

# CAPITALISTS ARE FUNNY

By FRANK CHODOROV

AMONG THE incongruities of our society, none defies understanding more than the loyalty of the capitalist toward institutions propagating, under the guise of education, and with an air of objectivity, the hate-capitalism doctrine. The doctrine impregnates the textbooks used in courses that pass as "social science"—particularly those dealing with economics and politics, though one finds it bobbing up also in history books and even in those books which deal presumably with pure literature.

The doctrine suddenly stared at our Capitalist from signs and leaflets carried by his workers in a never-ending parade outside his window. He had known many of these people as friendly folk. What had happened to them? They were now on strike.

The same doctrine was brought home to our Capitalist as he was listening to the argument of the Conciliator from Washington that he make concessions to the Union Leader's demands, but the Conciliator's manner was milder than that of the Leader. Somehow he found that he was speaking a different language from either of them.

And then came the request from the president of his alma mater for an increased annual contribution, as the money was needed for the new Social Science building where courses for the promotion of better labor-management relations would be given. The thought struck him that there, in the building

he would help erect, will be sown the seed of the vituperative picket-slogans which have been driving him to distraction. There the doctrine that breaks out in strike riots will be implanted in the next generation.

"MY DEAR friend," says the Conciliator, "you can well afford the raise asked for by the men, or at least a part of it. Last year your cash dividends came to a round seven percent, to say nothing of the stock dividend. You will not have to raise your prices to make this concession. Profits can absorb it."

The Capitalist does not know what to say. His blood pressure chokes his power of speech. For two years he has been planning an expansion program, so that the greater production, due to technological advances, would enable him to lower his prices and widen his market. More capital is needed. As every neophyte in business should know, capital flows more readily to a profitable business than an unprofitable one. The dividends this corporation has been paying out of its earnings will facilitate the flotation of a new stock issue, or bank borrowings, so that the expansion program can be put into effect. And now he learns that there is something reprehensible in the paying of profits to investors; he is put in the position of apologizing for running a successful business.

Profits—that is the key word of the controversy. The Conciliator and the

Leader have been harping on it, and out there on the picket-line he reads a sign: "Wages Before Profits." Another: "Dividends for Workers, not Wall Street." And did not the Leader pontificate that profits were paid for by babies who went without milk?

To comprehend the Conciliator and the Leader, our Capitalist must go back to his college. He must enroll in Economics 3, where he will come in contact with a book called *Economic Principles and Problems*, written by P. F. Gemmill and R. A. Blodgett. Both authors hold Ph.D. degrees, and both are listed on the title-page as professors. He will learn from their book that about everything bad in the social order can be traced to the profit-motive.

For instance, on page 447 he will read: "So long as the profit-motive remains undisturbed, it is hard to imagine an economic society free from depression." This will be startling news to the Capitalist, because experience tells him that profits come from sales, that sales make jobs, that the more he sells the more he buys from suppliers, who also employ help. And, is it not a fact, he asks himself, that profits encourage investment and investment means more economic activity which, in simple language, means more jobs? The textbook, however, describes profits as economic poison.

To improve on his economic re-education, he should attend the Graduate School lectures, devoted to pure theory. There he will hear reference to a theory called "surplus value." The professor will dismiss the theory as outmoded and invalid, but nevertheless he will explain it as "historically

important," and thus the Capitalist will learn how the authors of *Economic Principles and Problems* came by the notion that profits are bad. This surplus-value theory, invented by a fellow named Karl Marx, declares (to make it simple) that the worker is compelled to sell his services to the Capitalist for subsistence wages, and that all he produces above that necessary minimum is appropriated by the Capitalist; the appropriation is profit.

This will confuse our student-Capitalist more than ever. He knows that he is incapable of fixing the rate of wages; it is determined in the market. The more he sells the more workers he needs, and their wages go up accordingly. In the final analysis the rate of wages he pays is set by the consumers who buy his products, and since these consumers are, on the whole, the workers themselves, it is in reality they who, unbeknownst to themselves, determine their wages.

That he knows from experience, not books. But the books resolve for him the difficulty in understanding the language of the Conciliator and the Leader. His trouble arises from the fact that he has been away from college too long. Or did they use a different textbook twenty-five years ago?

**T**HEN THERE is Economics 17. That is one course he cannot afford to cut, since its advertisement promises a scientific solution of the very difficulties from which he is now suffering. The adopted textbook is entitled *Labor Problems in American Industry*, and the scholarship of its author, Carroll H. Daugherty, is guaranteed by the insignia attached to his name; be-

sides, the book is published by a house that sponsored books long before he was born and, presumably, should know a good book when it sees one. Scanning the pages he runs across the information that "the employer's point of view toward the wage-earner's standard is essentially the attitude of the master toward his slave or horses or cattle."

That reminds him of something the Leader said to him a few days ago, about changing times and the necessity of altering his view toward the laboring class; one must no longer think of the workers as cattle, disposable when no longer usable. The remark struck him as rather silly, for he knew that in hiring men he entered into a contractual relationship, and one does not do that with either horses or slaves. Now it occurs to him that the Leader must be acquainted with this textbook, or maybe, though the thought is extremely distasteful, the Leader got his ideas from Economics 17, in the curriculum of his own college.

He is reminded by this and other remarks by Mr. Daugherty of a lecture in Economics 107, the one given in the Graduate School. The professor had been discussing a pamphlet called *Communist Manifesto*, which he had described as "world-shaking," even though it contained, he said, many inaccuracies. Something so highly praised is surely worth a nickel. Reading this document, he learns that his life function, as a Capitalist, is to rob the worker, to push him "deeper and deeper below the conditions of his own class." There are other statements just as unflattering to his social status, though, to be sure, they

exonerate him from moral turpitude by blaming his exploitative occupation on some mysterious and ineluctable historical force. In the end, the pamphlet says, he will be done away with by this same historic force, and the world will be the better for his passing.

The textbook of Economics 17, the one given to undergraduates, seems to echo the thoughts expressed in the *Manifesto*, though there is more moderation in tone and enough circumlocution to satisfy academic standards; more important, in the present circumstances, is the suggestion that the textbook and the pamphlet may have seminanted something the Leader was reported to have said at a mass meeting last week. He had thundered about "labor coming unto its own," and the *Manifesto* talks about a "dictatorship of the proletariat," while the textbook, on page 551, praises "the revolutionary idealism which wishes to replace the selfish profits motive with the incentive of social service." The pups look different but they all come from the same litter.

**H**OW LONG has this been going on? Our Capitalist brings the matter up at the next meeting of his board of directors and it is decided that each of them should look into the textbooks used at his alma mater in the economics courses. Comparing notes, they find such uniformity in the approach to the subject of economics that the multiplicity of texts strikes them as sheer waste. This approach, they find, coincides with the experience of the Capitalist who went back to college.

For instance, one director turns up with a book called *Economics*, by Pro-

fessor John Ise. Of its 600-odd pages, about two-thirds are devoted to political ideologies, to isms, with capitalism coming out second best in every instance. Even in that part devoted, presumably, to the science of making a living—which ought to be the undertaking of economic study—there is little of the scientific method, of definitions and principles, and much of political regulation of and intervention in the marketplace. The impression one gets from this textbook is that economics is the study of the statutes governing the economic preoccupation of men, with the idea that through trial and error a perfect set of statutes will bring about the ideal social order. And that about sums up the purpose of all the textbooks.

"Unless labor organizations show a more vigorous growth in the future," one director reads, from a book called *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, "other resources of society must be drawn upon to meet these problems." What, the directors speculate, is meant by "other resources of society"? "It should be noted," another director reads from *American Economic Development*, recommended by his professor, "that the trend of action in improving and protecting the position of workers is toward the idea of industrial democracy."

So, that's what it is—industrial democracy. In what way are these notions different in essence from what is being hinted at in the Graduate School, about the inevitable class struggle ending up in the glorious dictatorship of the proletariat? And how can the students avoid gleaning from these books that the people who engage in

business enterprise are at best a parasitical outcropping of social evolution? Just as the Leader and the Conciliator insinuate in their thinking.

**B**UT THIS is make-believe. The Capitalist does not go back to college, does not know what kind of education is being disseminated in the classroom behind these hallowed ivy-covered walls. His donations are without rational basis; he is being loyal to his youth, and that may be explained biologically. The very name of the college conjures up lost illusions and he tries to recapture them with a check. It is a sacrificial offering to his memories.

The incongruity of financing propaganda inimical to one's own interests can be explained on no other grounds. It is as if he were hiring a public relations counsel to give him the worst possible press—to present him to the world as a parasite, a beast of prey, that ought to be put out of existence. Some of the students whose "education" he is paying for will become teachers of the selfsame hate-philosophy, adding new books to the surfeit now crowding out of the libraries any contrary literature. Others will become journalists and, knowing nothing else, will unconsciously impregnate the record of events with their jaundiced point of view. Many will enter the burgeoning government service where the opportunity to put into practice the doctrines absorbed in these "social science" courses will be all too tempting.

Thus, his contributions to the college create a subjective attitude that eventually simmers down to the non-

collegiate mind and shapes its thinking. It is on the picket-line or inside his office and factory that he feels the impact of the learning he has fostered.

Is it "truth" that is being disseminated in these courses? The Capitalist would be warranted in supporting the college on that score, regardless of any consequences to himself and his beliefs; the eradication of error carries its own reward. That brings up the question, What is Truth? Of a certainty, the truth cannot be ascertained by the espousal of a single line of thought, by the investigation of facts from a hypothesis that arbitrarily excludes all others. The "social sciences" courses are obviously so slanted these days that the student, unless later experience restores to him a sense of balance, will never be able to judge the soundness of the ideas got from them. His mind is weighted. Hence, the Capitalist who supports these courses is doing the cause of truth, and the student, an injustice.

Were the Capitalist more rational than romantic in his eleemosynary activity, were he to put to his contribu-

tions for education the same acumen that makes him a successful businessman, he would support only those institutions that spread ideas opposite to what is taught at the school he loves. True, he has little opportunity; for an examination of the textbooks used in the colleges reveals a ritualistic uniformity in the collectivistic point of view, a disdainful attitude toward all individualistic ideas. It would seem necessary for the Capitalist to found a new college and to subsidize a new set of books.

If that is a task of forbidding proportions, the next best thing to do is to foster a literature, particularly a press, devoted to the propagation of the very conceptions that our colleges are desperately trying to kill. It is an odd commentary that the few individualistic publications now extant in capitalistic America are struggling along with subsidies from devoted writers, while those that advocate or insinuate collectivistic doctrine are doing right well for themselves.

Proving again that Capitalists are funny.

## ***Comin' Through the Soviet Rye***

*As Sung by Trofim Lysenko*

*(Without apologies to "Bourgeois Bobbie" Burns)*

*News item, December 16: Crediting the achievement to "Stalinist teaching," Soviet geneticist Lysenko declares that, under his direction, Russian agronomists have turned wheat into rye. Western scientists say that such a feat is impossible, and would be analagous to changing a dog into a cat.*

When a *moujik* meets a Comrade  
Where the wheat grows high,  
He can hardly fail to notice  
It has turned to rye.

Every proletarian gene must  
Serve the state, say I;  
(And the Kremlin smiles on me  
For changin' wheat to rye).

M.T.W.