

These Terrible Reds

BY MALCOLM LOGAN



WHAT are we going to do about the Communists? Numbers of earnest and worried citizens have been asking themselves this since the Reds in our midst began this year to get themselves into large, black newspaper head-lines. Indeed, the question was raised not long ago by William Z. Foster, the high priest of American Communism. The day before the Communist unemployment demonstrations in the United States and Europe on "Red Thursday," last March 6, Mr. Foster, unconsciously echoing a famous phrase of Boss Tweed, said:

"Charges have been made that this meeting to-morrow has been called by the Communist International in Russia. Well, it has—what are you going to do about it?"

Literally and painfully, the answer was cudgelled into the brains of the Communists and some innocent bystanders by the clubs of the policemen in a dozen cities. At Washington they said it with a tear-gas bomb, while with rare finesse the Baltimore police laughed it off, let the Communists parade, and made the whole affair appear considerably more ridiculous than sinister.

But this was not the end. Some prominent victims of *Communophobia* rediscovered the Red Menace and decided that we should do something very drastic about it. The most popular remedy for political radicalism is, of course, to send these malcontents "back where they came from." This course was suggested by the Chamber of Commerce of New York City. Representative Hamilton Fish proposed another popular panacea, a Congressional investigation. The Police Commissioner of New York compiled a blacklist of Communists and said that their employers had promised to discharge them and fill their places with unimpeachable patriots.

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The 1935 May Day parade in New York City.

The method advocated by the mercantile fathers of New York was tried a decade ago when the Communists were seceding from the Socialist Party and Bolshevism seemed in a fair way of engulfing most of Europe. Attorney-General Mitchell Palmer, with a covetous eye on the Presidency, made the discovery that the country was confronted by "an increasingly dangerous radical situation." His agents and police began to round up suspected radicals. Before the epidemic of Red fever subsided, some 5,000 persons had been arrested, and 263 deported, including the famous shipload which sailed back to Russia on the "Soviet Ark," the transport *Bu-ford*. When the Communists tried to hold a convention on a lonely sand dune in Michigan a spy betrayed them and they were arrested and tried for criminal syndicalism.

All this, however, did not stamp out Communism. The movement was forced underground, but in a few years it emerged stronger than ever. If the Inquisition and the various holy wars of Europe failed to extirpate heresy, how can our officials expect with their milder methods to destroy this Communism, which its followers have embraced with the fervor of religious conviction? And what can we do with those Communists who can't be deported because they happen to be American citizens? They have been prosecuted sporadically under the sedition laws which thirty-five States still enforce against Communists, but that has not deterred them. If we are going to use force, we shouldn't be half-hearted about it. We should go the whole way and execute them all against convenient walls some morning; or, as I heard a gentle lady suggest, put them on a ferry, tow it into New York harbor and sink it. But as some squeamish persons would probably object, it is hardly feasible. And unless we are going to do the thing thoroughly, perhaps it would be wiser to use intelligence rather than force.

What, then, *are* we going to do about

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it? To the harassed guardians of the peace, the bellicosity of the Communists so well displayed by Mr. Foster in the speech quoted above undoubtedly presents a vexing problem. They have been trying hard to start something, and in a good many instances they have succeeded. Perhaps the best way to deal with them is to give them as much freedom as possible to parade, orate, and protest, and when it becomes necessary to arrest them, to prosecute them without vindictiveness. When there are unnecessary riots, the Communists get the publicity they are seeking, and the police assist them in dramatizing the "class struggle." When they are denied the customary privileges of the law, as were Mr. Foster and four other leaders of the party arrested in New York, they are permitted to pose as martyrs persecuted by the "capitalist courts" because of their devotion to the working classes.

It seems probable that Communism will be with us, a thorn in our complacent flesh, for some time to come, so it might be well to arrive at some consistent policy in regard to it. It was no coincidence that its latest recrudescence occurred during the business depression and unemployment following the stock market's nose dive. Radicalism is inversely proportionate to prosperity. The more ardent believers in mass production have held out the bright promise of continued and cumulative prosperity through the creation of new markets by lowered prices and increased wages. The Communist doctrine states that because the gain from industry is so unequally distributed, its products cannot be absorbed and there must inevitably be periods of overproduction and unemployment, just as there were before the gospel of mass production arose. Every recurrence of hard times means a renewal of hope and activity among the Communists.

As an approach to an intelligent attitude toward Communism, it might be useful to separate a few facts from the mass of conflicting rumors, guesses, and pure fables which surround the movement.

Matthew Woll, as acting president of the National Civic Federation, has warned us that the March demonstrations were held on orders from Russia, and that Moscow gave Mr. Foster a million and a quarter dollars to foment a proletarian revolution here, and to finance the demonstrations. Now it is hardly a secret that the American Communists, like those of their faith in all countries, acknowledge the authority of

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Matthew Woll (1880 - 1956)

the Third or Communist International. That is really not news, since at its birth in the United States Communism was given the blessing of the central organization.

The story of the million and a quarter dollars, however, appears to be only a new form of an ancient legend dear to the alarmists that crops up every few years. It happens that Russia's economic development has been greatly handicapped by shortage of capital. So will Mr. Woll tell us where a million and a quarter was found to be squandered on such a forlorn hope as American Communism? And can he explain why, with all these resources, Mr. Foster and his four comrades who were arrested in New York were unable to raise \$50,000 bail?

All of it could hardly have been spent on the unemployment demonstrations. From the point of view of an interested spectator of the affair in Union Square, New York, I would estimate its cost at about \$52.50, itemized as follows:

50 placards at 10 cents	\$ 5.00
6 speakers' stands at \$2	12.00
1 American flag50
Handbills	25.00
Medical supplies	10.00

What has become of the rest of that million and a quarter?

Mr. Woll, besides his connection with the National Civic Federation, is vice-president of the American Federation of Labor, which the Communists are attacking with particular vehemence. It may be well, then, to wait for proofs of his charge before we subscribe to the somewhat fantastic tale.

The strength of American Communism has been the subject of the most amazingly various estimates. Ralph M. Easley, chairman of the executive committee of the National Civic Federation, quotes as Gospel a recent magazine article which states that "the number of

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Communists in the United States to-day is much nearer a half million than 6,000, and it is increasing to-day with a rapidity heretofore unknown." At the other extreme, James Oneal, the Socialist leader and author of "American Communism," says that there are not more than 7,000 Communists in the country, of whom 5,000 are members of the official Communist Party of America. To this Mr. Easley replies that "the Socialists rush in to belittle the Communists because of the bitter fight and the natural jealousy between the two groups." On the other hand it may be pointed out that the National Civic Federation, being dedicated to fostering harmony between organized capital and organized labor, is equally the foe of the Communists, who so disturb the serenity of industry, but its tactics have been rather on the side of exaggeration than minimization. It is almost certain that the Communists if they had half a million members would not be so silent about the strength of the party, for their policy has never been one of reticence about their accomplishments.

The last statement of the Communist Party on its membership was in 1925, when it claimed 16,325 members, of whom two-thirds were born in the former Russian Empire or other Slavic countries. Since that time there have been two of the many schisms to which the movement here has been so frequently subject. The latest official figures published in Russia on the strength of the Communist party in America placed the membership in 1927 at 12,000. In 1928 William Z. Foster and Benjamin Gitlow, running for President and Vice-President on the Workers Party ticket, which was the Communist ticket, received 48,288 votes. Even the Communists say that a large part of this vote came from persons not active members of the party.

Mr. Easley declares that in order to get their names on the ballots, they had to present to the State election boards petitions bearing at least 200,000 names. He admits that probably half of these were not Communists, but adds that the majority of those affiliated with the movement are not citizens. The Workers Party was not on the ballot in fifteen States, however, and any estimate of the number of alien Communists is only a guess.

There are the various figures, and you may take your choice. My own belief—and it is nothing but an opinion based upon what I have seen of Communism at its fountain head, New York

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City—is that the Communists may have as many as 50,000 members.

But after all, the question of how to deal with them hardly depends upon their numbers. Indeed, if despite the obstacles they have met, they have as Mr. Easley says grown to half a million, it seems to be conclusive evidence that you cannot suppress them by force.

Communism in this country was born by fission of the Socialist Party, a process of gestation from which Socialism has not yet recovered; and the offspring has continued the process of division. There are at this writing three Communist groups. The largest and most militant is the Communist Party of America, the sect officially recognized by the Third or Communist International. In 1928 the split between Trotsky and Stalin in Russia produced a similar disagreement in the party here, and the Trotsky adherents, led by James P. Cannon, were expelled. They formed the Communist League of America, and called themselves the Opposition. The following year another large batch was found guilty of heresy and was excommunicated. Among them were Mr. Gitlow, only the year before Mr. Foster's running-mate, and Jay Lovestone, who organized the Communist Party, U. S. A., the so-called majority group.

A considerable amount of their energy has been devoted by these groups to fighting among themselves. To the orthodox Communists, fluent though somewhat repetitious in the use of epithet, these factions of the Right are "petty bourgeois renegades." This animosity is cordially returned, and the "majority group," far from co-operating in the recent demonstrations of the official party, heartily denounced them.

In a recent pronunciamento the "majority group" expressed its opinion of the official party as follows:

"The policy of the leaders of the official party has resulted in driving out and expelling from the party over 8,000 members. The outstanding leaders and builders of the Communist movement and the left wing have been expelled from the party. At the same time the official party leadership together with the official press is pursuing a policy of calumny, frame-up, lies, in an effort to destroy those who have been in the forefront of the workers' struggle in the United States and will continue to be in the forefront of those struggles.

"Instead of pursuing the revolutionary task of developing a powerful Com-

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Communist movement based upon the masses and the organization of the workers, the leadership of the official party concentrates on issuing the most irresponsible phrases which, though appearing militant, are pure adventurism and pseudo-revolutionary bravado. The very bravado which Stalin at this late date pretends to 'recognize as an error' in the Soviet Union is prevalent in an even worse form in the leadership of the official Communist Party in the United States. The irresponsible phrasemongering, the total contempt for actual objective conditions, the irresponsible boasting, offers a very fertile field for the police activities of the capitalist forces for reaction and makes it very easy for them to attack and to smash the Communist Party.

"The Communist Party in the United States fought for years to overcome its illegal existence and to function openly as a revolutionary political party of the broad masses of the workers in the United States. To-day we have the tragic fact that the official leadership of the Communist Party appears to welcome the forcing of the party into an underground existence and is accompanying this by isolating the party, destroying its influence and carrying on activities and issuing statements which open the doors of the party for spies and agents provocateurs."

Not even the most vehement *Communophobes* have condemned more scathingly the militant tactics of the official party than these, their former comrades.

The official Communist Party of America has numerous ramifications. The task of teaching the young idea how to revolt is entrusted to the Young Pioneers, composed of children from ten to sixteen years. They attend demonstrations, propagandize and study the Gospel According to Marx; and sometimes, with the high spirits of youth, carry on a guerrilla warfare with their particular enemies, the "fascist" Boy Scouts. The next age group is the Young Communist League, and finally the Communist Party itself.

The English organ of the party is *The Daily Worker*, published in New York and edited by Robert Minor, one of the men arrested with Mr. Foster on the charge of inciting the Union Square riot in New York. It is a small but ardent journal in which opinion and exhortation are liberally mixed with the news. A paragraph from an account of the prosecution of Foster, et al, from the

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issue of March 11 gives an accurate idea of its tone:

“Express train speed characterized the action of the capitalist courts of New York, under the grooming of the Walker-Whalen-McAdoo-Crain régime, in their hurry to reap their class vengeance against the committee representing 110,000 New York workers at the March 6 unemployment demonstration.”

The labor policy of the Communists was until recently to “bore from within” the unions under the American Federation of Labor. The needle workers, most of whom are concentrated in New York, have always had radical tendencies, and the Communists made their greatest progress in that group. Indeed, they almost captured the Fur Workers Union, but the A. F. of L. succeeded in expelling them, whereupon they organized their own Needle Trades Workers Union. In the past two years they have apparently given up hope of capturing the established unions and have started to form their own. The National Textile Workers Union, which called the unsuccessful strike in Gastonia, N. C., was formed in 1928. Other Communist unions have been organized in the building trades, among the marine workers, and in the food, automobile, mining, and steel industries.

In Cleveland on September 3 last the Trade Union Unity League was created with Mr. Foster as national secretary, as the authority over all the Red unions. It is the American branch of the Red International of Labor Unions, the labor arm of international Communism. From its headquarters in New York City the league publishes a weekly paper, *Labor Unity*.

It is somewhat early to judge the effectiveness of the Communist unions. Mr. Foster is an able labor organizer and he has written a very authoritative book on strike tactics; but the Communists have not yet won any important strikes and they have lost several.

Finally there is a legal branch of the Communist organization, the International Labor Defense, founded in Chicago, June 28, 1925. It defends not only arrested Communists, but all workers who run afoul of the law. Its official organ is *The Labor Defender*, a well-edited monthly illustrated magazine.

The name of William Z. Foster has occurred frequently in this article, for the very good reason that Mr. Foster is the real leader of Communism in the United States—or at least of the brand officially recognized by the Communist

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International. He is a man of long experience and considerable ability in labor organization. A newspaper recently described him as the most famous man out of "Who's Who," and he is certainly the first rebel of our land. He has always been able to get into the news, and his instinct for publicity was never better demonstrated than when he added that cryptic initial "Z" to his name. He says he inserted it because he thought it looked well. That may be so, but the fact remains that William Foster is just a name, whereas William Z. Foster is the sort of name that sticks in the memory.

A Socialist at nineteen, Mr. Foster has become a deeper red with the passage of years. He was expelled from the Socialist Party, joined the I. W. W. and finally found a movement to his liking in Communism. His first real job as a labor organizer was the unionization of the packing industry in 1917. The packers won their strike and in 1919 Mr. Foster turned his attention to the steel industry. A quarter of a million men walked out at his call, but after a bitter struggle they lost the strike.

Mr. Foster is an intelligent man, mild-mannered in conversation and matter-of-fact in his writing. As a speaker he uses the violent vocabulary common to the Communists, who have an idiom as well defined as that of the spread-eagle patriotic orators. But this is evidently assumed because it is the conventional mode of address, although there can be no doubt that Mr. Foster sincerely believes in salvation by revolution.

The policy of the Communists, though they have used the ballot, is opposed to parliamentary methods as futile. They believe that the overthrow of capitalism can be accomplished only by revolution and they believe that revolution in the United States is not far off.

The Communists have in their labor organization work attempted to appeal to the large masses of unskilled or semi-skilled workers who can find no place in the craft unions of the A. F. of L. An especial emphasis is made upon the brotherhood of workers of all races, a draw in the Negroes. The International Labor Defense has also appealed to that race by fighting its battles against lynching and race prejudice. "Special attention must be paid to the persecutions and oppression of the Negro workers and large masses of Negroes must be drawn into the I. L. D.," said a report of that body's recent convention.

One is inclined to wonder just what the Communists hoped to gain from the

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militant methods expressed in their unemployment demonstrations. The prospect of a cracked head seems little inducement to join the party. Mr. Foster says that it is the party's "only effective means of protest," but there are grounds for belief that the demonstrations were staged principally for the benefit of the leaders of the Communist International, who have been reported exceedingly dissatisfied with the condition of Communism here.

They did accomplish this much: they forced the country to recognize the existence of a serious unemployment situation about which the administration had naturally preserved a discreet silence. Mr. Hoover, it is true, at once said that the worst was over, but in view of his previous silence it is not surprising that the Communists in *The Daily Worker* printed his cheerful interview under the headline, "Hoover Tells Favorite Lies."

This, it seems to me, indicates that the Communists, however much they may dislike the idea, are useful elements in our capitalist economy. Red has always been a danger signal; and when the Reds flourish, locally or nationally, it is a warning that something is wrong, and we should thank them for letting us know about it. This time it was unemployment. In Gastonia and Passaic, N. J., when the Communists organized textile strikes, they informed us that something was very much amiss with a textile industry that did not pay a living wage to its workers.

I would suggest to our industrialists and business men who would like to abolish Communism that the most direct way to do it is to abolish the conditions which make men and women listen to its desperate counsels. Until they do, it is just as well to have the Communists with us to prevent us from becoming too satisfied with ourselves.

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