"Red Totalitarianism"

BY FREDKA KIRCHWEY

I T'S HARD, these days, to distinguish words from acts and ideas from political maneuvers. This difficulty can be carried to extremes of suspicion and subtle exegesis, as our contributor George Kaufman hinted in his recent dissertation on the Presidential "Good Morning." But I hope I am not succumbing to an attack of morbid distrust when I question the purposes of the manifesto issued the other day by a group headed by John Dewey and published on page 626 of this issue of The Nation. It is an eloquent statement. It says that intellectual freedom is good, that totalitarian repression is bad, and it calls for the formation of a Committee for Cultural Freedom in America. On the surface this looks like an innocent "Good Morning" from a group of honest intellectuals.

I believe the group to be honest but not innocent. I have no doubt that they really want to defend intellectual freedom, but I think they also intended to drop a bomb into the ranks of the liberal and left groups in the United States. Several other committees, already in existence, are also dedicated to the cause of a free culture. The only distinction, and therefore the only important feature of the present manifesto, is its emphasis on Russian totalitarianism. And this emphasis reveals the special purpose of the new committee, which is obviously to separate the sheep from the goats; to show up those who, in the words of the statement itself, "exalt one brand of intellectual servitude over another" and "make fine distinctions between various methods of humiliating the human spirit and outlawing intellectual integrity"; and to create a clear division on the left by relegating members of the Communist Party and the vague ranks of its sympathizers to outer totalitarian darkness.

Now that is an arguable position, but it lies in the field of political strategy and should be debated in those terms. We need, if we are to achieve the clarification the Deweyites presumably seek, some such direct statement as Sidney Hook made in his article on The Anatomy of the Popular Front in the current Partisan Review. After developing his point that "the socialist solution ... is the only solution possible for all producers and consumers," Mr. Hook says that this requires "opposition to every step towards fascism ... and the clearest differentiation from Stalinism together with its fronts, stooges, and innocents." That puts the proposition plainly. I should have more liking for the Dewey group, for whom Mr. Hook is the active spokesman, if they were willing to make their appeal openly on this ground and fight it out there.

This is a real issue, and I am not going to charge red-baiting to those who feel as Mr. Hook does. The Communist Party is a nuisance or a menace to all its opponents. Whatever its line may be, its tactics are invariably provocative and often destructive. Not only do Communists try to inject partisan ideas into the program of most organizations in which they are active; not only do they fight ruthlessly and tenaciously to make those ideas prevail; they also have been guilty, in many known instances, of using against their enemies methods of attack that were both unscrupulous and callous. Their verbal technique is evident in the pages of the party press; vituperation and downright slander have been weapons frequently employed, whether against the "social fascists" of yesterday or the "Trotskyists" of today. The result has been to create a fund of bitterness on the left which can be drawn upon whenever a convenient occasion arises.

It can be drawn upon, but it should not be. To advocate a policy of "clearest differentiation" on the left is a counsel of disruption. With all their faults the Communists perform necessary functions in the confused struggle of our time. They have helped to build up and to run a string of organizations—known as "fronts" by their opponents—which clearly serve the cause not of "totalitarian doctrine" but of a more workable democracy. And the value of those organizations lies largely in the energy and discipline and zeal of their Communist elements.

Some of their more bitter opponents scoff at the new democratic faith, as well as the democratic works, of these erstwhile revolutionists. Suspicion is natural and may be well founded. I have not the space here to debate the question. But I am inclined to believe that the Communists have developed a sort of double mental bookkeeping by means of which they are able to account jointly for their love of Stalin and their adherence to the New Deal. At any rate, the effect of their conversion, sincere or strategical, is to postpone serious revolutionary objectives to some post-next-war millennium and to leave them free meanwhile for democratic endeavor in this world. A sour note in the new harmony is the reluctance of some of the objects of their allegiance to accept them as followers, but they persevere none the less. In fact, in the name of the fight against fascism, they have committed themselves to an almost uncritical acceptance of the status quo; and their most radical recent pronouncement was in favor of a third term for President Roosevelt. In all seriousness, the Communists in their present phase seem to me to share the larger hopes and fears that animate most other people who stand to the left of center, including many of the founders of the Committee for Cultural Freedom. Add to this the fact that they oppose with obvious sincerity all forms of racial discrimination, and the total score is one that forces me to question
the whole premise on which the Dewey statement is based.

Instead of signing any such document, I should like to plead for an era of good-will and decency. The task of recreating unity and hope and strengthening the organs of democracy is not to be accomplished by insisting upon differences and crystallizing them in manifestos and committees. While moral rearmament engrosses the right, a little factional disarmament might well be tried on the left. There is virtue in merely refusing to shoot.

From Pump-Prim ing to Pumping

BY KENNETH G. CRAWFORD

Washington, May 22

W HETHER the New Deal will go down in history as Roosevelt’s revolution or merely as a milestone on the rocky road to someone else’s revolution will depend in large measure on the success or failure of the educational project started last week by the Temporary National Economic Committee. Composed of Administration officials and Senators (in that order of importance), the committee has undertaken the difficult task of teaching the nation the lessons to be learned from the boom-depression-partial-recovery cycle of the last twenty years. The answers are well known to the more alert economists and to a few liberal politicians. But most business leaders have resolutely closed their minds to the conclusions inevitably suggested by a study of the facts. To convince the public, that is, the voters, that two and two make four in economics as well as in pure mathematics is the job undertaken by the committee.

Dr. Alvin H. Hansen of Harvard got the TNEC off to an auspicious start. In a brilliant synthesis of the country’s recent economic history, present condition, and future expectation, he clearly pointed out the direction to be followed if disaster is to be avoided. But because his testimony, delivered with impersonal assurance from under a green eyeshade, was devoid of controversial clichés, it received little consideration in the daily press. In most newspapers it was buried under President Roosevelt’s matter-of-fact letter asking the committee to look for ways of bringing idle men and idle capital together, but Hansen’s testimony was much more important than the letter. It stated with brilliant lucidity the conclusions to which most liberals, in and out of the Administration, have come.

Hansen said, in effect: “Pump-priming is all right as far as it goes, but it doesn’t go far enough. Having primed the pump and started a reasonably steady flow of goods and services, government must take a hand at the pump handle. Large-scale government spending must become a permanent, not just a transitional, policy.”

He built his conclusion on the generally accepted hypothesis that there can be no prosperity for a capitalistic economy unless savings can find outlets in a constantly expanding productive plant. With population no longer growing at the old rate, with the physical frontiers gone, and with no new industries comparable to the automobile industry in the offing, these outlets are contracting. This creates unemployment in the capital-goods industries and slows up the entire economic machine. The resulting distress is “an economic phenomenon which cannot be explained in terms of the ordinary business-cycle analysis.” Rather it is “a chronic maladjustment” which private initiative by itself cannot cure. The government must come to the rescue.

It must, (1) encourage and if necessary finance development of new products and industries; (2) finance purchase of new equipment by the railroads on a self-liquidating basis; (3) reduce the interest rate on FHA guaranteed housing loans, and (4) reform the tax structure to tap savings rather than reduce purchasing power. In other ways, too, private investment must be supplemented by public investment “on a considerable scale.” Hansen suggested construction of hospitals, highways, sewer systems, rural-electrification networks, express highways, bridges, and various other projects, self-liquidating or not. As for the federal budget, he blamed “an obsolete system of public accounting” for the current alarm about its unbalance. The budget should not be considered out of balance, he said, if income from taxes is sufficient to pay the carrying charges on the public debt.

Hansen’s statements of economic fact were fully supported by the testimony of Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors, Edward Stettinius of United States Steel, Owen D. Young of General Electric, and Frederick B. Rentchler of United Aircraft. These men proudly announced that their companies were self-financing and probably would continue to be. There would be no room for new capital in their concerns. But their thinking obviously was “dominated by frozen patterns of the past, into which people try to mold the facts of the present.” In an interview outside the hearing room, which took headline precedence over his testimony, Sloan went through the usual rigmarole about lack of business confidence...