

Little Orphan Annie, Fascist

RALPH McKINLEY

HAROLD GRAY, creator of the country's No. 1 fascist comic strip, has come forward publicly with a group of theses which should explain to those amazed by the recent antics of "Little Orphan Annie," the ideology behind his "arts." In the January issue of Quill, a monthly magazine for writers, editors and publishers, Mr. Gray contributes the following apothegms:

1. Comic artists have a right to express convictions on any side of any important issue.

2. There is no use for the American Newspaper Guild.

3. A man is worth just exactly what he can get.

4. Life is a battle, with victory for the brave and strong-hearted alone.

Mr. Gray, in his article entitled "I've Learned about Comics from Her," frankly admits making a practice of "violating the standing rule against editorializing," because without such "raids" Annie alone "would soon pall terribly." He reveals that contrary to a report in Time he was *not* told to stop editorializing and received no comment of any sort from his syndicate. Moreover, having counted on "Americanism outweighing wild-eyed radicalism in this country" he is proud to report that even if a West Virginia paper *did* cancel his comic strip, his list of papers jumped ("carrying my royalty checks pleasantly higher, of course").

Mr. Gray's method of attack, as he explains it, is more calculating than it is brave. He sets the stage for a raid for several months and then, in his own words, "sneaks up" on the main story, comes into the open and drives through "the real action" within four weeks. Then comes the sporting part. He gets "cleanly out of the way and onto safe ground before the deluge" of protest. There is plenty of protest, but those who find his anti-union propaganda objectionable are "professional protesters" and it is better not to give them a chance "to get set."

The Gray brand of Americanism is approved and applauded by solid citizens, the artist points out, but at the same time it must be dished out "at carefully spaced intervals." Otherwise the protest from "little labor union headquarters" might become cumulative and of sufficient force to cause trouble.

Those unfamiliar with Gray's exposure of "labor racketeers," which the artist refers to in the autobiography of his rise, need study only the "Annie" release of July 17, 1935, to understand why the chronicle of "just a simple orphan kid" should have aroused "vituperative and viciously abusive mail."

On that day in Gray's comic strip we find three well-bearded fanatics (the type Red-

baiting cartoonists have presented as Bolsheviks ever since 1917) discussing the organization of a union of workers in the Eonite plant owned by Daddy Warbucks—to whom Little Orphan Annie is a sort of juvenile Peaches Browning. The organizers are anxious for unionization because that means "initiation fees," "fines," "assessments." "We cannot even bomb the plant—" one laments, "there are too many guards." These agitators, enlisted by a villain named Slugg, want to get Eonite away from good old Warbucks. But those who are bent on the evil of organizing the workers, take a smearing. On August 3, under the general title "The Workers Arise," a gang of "loyal" company men dispose neatly of the Reds. Mr. Gray here demonstrates his fine Americanism. His is the Ku Klux brand of patriotism. When one of the hirsute radicals cries, "The hour has struck—the time has come to act," a true "American" cries "I'll say it has" and the following sentiments are heard:

Have you got that tar boiling, Jerry?
Who's got the feathers?
Arise, eh? See how you like arising on that rail—

This is just an old American custom, boys—and the organizers are promptly tarred and feathered. The incident is captioned: "Our Feathered Friends."

The artist establishes clearly on August 8 that the imminent attack by workers who have been aroused by "fulminators" (although said workers were satisfied with working conditions on July 17 and showed their satisfaction by the use of tar and feathers five days ago) threatens not only Mr. Warbucks but all mankind. Daddy's speech to Annie on August 8 is another lyric:

Suppose the mob should destroy the plant and deliver the secret of Eonite into Slugg's hands—that would mean ruin and slavery for the whole human race instead of the prosperity and happiness that I am trying to bring to all.

However, the whole human race takes it on the chin four days later, when the mob destroys the Eonite plant and kills off old Eli Eon, the inventor, in the bargain. But the National Guard arrives to handle the situation. On the 13th the colonel of the guard, a handsome, broad-chested fellow with a mustache like that of Mr. Esquire, reports on the telephone to Daddy W.:

There's a little sporadic fighting—a few wild-eyed remnants of the mob still insist on having their skulls cracked—but everything is well in hand.

And the mob which wrecked the plant is described, through Mr. Crackbrain:

They were mad—their eyes were glazed—their faces contorted and bestial.

Patriot Gray's attack on the American Newspaper Guild, like his drawing and writing, has the grace and charm of a dancing elephant. "I admit complete ignorance of any use for the American Newspaper Guild," he writes, bringing up the subject in connection with a letter he received from a Guildsman. "From my contacts with members of the Fourth Estate, a man who has what it takes doesn't need any Guild or Union, nor will he fail to collect every dime he is worth from a delighted and grateful public."

In the next paragraph come other deft epigrams, one right after the other:

I have always felt, even passing through the \$15-a-week stage, that a man is worth just exactly what he can get. No Guild on earth can make a stupid reporter brilliant, or even capable and self-reliant.

The axiom that a man is worth what he can get heaps kudos on Al Capone and makes Jesus Christ look like a piker, because he got practically nothing.

While your friend McKinley doesn't know about all the Guilds on earth, as a member of the American Newspaper Guild he can't recall a single instance wherein the A.N.G. promised to make a stupid reporter brilliant, or even capable or self-reliant. As a rule, stupid, incapable and unreliable reporters are not in a position to join the Guild, since such men are not ordinarily hired or maintained by bright executives.

That victory-for-the-brave Gray should openly announce his intention of continuing to malign the labor movement at carefully-spaced intervals and that he could boast of his syndicate's silent approval of his editorializing, should be of interest to all unions, editors, reporters and even some publishers. Maybe this time the professional protesters can "get set" for Mr. Gray.

Already the Springfield, Mass., Guild is set for Daddy Warbucks and the little orphan girl. The Guildsmen in that city took Gray's Quill article to the editor-in-chief of The Springfield Republican, in which the comic strip is appearing. Said the editor: "Thank you. I'll watch the strip carefully in the future." But the Guild is pressing to have the strip removed on the strength of its past record, plus Mr. Gray's credo.

Those who find Annie poorly drawn and devoid of anything resembling humor, should not conclude that the artist can't be funny. He can, even without trying. In a concluding paragraph to his success story in the Quill, Mr. Gray writes:

Whatever else I may ever attempt to do with the strip, you may be sure it will always remain clean and decent.

That's very funny, Mr. Gray.

Elmer Rice Answers Raskob

The Liberty League Solicits Customers

February 4, 1936.

Mr. John J. Raskob,
Empire State,
New York City.
My dear Mr. Raskob:

I AM happy to be one of the 150,000 recipients of your chatty, personal letter. It is indeed an honor to be included in that heroic band of "members of stockholders committees, industrialists and leading figures in business and civic life," (New York Herald-Tribune) to whom you have addressed your clarion call "to rally to the standard of the American Liberty League" (New York Herald-Tribune) in defense of the sacred rights of property.

It was gratifying to learn from your letter that you have acquired "a competence for old age and the care of dependents." I have, of course, heard rumors to that effect, but one scarcely knows what to believe these days, and it is good to learn over your own signature, that you are not a candidate for home relief, an old-age pension or any of the other hateful forms of governmental patronage.

Too, I was greatly interested to learn something of your background and early experiences, which, in many ways, are similar to my own. I, also, had the good fortune to be born a citizen of the United States—as had my parents before me—and, like you, I was obliged, at an early age, to make my own way in the world. You were lucky enough to be able to remain at school until you were nineteen; I had to go to work, at fifteen.

My first job paid me \$4.50 per week. At nineteen (when you were beginning at \$5) I had already worked my way up to \$9. Later, my fortunes, like yours, improved and, like you, I have succeeded for a good many years now, in making a comfortable living although I must confess that I have never had to face the embarrassing necessity of avoiding an income-tax liability of \$600,000 (a single calendar year).

But now I come to an important point of difference between us. It is simply this, Mr. Raskob: my nature is sadly lacking in that happy resiliency which sparkles through every paragraph of your refreshing and stimulating letter. Temperamentally, I am morose and sombre and so I have never been able to shake off the memory of those bitter early years of drudgery and starvation wages. Morally, I have continued, throughout the years, to identify myself with the tens of millions underpaid, underfed, underprivileged young men and young women, from whose blood

and sinew such great fortunes as yours and those of your associates are distilled.

Like you, I am the head of a family and so I understand how comforting to you is the knowledge that your twelve dependents are not in immediate danger of want. But are you not forgetting, Mr. Raskob, that for each of your twelve there are today, in this land of opportunity and plenty, one million unemployed men and women?—human beings with desires, needs and feelings very much like yours, who are denied, through no fault of their own, the bare necessities of life, the bare right to provide for themselves and their dependents. Other tens of millions lead a precarious existence, with little or no margin between themselves and actual destitution, never knowing an instant of real security, their pinched lives darkened by the ever-present specters of illness, unemployment and penniless old age. What about their "human rights"?

You are one of the leaders of a great industry which has always been conspicuous for its refusal to grant to its workers their

"human rights" to organize for the betterment of their own condition. You and your fellow captains of industry have met the "group initiative and enterprise" of these workers with the clubs of the uniformed forces of law and order and with the bullets of hired assassins. Secure in your economic oligarchy, you have not hesitated to rob men of their employment, without warning; to toss them on the industrial scrap-heap at forty; so much slag in the process of smelting your gold. Your associates in the American Liberty League—the feudal barons of Delaware—are the beneficiaries of organized mass-murder; they have coined their wealth from the bodies that strew the battlefields of the world.

To the hungry, the maimed, the disinherited of this land of ours, your phrases about liberty and freedom must seem as empty as the Empire State Building or the brown derby of the Happy Warrior. Compared to the "freedom" which serves only to entrench a handful of plutocrats in the possession of their dubiously-acquired wealth, the "tyranny" of a form of government which guaranteed, to all its citizens, economic security and a minimum of decent living would be a blessing, indeed.

Literature is not your trade, Mr. Raskob, and so we must not condemn you for the ineptness of your "paraphrase" of the Declaration of Independence. But permit me to counsel you to read further in that splendid document. In the very paragraph which you "paraphrase" you will find these words which require no paraphrase: "Whenever any government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

When the people of this country see fit to exercise that right, the industrial magnates and the captains of finance will go the way of all the despots and oppressors, whose inordinate lust of wealth and power has blackened and reddened the pages of human history.

And so, my dear Mr. Raskob, I decline with thanks your friendly invitation to join the American Liberty League. I prefer to take my stand with that "vicious radical element" which clamors for a new social order, based not upon the preservation of the property rights of the predatory few, but upon the satisfaction of the human needs of all.

Very truly yours,

ELMER RICE.

New York, N. Y.

From John J. Raskob's Letter

Beginning life as a poor boy blessed with splendid health, the finest heritage which a good father and mother can leave any child, I was able to acquire a good grammar and commercial school education before starting to work at five dollars per week, at the age of nineteen years, to make my own way in the world.

It was my good fortune to be born a citizen of the United States of America—a country whose government is founded on a constitution which respects the rights of persons and property as fundamental to every successful form of government and which teaches the duty of government to encourage and protect individual and group initiative and enterprise; to foster the right to work, earn, save and acquire property and to preserve the ownership and lawful use of property when acquired. These are human rights.

Through the years I have been successful—successful in retaining good health and, through hard work and saving, in acquiring a competence for old age and the care of dependents. . . .

As a citizen with the responsibilities of the head of a family of twelve, as a property owner, stockholder and director in several corporations, I hope you will not think me presumptuous in calling on you and your friends to unite with others in issuing a clarion call to all liberty-loving citizens to join the American Liberty League . . . which is doing everything possible to root out the vicious radical element that threatens the destruction of our government.