Theory and Practice of Psychosurgery


Fourteen years of active leadership, theoretical and practical, in the Communist movement of the later Comintern period, served the author as a basis of this study. The volume is an independent part of a series on “Communism in American Life,” sponsored by the Fund for the Republic, and designed to analyse the complex ideological, psychological, environmental and institutional conditions, all of which contribute to the emergence of the Communist cadremen—the policy-making strata of the movement. In a word, the purpose of the book is to show how a genuine Communist is “made.”

The author puts the main emphasis of this process on two elements. One is doctrinal, and concerns the universality of the Communist ideological postulates; the other is methodological; i.e., it deals with unique techniques of Communist “follow-up conditioning” (as this practice of continuous “moulding” was termed by William Sargant in his Battle for the Mind). This fact that doctrine and training are the same everywhere is invoked by the author when he relegates to second place the various historical and national situations as well as contrasting missions of the Communists in and out of power. Thus he presents Communism as a “common secular and messianic quasi-religion which inspires the Communists everywhere and from the beginning of the Communist movement till this day.”

The author dissects the theory of Communist training with remarkable subtlety. He stresses in particular the role of Marxist “reductionism,” this “nothing but” type of approach, which reduces to basic class interests all social complexities, externalizes all human problems, and presents within such a “closed universe” a ready answer to every inquiry. At the same time, since all the non-economic elements are eliminated from the field of Communist preoccupations, the cornerstone of Marxist outlook, political economy, takes the place of a “cosmological birth-and-death myth.” Thus it gives vital strength to Communist theory. For “Communist theory is powerful not because it is true . . . It is powerful because it is believed.” Once accepted as an infallible guide, the doctrinal credo leads to gradual severance of all ties with the mores of society and the sense of community with the nation, and to surrender of individuality to the Party. All the stages of Communist training are set up in order to produce total devotion to the Party, this “soul of soulless universe,” which becomes the only reality for the Communist. The final aim is to achieve the identification of personal and Party will and to make life
unthinkable under any circumstances outside the Party. Because of all this, Communism represents in Mr. Meyer's view a "challenge à outrance to our civilization," for against the vision, the devotion, the determination of the Communist man, "there is no recourse in compromise, reasonableness, peaceful coexistence. Only a greater determination can avail, for Communist man poses two stark alternatives: victory or defeat."

The historical record of the last four decades does not seem to contradict Mr. Meyers apodictical postulates. The only critical remark this reviewer wants to make concerns some of the author's overall formulations which foreclose further elaboration of the discussion at some points. Thus, for example, even if the basic theory is the same and the technique of indoctrination identical, there are necessary and significant differences in the day by day procedures as well as in the end product of moulding a Communist in a country where the Party struggles for power under adverse circumstances, or enjoys all the stimulating and corroding effects of total power. Likewise, the interpretation of doctrine and consequently some substantial aspects in the training of the cadre, must of necessity receive diversified shades according to specific conditions in such countries as Russia, China, and Yugoslavia. A discussion of these points would not disprove the final conclusions of Mr. Meyer's masterly analysis. It would, however, introduce another dimension which must not be overlooked. Moreover, it would emphasize even more forcibly some supplementary aspects of Communist fallibilities.

Reviewed by MILORAD DRACHKOVITCH

The Conservative as Radical:
Woodrow Wilson and Henry L. Stimson


One of the delights of history is the irony it offers. And one of the recurring ironies is this: often the man who thinks of himself as a conservative, as a devotee of law and order and traditional values, pursues his principles with steps that lead to radical consequences. So it was with Woodrow Wilson and Henry L. Stimson, though they did not always see eye to eye.

There is an added ironical touch in the changing relationship between the views of these two men. Before we got into the First World War, Stimson was one of the most extreme of those who championed the Allied cause and called upon Americans to be prepared to fight. He was to remember "how outraged we were when President Wilson did nothing to show the shame that we felt" over the German invasion of Belgium. Finally, Wilson became as bellicose as even Stimson could have wished. In his