

CHAPTER I

WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?

THE question asked of Communists more frequently than any other, if we can judge from the Hearst newspapers, is this:

"If you don't like this country, why don't you go back where you came from?"

The truth is, if you insist on knowing, Mr. Hearst, we Communists like this country very much. We cannot think of any other spot on the globe where we would rather be than exactly this one. We love our country. Our affection is all the more deep in that we have watered it with the sweat of our labor—labor which made this country what it is; our mothers nourished it with the tears they shed over the troubles and tragedies of rearing babies in a land controlled by profit and profit-makers. If we did not love our country so much, perhaps we would surrender it to Wall Street.

Of course when we speak of our love of America, we mean something quite different from what Mr. Hearst is speaking about in his daily editorial diatribes. We mean that we love the masses of the toiling people. We find in these *masses* a great reservoir of all things admirable and lovable, all things that make life worth living. We are filled with anger when we see millions of these people whom we love being degraded, starved, oppressed, beaten and jailed when they protest. We have a deep and moving hatred of the system, and of those who fatten on the system which turns our potential paradise into a living hell.

We are determined to save our country from the hell of capitalism. And most of us were born here, so Hearst's gag is not addressed to us anyway. But workers in America who happen to have been born abroad are just as much Americans as anybody else. We all originated across the waters, except perhaps a tiny minority of pure-blooded American Indians. The foreign-born workers have worked harder for less wages on behalf of this country than anybody else. They deserve, at a minimum, a little courtesy from those who would speak of Americanism. There is less historical justification in America than perhaps in any other major country for that narrow nationalism, that chauvinism, which makes a cult of a "chosen people".

We in America are a mongrel breed and we glory in it. We are the products of the melting pot of a couple of hundred nationalities. Our origin as a nation acknowledged its debt to a Polish Kosciusko, a German Von Steuben, a French Lafayette and countless other "foreigners".

Furthermore, let's be careful not to get snooty about pedigrees; half the names in the American social register were originally borne by men who were transported from Europe after conviction of crime or who in the new country became bold bandits and buccaneers. It was the more aggressive and violent types who rose to the top most quickly in our early days and laid the foundations of the great American fortunes. They were the Al Capones of their day, with no income-tax department to bring them to grief.

We love the past history of America and its masses, in spite of the Astors and Vanderbilts. We find in it a wealth of tradition striped in the purple tints of glory—the glory of men and women fighting fearlessly and self-sacrificingly against the throttling hand of a dead past, for those things upon which further progress depended.

Around the birth of our country as an independent nation cluster such heroic names as those of Patrick Henry, whose famous shout, "As for me, give me liberty or give me death!" re-echoes down the corridors of time; of Thomas Paine, whose deathless contribution to our national life of a militant anti-clericalism has long survived the many pamphlets with which he fought, the form of which alone belongs to a past age; of Thomas Jefferson, whose favorite thought revolved about watering the tree of liberty with the blood of tyrants (he thought this "natural manure" should be applied to the tree about every twenty years!); of all the founding fathers, whose chief claim to glory lies in their "treason" to the "constitutional government" of their day, and among whom the most opprobrious epithet was "loyalist".

These men, in their own time, faced the issues of their day, cut through the red tape of precedent, legalism and constitutionalism with a sword, made a revolution, killed off a dying and outworn system, and opened up a new chapter in world history.

Our American giants of 1776 were the "international incendiaries" of their day. They inspired revolutions throughout the world. The great French Revolution, the reverberations of which filled Europe's ears during the entire nineteenth century, took its first steps under the impulse given by the American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence was for that time what *The Communist Manifesto* is for ours. Copy all the most hysterical Hearst editorials of today against Moscow, Lenin, Stalin; substitute the words America, Washington, Jefferson; and the result is an almost verbatim copy of the diatribes of English and European reactionary politicians in the closing years of the eighteenth century against our American founding fathers. Revolution was then "an alien doctrine

imported from America" as now it is "imported from Moscow".

After the *counter-revolution* engineered by Alexander Hamilton had been victorious and established itself under *the Constitution* in 1787, a period of reaction set in. There was, as in our modern days since the World War, a period marked by oppressive legislation which went down in history as the "Alien and Sedition Laws". But the American masses had not been mastered; those who rode high and mighty with their eighteenth-century counterparts of criminal syndicalism laws, deportations, Palmers, Dicksteins and McCormicks, were driven out of power in a struggle, often bloody and violent, which again for a period placed the representatives of the masses (then predominantly agrarian) in control of government.

The greatest figure of them all in the American tradition, Abraham Lincoln, became great because he, despite his own desire to avoid or compromise the struggle, was forced by history to lead to victory a long and bloody civil war whose chief historical significance was the wiping out of chattel slavery, the destruction of private property rights in persons, amending the Constitution in the only way it has ever been fundamentally amended. Lincoln's words, which still live today among the masses, are those which declared:

"This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it."

These words of Lincoln are but a paraphrasing of the Declaration of Independence. Our national holiday, July 4, is in memory of that immortal document of American history. The very heart of the Declaration, that which gives it

life, without which all else becomes empty phrases, are these lines, the memory of which had grown dim until the Communists rescued them from the dust of libraries:

"Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness], it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute a new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such forms, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. . . . When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them [the masses] under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security."

This is the heart of the American tradition. Without this revolutionary kernel, the whole history of the origin of our country becomes only the strutting of marionettes and stuffed shirts, the spread-eagle oratory of the Fourth of July under imperialism, the vulgar yappings of the Hearst press. Without this, patriotism becomes—as that acid critic of the British bourgeoisie, Dr. Johnson, described it—the last refuge of the scoundrel.

The revolutionary tradition is the heart of Americanism. That is incontestable, unless we are ready to agree that Americanism means what Hearst says—slavery to outlived institutions, preservation of privilege, the degradation of the masses.

We Communists claim the revolutionary traditions of Americanism. We are the only ones who consciously continue those traditions and apply them to the problems of today.

We are the Americans and Communism is the Americanism of the twentieth century.

That does not mean, of course, that we Communists raise the slogan of "Back to 1776". Such reactionary stupidity was committed by the LaFollette "third party" movement in

1924, typical as that movement was of a class grouping (petty bourgeoisie refusing to ally with workers) that had lost its historically progressive significance. That was no more in the spirit of our revolutionary forefathers than it would have been for the Declaration of Independence to proclaim, "Back to the Republic of Rome". To each day its own task; that of 1776 was to free a rising capitalism from the fetters of a dying feudal system, enabling it to expand the productive forces of mankind to a new high level; that of today is to free these tremendous productive forces created by capitalism, which are now being choked and destroyed because they have grown too big to live longer under capitalist property relations.

Americanism, in this revolutionary sense, means to stand in the forefront of human progress. It means never to submit to the forces of decay and death. It means constantly to free ourselves of the old, the outworn, the decaying, and to press forward to the young, the vital, the living, the expanding. It means to fight like hell against those who would plow under the crops in our fields, who would close down and scrap our factories, who would keep millions of willing toilers, anxious to create the good things of life, living like beggars upon charity.

Americanism, as we understand it, means to appropriate for our country all the best achievements of the human mind in all lands. Just as the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence had been nurtured upon the French Encyclopedists and the British classical political economists, so the men who will write our modern declaration of independence of a dying capitalist system must feed themselves upon the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, the modern representatives of human progress.

In the words of a famous American whose memory we love,

we say to Mr. Hearst and all the Red-baiting cohorts of Wall Street: "If this be treason, make the most of it."

This is how we American Communists read the history of our country. This is what we mean by Americanism. This is how we love our country, with the same burning love which Lenin bore for Russia, his native land. Like Lenin, we will fight to free our land from the blood-sucking reactionaries, place it in the hands of the masses, bring it into the international brotherhood of a World Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and realize the prophetic lines of Walt Whitman:

"We have adhered too long to petty limits... the time has come to enfold the world."