

A LESSON IN DEMOCRACY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
COMMUNIST MOVEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

BY A. LANDY

ON SEPTEMBER 1, the American Communist movement will celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. There was a time when this might have been of interest to only a small part of the American people. But ever since Hitler tried to camouflage his drive for world conquest with the "bogey of communism" an intelligent understanding of the character of the Communist movement became a historical and practical necessity for the entire nation. For Hitler who, like Dante's wild beast, was more hungry after each meal, used the "menace of communism" as his chief political weapon for dividing his prospective victims, nation from nation, and each nation within itself. To deprive him of this weapon and to strengthen national unity against predatory fascism, it was essential to understand the real character of the Communist movement, which did not mean imposing on the country the study and discussion of communism or compelling agreement with its principles; but it did mean making a serious effort to acquire objective knowledge about the Com-

munist. For, after all, the only refuge from the deleterious effects of a bogey, as Earl Browder has repeatedly pointed out, is to get acquainted with the real thing.

And yet, Hitler's use of this "Communist bogey" is only a negative, though plainly urgent, reason for being better informed about the true character of the Communist movement. The positive reasons go much deeper and, if grasped, provide a better preparation for meeting the realities of the present world.

1. The American Communist movement is a historically established and socially vital force, representing the views and ideals of a democratic political current actually over one hundred years old; its influence is too deeply rooted in the social aspirations and struggles of the American working class and the vital needs of the nation to be dismissed as of no consequence.

2. The Communists have been making a signal contribution to the country's war of survival, precisely because of the strength of their influence in the labor movement; the nation cannot ignore this contribu-

tion and its significance without weakening all the driving forces of its democratic development.

3. The Communists will be an important factor in the post-war relations of our country to the rest of the world.

A Strange Proposal

If a correct attitude toward the Communist movement is necessary for national unity to assure victory in the war, it is equally necessary for national unity in the interest of an orderly democratic advance after the war. The urgency of this is apparent from the fact that there are persons in the United States who want to win the war and assure a durable peace—and yet predicate this peace on the abolition of the Communist movement all over the world. Nothing need be said of the morality of such people, who are willing to secure victory in cooperation with the Communists everywhere, but who would like to destroy them as soon as the job is done.

But this is exactly what such a competent journalist and supporter of the war as Walter Lippmann proposes in his latest book, *U. S. War Aims*. Stated briefly, Lippmann's thesis declares:

That the Soviet Union is a totalitarian dictatorship;

That the United States can remain at peace with the Soviet Union only if the latter adopts "democracy," that is, the American way of life, and agrees to the suppression of the Communist movements in Europe and America.

What is startling about this thesis

is that a man of Lippmann's caliber and background can project a perspective of war between the United States and the Soviet Union at a time when these two countries, together with Britain, are putting into practice an agreement which provides for a post-war era of enduring peace and while the common war against Hitler is still in progress. It betrays a desire to restrict the influence and role of the Soviet Union in the post-war period, a position at complete variance with the premises embodied in the Teheran Agreement, and perspectives of full and equal cooperation. How Lippmann could arrive at this thesis as his main conclusion from all that has happened in the world in the past eleven years, and especially from the Anglo-Soviet-American collaboration on the field of battle, is not for us to explain. And yet the fact remains that Lippmann, an able thinker, starting from the correct premise that the fear of communism must be eliminated for the sake of world peace, arrives at the false and dangerous conclusion that this requires the elimination of the Communists on pain of war against the Soviet Union. It is an indication of the terrible consequences which can follow from ignorance regarding the character of the Communist movement.

We can, of course, dismiss Lippmann's *flat* declarations about the character of the Soviet Union as utterly worthless and arrogant, reminiscent of the idiocies perpetrated against that country during the disgraceful "Communazi" days of August-September, 1930. At this late

stage, suddenly to insist on judging Soviet democracy by the standards of American capitalist democracy is not only irresponsible national arrogance, but highly suspicious behavior. To question the democratic character of the land of socialism after the matchless performance and countless sacrifices of its entire people against Hitlerism in the service of all humanity is unworthy of an honest man. Judged by the test of performance in the war, both in its military and diplomatic phases—and, in the last analysis, there is no more effective or more practical test today—the Soviet Union is outstanding as a *democratic* power.

Lippmann talks glibly about dissolving the Communist movements of Europe and America—as if all that were involved were the closing of a bank account. For some strange reason, he selects little Switzerland as the model to follow in such an action. But the world remembers the more notorious example of Hitler Germany where the suppression of the Communist movement was only the preliminary to the destruction of the whole labor movement and the institution of a regime of bloody terror, followed by a drive for world conquest. If Lippmann's thesis has a familiar ring to it, it is because the world has had ample opportunity to become acquainted with it in the form originally advanced by barbarous German imperialism.

The Communist Parties are not only playing a magnificent role in the destruction of fascism and winning the war; but, as a result of this, they are being welcomed into the new democratic governments

arising in Europe. In asking for the destruction of the Communist Parties, Lippmann, therefore, is asking for a reversal of the existing relations in the anti-Hitler camp of Europe and the world. But to ask for this is to ask for civil war in Europe and for scrapping the Teheran Agreement and its perspectives of order and peace. That is the real substance of Lippmann's thesis.

A Lesson from France

How far removed Lippmann's speculations are from the real trend of developments produced by the war is shown by what is taking place in the flesh-and-blood struggle in Europe. In the countries of Europe, devastated and tortured by the Nazi conquerors, the prejudices and divisions sedulously cultivated against the Communists during the past quarter century have been swept away by the torrents of blood which the patriots of all classes have poured out in resistance to the common enemy. A profound change has occurred in these countries in the relation of the nation to the Communists; and this change, so incalculable in its significance for the future, is a much more accurate indication of what is happening in the world than the illusions and misrepresentations which generally pass for facts in the American press.

Some idea of this change can be gotten from a stirring little volume on the French underground by Joseph Kessel, just translated into English under the title of *Army of Shadows*. "I should like you to understand me once and for all," a non-Communist engineer declares to

a fellow prisoner in a French concentration camp. "There are no longer suspicions, hatreds or barriers of any sort between communists and others. Today we are French. We are all in the same fight. And it is the communists against whom the enemy is most rabid. We know it. And we know that they are as brave as the bravest and better organized. They help us and we help them. They like us and we like them. Everything has become very simple. . . . I don't know a man in the resistance who does not speak of the communists with a special quality in his voice and expression, a deeper gravity."

In the United States everything has not become so simple and crystal clear yet; the United States has not suffered from the horrors of Nazi occupation. But the great lessons of the war are being reflected even in our more limited experience, and the profound changes which are transforming all relations in Europe and the Far East and etching the pattern of the future are slowly but surely being registered here too.

We do not know for whom Lippmann speaks besides himself or what forces other than the most reactionary he expects will sponsor and promote such a policy. But it is evident that he is not speaking in the spirit of the Teheran agreement, which embodies the will and the best interests of world democracy. Surely he must know that peace for generations can be achieved only by the victory of the democratic forces who will insist on policies assuring a democratic course of development of the world.

False Premises

From the American viewpoint, there are two false assumptions underlying Lippmann's thesis: (1) that American citizens do not have the right to hold Communist views or belong to a Communist organization, and, by so doing, place themselves beyond our democratic Constitution; (2) that the Communist movement is incompatible with democracy.

These assumptions have been effectively disposed of, both legally and theoretically, even by the United States Supreme Court in its decision on the *Schneiderman* case in June, 1943. This decision recognized that American citizens holding Communist views or membership in the Communist organization are acting within the framework of the Constitution. It based this on the principle that the Constitution is no straitjacket on progress and on future generations and that social, economic and political changes produce changing needs. It refused to restrict the concept of freedom of thought, either to a majority or to a minority, or in the range or in the extremity of the thought, and consequently to the exclusion of fundamental revolutionary change. It refused to regard Communist proposals for ultimate social change as incompatible with the political philosophy of the Constitution and the democratic tradition. It acknowledged that the Communist movement represents a democratic political current in American life—a fact underscored by the

signal contribution of the Communists to our nation's war effort.

The assumption that the Communists are not and cannot be an integral part of the democratic development of the nation is also contrary to the democratic origin, ideals and practical achievements of the Communist movement. The modern Communist movement had its origin in England, France and the United States. It arose within the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, expressing the desire of the most consistent democrats in these revolutions for the energetic defense and development of the newly established republics against monarchic counter-revolution and for the extension of the benefits of these republics to the common people. "The first appearance of a really active Communist party," Karl Marx declared, "may be placed within the period of the middle-class revolution, the moment when constitutional monarchy was abolished." The Communist movement was the organized expression of the desire of labor and the common people to liberate themselves from exploitation and oppression and to achieve equality and abundance for all.

Marxism, the defining characteristic of present-day communism, also arose within the modern democratic movement for the abolition of feudal conditions in Germany. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the men who placed communism on a scientific basis, were active members of the German democratic camp which carried on republican

and democratic agitation in monarchic Prussia. They were part of the university group of Young Hegelians which supplied the personnel of the German democratic press in 1840-1842. Confronted by the social question, and inspired by French communism and English Chartism, the contemporary form of the labor movement of these countries, they began to study the working of modern capitalist society.

They came to the conclusion that political democracy alone was insufficient and that the industrial proletariat of the cities, with its demand for social equality, had become the core of all modern democracy, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry depending entirely on its initiative. "When the proletarian parties of various nations unite," Engels wrote in 1845, "they are quite right in inscribing the word 'democracy' on their banners."

The new Communist party, organized by Marx and Engels at this time, was outspoken about its democratic aspirations. In 1847, for example, the *Communist Journal* took Karl Heinzen, a bourgeois radical, to task for distorting the Communist position on democracy. "Either Karl Heinzen is completely ignorant of the meaning of communism," it declared, "or he has allowed his personal antagonism to certain Communists to prejudice his judgment of the party which stands in the front ranks of the armies fighting for democracy." The official *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Marx and Engels in 1848, called for

winning the battle of democracy which would require the attainment of political power by the working class.

Marx and Engels fully appreciated the significance of the existence of democracy in the United States. In 1845, when they began the struggle to place the Communist movement on a scientific basis, they took issue with such German Communists as Herman Kriege, who had come to the United States that year and tried to set up a secret society along the old pattern prevailing in the Communist movement before Marx and Engels came forward. They insisted that the task of German immigrants in the United States was to become fully American and that, as Communists, they must immediately associate themselves with the real American labor movement which, at that time, assumed the form of a struggle for free land and was known as the Agrarian or National Reformers. In 1847 they reiterated their stand that, since the United States has a democratic Constitution, the Communists must make common cause with those who are utilizing this Constitution in the interests of the working class and the people in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. They contrasted the conditions in Europe and the United States, and expressed the opinion that because of the existence of democracy in America, which gave political rights to labor, the social transformation of society in the New World might take place by peaceful means as part of the democratic process.

The Test of War

It is no accident, therefore, that in two of the great wars which have been fought to determine the fate of our country as a free and independent nation, the Civil War of 1861 and the present war, the Communists have demonstrated their democratic devotion to the nation and the people in self-sacrificing deeds. In the Civil War of 1861 the leading Marxists volunteered in the Union armies and because of their valor and initiative received officers' commissions from President Lincoln. Joseph Weydemeyer, friend and follower of Karl Marx, even became a general in charge of the St. Louis district. Karl Marx himself, residing in London, rallied the workers of England and Europe in support of the United States government, for which Lincoln expressed the gratitude of the American people. In the present war against fascism the contributions of the Communists are a matter of public record. Humanity has never asked any more positive proof than this. But to the advocate of the abolition of the Communist movement this apparently does not constitute proof. He wants the Communists to prove themselves not by what they do in the course of their existence, but by going out of existence altogether! Obviously this is not a demand for proof; it is proof of an utterly irrational demand.

The history of the Communist movement, especially during the past eleven years, has been interwoven with issues and developments of the greatest magnitude in the life of our nation. An unpreju-

diced evaluation would show that the Communist movement has played a positive and influential role in determining their outcome. But Lippmann prefers to imply that all the Communists have contributed during this time is an issue. As a convenient and facile way to dispense with the need of thinking about complicated questions, this may be sufficient. But as an understanding of the main forces of our country's democratic development, it is worse than shallow.

The facts speak for themselves:

1. The Communists taught millions of Americans how to organize and fight for unemployment relief and social security.

2. The Communists pioneered in the organization of the unorganized millions of America's workers; in the building of mighty industrial unions and a labor movement, now fourteen million strong, which constitutes the main bulwark of American democracy; and, above all, in helping to crystallize the independent economic and political strength of American labor for the first time in the history of the United States.

3. The Communists played a leading and decisive role in helping the Negro people win the support of the labor movement in their struggle for equality, and in enabling them to emerge as a powerful factor for democracy in our nation.

4. The Communists pioneered in opening the South to the modern labor and democratic movements which is leading to a fundamental change in the role of that great section of the country in the life and history of the nation.

5. The Communists, by their influence in the labor movement, among the Negro people and the progressive forces generally, have made a decisive contribution toward enabling our country to meet the greatest crisis in its history, its third and biggest war for national independence and freedom.

What else are these but signal contributions to the welfare of the nation and the creation of the main driving forces of our democratic existence and development?

But the truth is that Lippmann is concerned neither with the theory nor the practice of democracy. To the extent that it finds expression in his thesis, it is in the form of the notorious "fear of democracy" which we have met time and again in the history of modern society ever since the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth century. All one can say of this is what Turgot, the great French publicist and contemporary of our Founding Fathers, said of some of their fears of democracy: "By striving to escape imaginary dangers they had created real ones." The only difference is that Lippmann's views are not those of the responsible forces guiding the destiny of our nation. Nor is the issue which he projects for the post-war period the issue which will arise out of victory in the war. For, this issue and victory over Hitler are two mutually exclusive concepts, two mutually exclusive facts.

Lippmann regards himself as a ruthless realist; he thinks only in the hard terms and brutal realities of power—obviously the power of

imperialism. But because his eye is focused on the wrong power, he sees the wrong "realities." The actual realities are moving along a different path, a democratic path of development, as the whole course of the war is demonstrating; and it is this democratic path which will assert itself as the inexorable logic of victory in the war. And the surest guarantee of this is the power of the democratic forces which have been brought forward by the war and which is exercised through the alliance of the United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain.

This is the reason Lippmann's thesis also fails the moral test. The contradiction between morality and the "brutal realities" of power in Lippmann's position, which leads him to dismiss moral considerations altogether, arises from the fact that he operates with the wrong "realities," the "realities" of imperialist power politics. By clinging to the premise of imperialist power relations which are devoid of any moral content, his only refuge is to dismiss moral considerations altogether, not as a more adequate substitute but rather as a cover for the total abandonment of such considerations, which, in the last analysis, are essentially considerations of jus-

tice. Were Lippmann to base himself on the "realities" and the power of the democratic driving forces emerging out of the war, the contradiction inherent in his thesis would disappear; the considerations of morality and reality would merge; for the policies and interests of the democratic forces, in contrast to imperialist interests, are profoundly moral, for they are profoundly just and in full harmony with the progressive interests of all nations and peoples.

The trouble with Lippmann is that he operates with abstract categories and overlooks the real forces of democracy, the forces of the people whose needs are inseparably associated with the over-riding necessities of economy and national interest. Order, peace, democracy, national interest—all the things in the name of which Lippmann advances his thesis, can be realized only by the assertion of these forces. These are the realities; and here lies the power; not where Lippmann sees them. The science of thought has never consisted in presenting passing facts as eternal verities. And there is no room in the new world arising out of the war for Hitler's scale of values regarding the Communist movement.

A RESOLUTE NON-PARTISAN POLICY TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL UNITY *

BY EUGENE DENNIS

ONE of the central conclusions which must be drawn from the latest political and election developments, including the outcome of the Republican and Democratic conventions, is the need of strengthening labor and national unity. Now more than ever before, as Earl Browder has stressed, it is necessary to *steer a resolute course of non-partisanship in the elections, to work to unite patriots of all classes and party affiliations for the re-election of Roosevelt and the election of a victory Congress.* For only in this way can victory be assured in November for the coalition supporting the Commander-in-Chief and the government's war and post-war policies.

In terms of practical election considerations it is clear that only a non-partisan election policy can succeed in influencing and rallying the bulk of the independent voters who comprise over 25 per cent of the electorate—and a most decisive part. Only such a policy can influence the majority of the Negro people to support the re-election of the President.

Only such a policy can influence and draw into progressive political action the millions of new workers who have entered into war industry. And only such an approach can influence tens of thousands of the adherents of Willkie to rise above partisan considerations.

No less important than such considerations as these is the cardinal fact that the most vital interests of the nation's war effort require that labor, the Roosevelt Democrats, as well as all patriotic Republicans, really conduct the election campaign in a spirit of national unity. This is a supreme necessity in order to consolidate the unity of the nation for the final military undertakings now being launched and for insuring the most stable internal political relations after the war. This is equally needed to help strengthen the post-war collaboration of the American-Soviet-British coalition, for securing the peace and solving the problems of reconversion and reconstruction.

Therefore, among other things, it is necessary now as never before to make clear that Roosevelt must be supported not because he is a Democrat and the candidate of the Democratic Party, but because he is a great patriot and the foremost

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