afford a comfortable subsistence, but wherewith to provide for a cessation of labor in old age.

And later, writing to a Mr. Spafford, in 1814, Jefferson said:

I fear nothing for our liberty from the assaults of force; but I have seen and felt much, and fear more from English books, English prejudices, English manners, and the apes, the dupes and designs among our professional crafts. When I look around me for security against these seductions, I find it in the widespread of our agricultural citizens, their independence and their power, if called on, to crush the Humists [the legalists of property-rights] of our cities and to maintain the principles which severed us from England.

Those foundations upon which Jefferson and Lincoln relied, of an agrarian democracy, of a population predominantly neither capitalists nor wage-workers, with such capital-labor relations as did exist tempered and modified by the free land of frontier—those foundations have entirely disappeared. Today, more than four-fifths of our population is entirely divorced from the land and depend, directly or indirectly, upon modern industry which is completely in the grip of monopoly. The population is predominantly composed

of wage-workers, employed and unemployed, while almost all the non-wage-workers have completely lost the boasted independence of Jefferson's time, even the farmers becoming tenants or mortgaged to the banks or in the toils of the marketing monopolies. Free land has long disappeared, and the land is entirely monopolized; most workers can no longer exact anything near a "comfortable subsistence," while provisions for old age for the masses have become entirely a question of fighting for a governmental old-age pension system. The old economic foundation for democracy has been destroyed by the "capitalistic economy" which has developed into monopoly.

Unless a new economic foundation is found, democracy, already sick unto death from malnutrition, will surely die. But such a new economic foundation can be found only by limiting, modifying, and finally abolishing that capitalistic economy and the system of rule raised by it. To be free, the people must own and control their own economy, but in this age of modern, large-scale industry, they can own their own economy, not through individual private ownership, but only through collective public ownership.

The task of finding a solution to this problem can no longer be postponed. Monopoly capitalism has already reached the point in its development at which either it will crush the people or the people must abolish it and find new safeguards to their welfare and security, a new system of economy and of government.

CAPITALISM IN DECAY

That very bankers' convention which, the other day, sang the praises of "the American way of life based on a capitalistic economy," in the same document made admissions which damn that system beyond all salvation. It summed up the results of this system for the past ten years in these words:

For the first time in our history the production of American industry has made no net gains for a full decade. Industrial output has stagnated. Much of our factory equipment, and that of our transportation

system, has become obsolete or obsolescent. For the first time our national standard of living has declined.

Our present economic system is obviously declining, decaying. Yet both major political parties, both Willkie and Roosevelt, reject any serious efforts even to bolster it up from within, as, for example, with a fifteen billion dollar governmental appropriation to produce more food, clothing and housing for the broad population; such a measure, they claim, would break down and destroy "the American way of life" as they understand it. But they are agreed that fifteen billions of dollars, spent for engines of destruction, for war, is necessary precisely in order to "defend the American way of life." Those who taught us over many years that huge expenditures, even for production of the needs of life, was the road to ruin for our nation now rush us without debate into greater expenditures for war—and they call it "national defense."

Not war, nor preparations for war, can cure or in any way alleviate the sickness of the capitalist system from which we, together with the whole world, are suffering. It is from this sickness, from this crisis of capitalism, that the war has arisen. The war will only multiply all the ills of our present society a hundredfold. It was capitalism, with its inner contradictions, its sickness, its crisis, which brought on the last world war. It was capitalism which gave us the so-called peace of 1919, a peace of violence and oppression leading directly to the present war. It was capitalism which gave birth to Hitler and Mussolini and to the militarist imperialism of Japan, and which is now reducing to their level all the other capitalist lands, including our own. There is no way out, for America or for the world, which does not start with a sharp fight, not for the defense of "capitalistic economy," but for its fundamental change, for a new system to take its place.

SOCIALISM THE ONLY WAY

Socialism, the common ownership and operation of the national economy by and for all the people who toil, is the only alternative

to capitalism. It is the only way the American way of life, as understood by Jefferson and Lincoln, can be preserved. Socialism is not a mere theory untested in life. It has been tried out with magnificent success in a great land, the Soviet Union.

American newspapers, radio and pulpit, together with the Norman Thomas Socialists, join in telling the American people the most horrible stories about the Soviet Union, striving mightily to convince them that the Soviet Union is the worst place on the globe. But if their stories are true, how is it that the Soviet Union emerges more and more as a great power in the world, growing stronger while other nations grow weaker? If their stories are true, how does it come that the Soviet economy multiplies tenfold its production of wealth for the people, during the same period in which the Bankers Association tells us that American economy has "stagnated"? If their stories are true, how is it that the Soviet Union has maintained peace for itself, while the rest of the world plunges madly into the most bloody and destructive war? If their stories are true, why is it that the Soviet Union, standing alone among the governments of the world, gives its people a profound and calm confidence in its security and its future, while all the rest of the world, including the United States, undergoes a hysteria of fear and feels nothing but doubt for the future? These facts are all unquestionable, and they give the lie to the horror-tales spread against the Land of Socialism, the Soviet Union. We have much to learn and many benefits to gain from the Soviet Union. The founders of America were not afraid to learn from other lands. "By their fruits ye shall know them!"

In this 1940 election campaign, only the Communist Party comes to the people with a clear explanation of the cause for our present ills, which are destroying the best traditions of the American way, a platform of immediate measures for their alleviation and a program for the future which will fundamentally solve our problems.

The Communist Party is educating and uniting the working people to fight for peace, for a better life and for security for all. That is why the servants of Wall Street try to suppress and outlaw

us. That is why millions of Americans are coming to our defense, learning to trust and follow us. That is why the Communist Party has emerged as a major factor in the 1940 elections.

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