

Alternative

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WHAT IS A COMMUNIST?

A friend of mine had asked me to help in getting a job for a man who had just arrived from Poland. I was discussing with my brother what I could tell the prospective employers.

"He was in a concentration camp," I said; "that ought to be a good recommendation."

"Oh, don't tell them he was in a concentration camp," my brother said. "Many people think that anybody who was in a concentration camp was a Communist."

"But this was a *Russian* concentration camp," I said.

"That doesn't make any difference," my brother replied. "If he was in a concentration camp, he must have been mixed up in something."

"You mean it's bad just to be mixed up in something?" I asked.

"He must have done *something*," my brother

"But this man was not a Communist," I said.

"That's what you're trying to prove," he said.

"I don't have to prove anything," I said. "This man was captured by the Communists because the Communists didn't like him."

"But why didn't they like him?" my brother asked significantly.

"For the simple reason," I said, restraining myself, "that he himself was not a Communist. Look here — he was just an ordinary person like you and me. He never did anything in his life."

"Then why did they capture him?"

"Well, maybe he made a speech or something — one speech."

"People shouldn't make speeches," my brother said emphatically.

"All right," I said. "Maybe he didn't make a speech, maybe they just didn't like the way he

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Most of our readers know that the last two issues of *Alternative* were confiscated and burned by the postal authorities — for interfering with the enlistment and recruiting service of the U. S., and for impairing morale in the armed forces.

This is not a general ban on all issues. We hope that the present issue will pass the censors in Washington. But many of our future issues would undoubtedly be confiscated if we tried to mail them.

The response of a large number of our readers has been amazing. Never before have we received so many letters of support, so many financial contributions.

The response of *Alternative* is to print twice as many copies as formerly, to increase our street distribution, and to build up centers throughout the country where our readers can pick up issues that do not go through the mails.

For all this we will need your help. We need: 1) your patience if your copy is delayed in reaching you; 2) your help in seeing that copies of *Alternative* receive the widest possible circulation; 3) increased financial contributions from those who can afford them, in order to meet increased costs of both printing and distribution; 4) letters and articles from our readers.

We hope to hear from you.

said.

"What he did was to oppose the Communists," I said. "They sent him away for being against the Communists."

"He opposed the authorities in other words," my brother said.

"But the authorities were Communist authorities," I said. "If you question the authorities when the authorities are Communists that doesn't make you a Communist, does it?"

"Many people do not understand that," my brother said. "They will tell you he must have been a radical or something to be so violent about politics."

"Who said he was violent?" I said.

"Everybody knows the Communists believe in violence," he said.

looked."

"I always said you could tell those Communists by the way they look," my brother said. "I can smell them a mile off."

"But these were Communists who smelled him," I said. "I mean, they knew he wasn't a Communist."

"He wasn't a Communist but he looked like a Communist, is that it?" my brother said.

"No, he didn't look like a Communist," I retorted. "He wasn't a Communist so how could he look like a Communist?"

"They fool you," my brother said. "They change their names and get their faces remodeled."

"What difference does it make how he looked," I exploded. "The main thing is that the Com-

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munists sent him to Siberia for two years. Does
that look as if he was a Communist?"

"How did he get out of Siberia?" my brother
asked.

"He escaped," I said. "He and four other men
managed to get away."

"I wouldn't tell them that," my brother said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"It might look as if he was a troublemaker. I
suppose he organized the escape?"

"I don't know whether he organized it or not,"
I said. "Don't you see you want people to be
troublemakers sometimes — the more trouble the
better."

My brother glanced apprehensively over his
shoulder. "Keep your voice lower," he said.

"But I'm talking about Russia," I said. "We
want trouble in Russia, don't we?"

"Not from the Communists," he said.

"Now wait a minute," I said. "How would you
get trouble from the Communists against the
Communists? There must be somebody else who
can make trouble in the world besides Com-
munists."

"Maybe it's a different type of Communist,"
my brother said. "You know there's more than
one kind."

"You mean it's Communistic to oppose the
Communists," I said. "But we're opposing them
— does that make us Communists?"

"It's all because it's in your own country," he
said.

"You can oppose something in another coun-
try but not in your own, is that it?" I asked.

"Not when it's the law," he said. "It would
be breaking the law and unpatriotic."

"You mean even in Russia people are supposed
to obey the laws?" I asked.

"We don't want a disrespect for law spreading
around," he said. "Even Washington wouldn't
like that."

"But those were laws made by the Commun-
ists," I said.

"Even the Communists have to have laws," he
observed smugly.

"But if you are opposed to the Communists,
wouldn't Communist laws be bad laws?" I asked.

"Laws are laws," he said. "If you get people
into the frame of mind of opposing laws in Rus-
sia, they might begin to oppose them here."

"The bad laws become good laws when they
are made by the country you are living in, is
that it?" I asked.

"There are no bad laws in a democracy," he
said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because the people can always change them."

"But the people might go haywire or some-
thing. Or maybe the government would be car-
rying on so many things in secret that the peo-
ple wouldn't know enough to pass good laws.
They might get frightened over nothing."

He looked shocked. "In a democracy you can
always pass new laws," he said. "That's the dif-
ference between Russia and America."

"But supposing all the people who are opposed
to the bad laws are called Communists and the
FBI watches them and doesn't let them tell peo-
ple to disobey the bad laws?"

"You have to obey the bad laws until they are
changed," he said.

"Maybe the best way to get them changed is
to disobey them," I said. "Maybe that would be
the only way."

"I can't think of any laws like that," he said.

"Well how about conscription in peacetime," I
replied. "That's really unAmerican, isn't it?
Our forefathers tried to get away from military
conscription, didn't they? Would it be all right
to tell people to disobey the conscription law?"

"Certainly not," he said. "What are you a trait-
or or something?"

"No," I said. "It's the American thing to do
to disobey bad laws and to tell other people to
disobey them too. That's what the Abolitionists
did about the Future Slave Law, didn't they?
They told people to hide the runaway slaves."

"Times have changed," he said. "You're old-
fashioned. That's the trouble with you, you're
too conservative. You don't realize that the
world has changed. That's why we have the FBI
to keep an eye on people like you."

"You mean the FBI is to make sure that peo-
ple don't behave like Americans?"

"You've got it backwards," he said. "The FBI
is to make people be Americans."

"That certainly is a radical new idea," I said.

"And the Post Office and the Congress and
everything else is to do that too," he said.

"You mean they're all afraid of old-fashioned
ideas?" I asked.

"No," he said, "they're all afraid of Com-
munists."

"Well, suppose we published something telling
people all over the world refuse to be drafted and
not to fight any more wars. Would that be Com-
municistic?"

"That would be playing the Communists'
game," he said. "That would leave us defence-
less and Russia would walk all over us."

"You mean the Russians would attack us if
they thought we were defenceless and had proved
that we didn't want war?"

"Sure," he said.

"And would we attack them if we knew they
didn't have any conscription and weren't build-
ing up an Army?"

"We wouldn't," he said. "We don't want war;
we want peace. It's the Russians who want war.
They want to conquer the world."

"And they say the same thing about us," I
said. "They say the only reason they're arming
is because we might attack them."

"That's what they say," he said. "But every-
body knows they don't mean it. They would
like nothing better than a real pushover. Then
they could run the whole world — just like the
Nazis wanted to do."

"Quite a job," I said. "And you're sure the
people of Russia want to run the whole world?"

"They don't have any say about it," he replied.
"They have to do what Stalin tells them."

"And he would tell them to run the whole
world, and they would do it, is that the idea?"
I asked.

"They would have the help of all their fifth
columns," he said.

"Then we ought to get rid of the fifth col-
umns," I said.

"For once I agree with you," he said.

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PEACEMAKERS RESIST DRAFT; DRAFT ALL-OUT RESISTANCE

It's an old political axiom that you can't beat somebody with nobody. Even the most objectionable office holder can usually win an election if the campaign against him consists mainly in attacking his faults without presenting either a strong personality or a strong program as an alternative choice.

At the present time, war is an extremely dynamic officeholder loaded with patronage. The drive to extend the present war has a terrific momentum based on huge expenditures of money, widespread and dramatic propaganda, and the pressure of colorful personalities whose actual lack of personal independence is obscured by the fact that they are united in a concrete program of action. Against this array, it is of little use to expose the evils of war unless we can come through with the type of positive alternatives that people can sink their teeth into.

By now most everyone knows intellectually that war not only fails to solve any problems but even compounds the evils which underly the original war situation. You can get most anyone to admit this in five minutes of quiet talk. But when the pressure to social conformity is added to the other dynamics of war, this intellectual admission does almost nothing to get people to transfer their actual day-to-day allegiance from the institution of war to the practice of peace. The present situation is further complicated by the fact that the loudest voices for "peace" are the voices of Communists who have a well-earned reputation for dishonesty and are known to be interested less in peace than in victory" for the Soviet Union.

In this discouraging situation the old line pacifist organizations offer little hope. Sincere as they are and right as they are in their general position (a repudiation of war and a belief in what they call the "way of love" as an alternative), they do not make a decisive enough break or express a fresh enough approach in the specifics of daily life to build up an alternative dynamic. The voice is the voice of a new way but the hands are the hands of people whose daily lives are involved in conventional living. This would not matter so much if war were an accident which could be challenged in isolation from the rest of our social practices. But war is not caused by a few bad leaders or a few easily remedied mistakes. Nor does it come about because some bad nation somewhere is an aggressor. War is a natural outgrowth of the kind of lives we all lead and the kind of society in which we live. The essentials of this society are the same in all the powerful nations of the world. The things which are different in Russia and the United States are of less importance than the things which are basically the same — inequality of wealth, power, and prestige; competition to win more favorable positions in this inequality; organization of daily life in such a way as to dull individual initiative and self-reliance; social conformism from the cradle to the grave; sexual fear and selfishness; reliance on violence to maintain order. Under these circumstances an alternative to war cannot be developed except as part of a revolutionary approach to the whole of life.

I am glad to be able to report that in this

stalemate between a dynamic evil which no one really believes in any more, and an opposition which is too vague and conventional to present a powerful alternative, there seems to be a new element of hope. It would be silly to identify this hope solely with a Conference of a group called Peacemakers which took place in Cincinnati New Years weekend. But it is my belief that the elements out of which a practical alternative can grow could be seen there.

Peacemakers is an informal association of radical pacifists which has been in existence about three years. It has always stood for all-out opposition to war, including refusal of its members to make or bear arms, and even refusal to register for the draft. Many of its members publicly refuse to pay income taxes, maintaining that those who believe in peace should not conspire to finance the instruments of war. As such, it might well have become another of the radical sects of which history is full. In a corrupt, violent, and hierarchical society there have always been small sects of persons who live personal lives which draw a type of admiration from the rest of society but which are not considered relevant to the rest of us nor to the problems of society as a whole. Fortunately Peacemakers has never emphasized this personal "purity" in exclusion from the rest of society. It has always had the fundamental purpose, for instance, of actually putting an end to war. It has advocated organized non-violent resistance as a method for doing so. In a sense it is a peculiar 20th century development, combining the emphasis on personal idealism of the early religious sects with the fervor of the early Marxists for achieving an actual social revolution for the whole of society.

Many of its members have served sentences (or are serving them now) for refusal to participate in war. At the same time, most of the actual public demonstrations against war in the past few years (other than Communist lead demonstrations) have been initiated by Peacemakers. Perhaps there have been as many arrests for sit-downs, picketings, street-meetings, and other public agitation as there have been for individual conscientious objection.

Although this has been an encouraging development of the last few years, Peacemakers has always been limited by many factors, including the fact that it was more distinguished for the ideal it was pointing towards than for anything it actually was. Of course this is still partly true, but at the New Years Conference there were signs that three years of growing pains have led to the development of Peacemakers as a movement to be dealt with. Four of the outstanding characteristics might be listed as follows:

- 1) *Maintenance of the attitude of unequivocal opposition to war and the war-making government, no matter what the consequences in the way of personal sacrifice or organizational suppression.*

Since the outbreak of the Korean war there has been a steady trend in all other pacifist organizations toward uncertainty, and division, with powerful groups within them pressing for positions of evasion and compromise. At the Peacemaker conference there never was the

slightest hesitation about maintaining the position of clear-cut opposition.

2) *This was the closest thing to the familiar ideal of a "grass roots" conference that I have seen.* If the conference had consisted merely of a small group of extremists, the unequivocal position would have had little significance. Nor would it have meant much if this had been a lightly centralized conference in which a few dominant figures had "sold" their position to a mass of less experienced followers or listeners. The encouraging thing was that in the first place the composition included a wide variety of persons from varying backgrounds and sections of the country — persons who had hitch-hiked or ridden several nights from California, Iowa, Louisiana, Alabama, Massachusetts, etc. In the second place, this was virtually a conference of equals. Naturally there were differences in experience and eloquence. But a boy from California who had already made the highly important personal decision to refuse allegiance to the draft was not going to get his "line" from a more vocal "organizer" from New York — even if there had been such an organizer from New York to try to give it to him. Nor was a wife who was preparing to care for her three children in a hostile world while her husband went to jail.

The attitude of give-and take amongst self-reliant individuals carried over to post-conference organizations as well. No named officers were elected. Instead organizational responsibilities were divided amongst various committees and local or regional groups. A 40 person Continuation Committee was elected, with representatives from all over the country, to meet every two months to aid in national planning and coordination.

3) *The major emphasis apart from war resistance was the setting up of communal groups, called Peacemaker Units, to experiment with more creative patterns of daily living.* Eight or nine existing groups of this kind were either represented at the Conference or reported as already belonging to the Peacemaker movement. Scattered throughout the country, — in Georgia, California, North Carolina, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio — these communities represent varying types of emphasis, but all are concerned with the practice of social and economic equality. Besides owning land in common, most of the groups have communal farms or workshops wherein the members attempt to produce socially

WHAT IS A COMMUNIST?

Continued from page 2

"But how would you do it?" I asked. "Would you do it the same way the Communists get rid of the people who oppose them — I mean pass laws against them and put them in concentration camps and say everybody else was a communist who said there was some truth in what they said. That's a new way of dealing with Americans, isn't it?"

"We have to make them see what real Americanism is," he said.

"That will be a strange country when you get through," I said. "I guess you'll outlaw a lot of other people too — maybe anybody who has any really serious criticism and means business about it. They'll all be helping the Communists some way or other, won't they?"

"We have to defend our way of life," he said.

"I'm not sure I would want to live in that kind of a country," I said. "Most old-fashioned Americans wouldn't want to either."

"You sound subversive," my brother replied. "You'd better look out or the FBI will be after you too. I'm not sure I even ought to be talking to you. When they pick you up they'll want to know who your friends are." He looked at his watch and hurriedly left me.

—ROY FINCH

useful goods on a non-profit basis. But instead of serving as a basis of isolation from the rest of society, the Peacemaker unit also tries to strengthen its members for carrying on in a non-violent resistance to totalitarianism and militarism.

4) *A plan was developed for making a widespread public demonstration of a positive alternative to war.*

Perhaps it is unwise to refer to this program before the final details are worked out. Any aggressive campaigns which seeks to reach out to the non-pacifist public at the present time obviously involves many subtle problems which can not be dealt with in a brief summary. But for our present purposes it is important to report that one of the main concerns of the conference was to develop a program which can be carried to the public-at-large and which will try to present concrete substitutes for the present method of militarization.

I hope for a fuller report on this next issue.
DAVID DELLINGER

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