

CHANGE THE WORLD

by MIKE GOLD

SAN FRANCISCO.

THERE'S a little park near our flat in San Francisco where I sometimes go to sit and to meditate and answer the mail. Old-fashioned trolleys clang by, the grass is always green. Old ladies of the neighborhood sit and gossip with gusto. Another bench is generally occupied by some aging and amiable "winos," forever passing a bottle. There are also numerous dogs, barking, run-



ning, arguing. And the neighborhood kids come here to fly their kites, or to play baseball and football.

It is a humble and easy-going spot. One often forgets that an H-bomb hangs suspended over it, and over us all. It takes common people so little to stay happy. But the Standard Oil Company needs a lot of things to keep it happy.

The other day I received a letter from "Joe Smith," an old friend. I read it in the little park, and it brought a bitter whiff of cyanide and world politics into the place.

Joe's finest hour was during the depression, when he became a great general of the unemployed. He was a patient, far-seeing and fearless tribune of the people. I can never forget his heroism of that time. Now his letter lamented the "bankruptcy" of the working class movement in America. "I feel as though I have wasted 30 years of my life," he said. The bitter cry was so unlike the man I knew on the Hunger March to Washington. "Joe" was cracking under the strain. Many other good people have been cracking up. It is a bad time.

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THE landmarks of socialism seem washed away. It is necessary to go pioneering again into our untracked wilderness. I could sense one of the things shattering my friend's peace of mind. He had formed some comfortable habits during these years. Now it was demanded of him that he leave the old homestead and go into the wilderness. You can do this once in your life. It is hard to do it again in middle age.

"I hated the fallen tyrant!" Shelley wrote in a sonnet on Napoleon. But later he learned to hate custom, the true cause of tyranny. Habit is the worst en-

emy of progress. It is a gag on original thoughts. My friend Joe had succumbed to a habit of bad thinking. It was a sort of military communism, the thinking necessary to the men of 1917 in Russia.

It no longer serves to build socialism. It defeats the healthy growth of a people's movement in America. And was Stalin protest as strongly as polite lanceed was planted a century before he was born. It would be growing in the womb of history long after all of us had passed on. Socialism does not stand or fall by the deeds of Stalin.

Socialism is no sudden improvisation, no adventurous putsch. It is the redemption of man, and the mainstream of human history. It will change its forms many times, but its spiritual content must always be the same—Brotherhood! I will adhere to any group in America I feel is honestly trying to bring brotherhood and socialism here. So will the people, when their moment comes.

How can anyone who has ever understood socialism ever abandon it? It is like giving up the multiplication table. However sick you may feel over some tragedy, two and two will still make four. The world is already one-third socialist. Capitalism is threatened and intriguing for an H-bomb war. That is the only future it holds out. Who can give up the dream of socialist brotherhood and go back to capitalist death?

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I WISHED I could have spent a day with my friend Joe, thrashing out the question of socialist change over a bottle of wine.

But he was in New York, three thousand miles away. So I wrote him he was a damn fool. How could he feel he had wasted his years working for socialism? Would it have been better had he spent those years selling shoddy furniture on the instalment plan? Or writing Hollywood crap?

Joe had been a good machinist. Would he have been completely satisfied merely working at this trade? He was one of those people who have to feel they are serving a great purpose with their lives. The world must hold a meaning for them, a high ideal worthy of their devotion. Otherwise such people are as unhappy as Daniel Boone might have been had he tried to turn into a respectable bookkeeper.

Man is the meaning of the universe. Brotherhood is the meaning of man. Those who

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work for socialism are bringing in the brotherhood of man. This, and not money grubbing or mere comfort, is the highest activity of man.

So don't waste your emotions, Joe, on foolish breast-beating and wasteful regrets. Let's look ahead to the future!

Another old street car clattered by our little park. I saw a group of kids running on the grass. They were trying to get a red kite up into the air. It just wouldn't rise. They tried and tried, again and again, with the earnestness of kids at play.

They were typical of our neighborhood. Some were Japanese kids, others Negro, Mexican, Irish and even one Jewish child. I love to watch the kids of all races playing together on our streets. They do it so naturally, without theories. It is a different climate than ten years ago. A great step has been made toward American socialism.

But they couldn't get their kite to fly. Finally they appealed to the park attendant. A beefy old fellow with a waxed moustache and wind-burned, wine-burned jolly face, he said to them: "There's a big hole in your kite. Also there's no wind today. Fix your kite and come back tomorrow. There will be a wind and the kite will fly."