

HENRY LUCE'S *Revolutionaries*

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THE well-informed editors of *Fortune* magazine must be sorely disturbed over the prospects of United States imperialism; otherwise there would be no occasion for the elaborate "theoretical" justification which constitutes their February 1951 issue, and which now appears in book form under the radical-sounding, semi-Trotskyite title: *U.S.A.—The Permanent Revolution* (Prentice-Hall). Here is probably the "highest" contemporary expression we have met of the utter bankruptcy of bourgeois economic and political theory in the period of capitalist decay and decline.

In the midst of a war economy of soaring prices, lagging wages and vast and increasing impoverishment, the authors try to picture the American standard of living in terms of "television sets, electric toasters, frozen foods, home permanent-wave lotions, and group hospitalization contracts." They conclude that it is "nonsense" to talk of capitalist exploitation: "it is not the capitalists who

are using the people, but the people who are using the capitalists."

Speaking for a class which can no longer advance the national interests of our country, but which finds both cosmopolitanism and national chauvinism useful ideological weapons in its drive for imperialist expansion, the editors of *Fortune* come very close to denying our *national* existence: "To a large extent the American ideals replace (and often conflict with) the conventional concept of nationality"; further: "What holds Americans together, the real focus of their patriotism and common loyalties, is not a national organism but the system."

At the same time the editors assert that the ideals of the American Way of Life are "universals belonging to all mankind, of which he [the American] is in certain respects the custodian"; that "the concept of America as a guardian of these universals remains, in our judgment, historically incontestable."

Today when monopoly domination of our economy and its unbridled drive for greater super-profits are more pronounced than ever before, these editors of the trusts prate of a remarkable "transformation of American capitalism"—"of which," they admit, "the world as a whole is as yet unaware." It is said to be a revolutionary change brought on by "the American's moral indignation" at the abuses and injustices which used to characterize capitalism some fifty years ago.

This new transformation, we are told, has achieved the heretofore unknown results that "Wall Street has ceased to be the valid symbol of great tyranny"; that "the old concept that the owner has a right to use his property just the way he pleases has evolved into the belief that ownership carries social obligations, and that a manager is a trustee not only for the owner but for society as a whole"; and that "U.S. capitalism is *popular* capitalism," a new and democratic "kind of capitalism that neither Karl Marx nor Adam Smith ever dreamed of."

More than this: Precisely when U.S. monopoly capitalism is demonstrating before the world its incapacity to offer our nation any perspective other than economic crisis or war—in sharp contrast with the rapid, steady and peaceful development of socialist economies abroad—these spokesmen for a dying system proclaim: "Such is the Transformation of American Capitalism" that "in all the world there is no more hopeful

economic phenomenon."

One is reminded of Lord Byron's metaphor, in "The Giaour": "A gilded halo hovering round decay." It is an apt characterization of *U.S.A.—The Permanent Revolution*.

THE underlying and all-pervading thesis of this book is that U.S. imperialism has the moral obligation and the power to extend its domination over all the world, *and that for this we have got to start another world war.*

The editors of *Fortune*, of course don't express it quite that crudely—but they almost do. There is very little subtlety, for example, in their assertion that what this book calls "The American Proposition" is "a proposition for mankind," and that "America itself—that 'grand scheme and design in Providence,' as John Adams called it—has a mission to present the Proposition to the rest of the world."

Even more explicit, in something close to the old-fashioned language of "Manifest Destiny," is the declaration that "in the history of American destiny has knocked" several times, most recently in 1917 and in 1941, but "on neither of those occasions did the knocking have the iron clang that we hear today."

"... In World War I, and even in World War II, a mold existed in which we could pour our vast energies. Our power—and in the second war our leadership also—was essential to victory. But it was not our task to make the mold. It was not our task

to determine either the geographical contours or the moral content of the battle. That had already been done by the rest of the world.

"But today, though we again have allies, though we have the United Nations, though we have access to resources all over the world, it is *we* who must shape the struggle; *we* who must make the mold . . . the shape of things to come depends on us: our moral decision, our wisdom, our vision, and our will."

And when it comes to identifying the main obstacle to U.S. dictation of "the shape of things to come," our Wall Street editors cast aside all euphemisms and figurative language. They name the Soviet Union, China and the new democracies. We must "determine to be rid of them. The rest is procedure." Thus, in its next response to the "knock of destiny," the United States must destroy the socialist society being built by one-third of the world's peoples.

A few years ago Mr. Henry Luce's *Life* proclaimed "The American Century"; and now his *Fortune* calls for its realization through U.S. imperialist aggression and a new world war.

What is the alleged rationale of this immoral and bloody program? What are the "theoretical" premises set forth to justify this blatant call for war and the somewhat more guarded proclamation of "America *über alles*"? The over-all structure of *Fortune's* argument can best be grasped by summary analysis of the key propositions expounded in the three major divisions of the book,

PART I develops the premise mentioned above that "*the U.S. is not merely a nation but a Way of Life founded on a universal Proposition.*" This American Way of Life is said to be infinitely diverse, but with "an extraordinary unity in this diversity," its central focus being "the individual human being." It is not an achievement, we are told, but "a *process*—a process of becoming."

However, any theoretical questions one might ask about "the purpose of this 'becoming' . . . and where it leads to" are dismissed by the very pragmatic (and somewhat mystical) editors of *Fortune* as currently irrelevant:

"Perhaps the day will come when this kind of question will occupy Americans, but thus far their mission has been the mission of action—the mission of the will. Metaphysical speculation is hardly yet a national specialty. In the American's eyes the individual is, in the end, an enigma. Therefore, America is an enigma. . . . The point is that the American way of life embodies a mystery, which no one has yet solved, but which is common to all men: the mystery of the human spirit."

In other words, the net "theoretical" contribution of this first chapter is the highly illuminating discovery that the American Way of Life is enigmatic and mysterious, and thus not amenable to theoretical interpretation. Such is the philosophy of imperialist decadence!

Inherent in the universal "American Proposition," say the editors of

Fortune, is the "permanent revolution," hence the title of the book. They hasten, however, to differentiate between their "revolution" and "the entire Bolshevik revolution [which], it is now clear, was just another counter-revolution against liberty." The point is driven home with this characteristic bit of Fortunesque "logic" (figure it out if you can):

"Moreover, to call any Communist revolution 'permanent' is a contradiction in terms. A social and political revolution takes place against something: if it fails it disappears; if it succeeds, it replaces the status quo against which it rebelled and becomes itself the status quo. The contradiction in Trotsky's use of the phrase ['permanent revolution'] is thus revealed by a simple question: should the Communist revolution succeed totally, what would be left for it to rebel against? The answer is, nothing. The completion of that 'revolution' would impose upon mankind a total and permanent tyranny."

But there is no such "theoretical" problem in the kind of "permanent revolution" the editors of *Fortune* are talking about. Unlike the Russian Revolution which placed political power in the hands of the working class and reorganized the economy to serve and enormously advance the material and cultural well being of all the Soviet peoples, these charlatans propose no *real* transformation of society at all; they deal only in vague abstractions about the "revolution of the individual" and the infinite potentialities of the "human

spirit." Hence, according to their scheme of things, there would always be very substantial social conditions "to rebel against."

Thus, "the American Proposition" is a mystical conception derived from God, translated into a counter-revolutionary phrase of Leon Trotsky completely divorced from the historical development of human society, and somehow validating the right—indeed, the obligation—of the U.S. ruling class to re-mold the world in their own image. We need not deal here with *Fortune's* gross factual distortions of social reality; it is more than enough to reveal the total bankruptcy of their social "theory."

THIS obscurantist level of "theoretical" analysis is continued in *Fortune's* interpretation of "The American System," whose essential political principles are described as "very simple." "They are three: a word ['liberty'], a tendency ['equality'], and a method ['constitutionalism']."

"The Founding Fathers" who created this system, we are told, "were great and talented men of very high I.Q.," and they pronounced the very last word on political theory. Indeed, paradoxical as it may appear in the book on "permanent revolution," our editors assert "political philosophy has made absolutely no progress in its essentials from the time when Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton and Madison were its world masters to the present."

It is not strange, therefore, con



TRUMAN: "Think of it—good Americans refusing to sign their names to the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights because they were afraid they would lose their jobs or be called Communists!"

sidering the very substantial changes in the economic and social life of our country since the Founding Fathers did their work, that the principles of what *Fortune's* editors call The American System are completely divorced from social reality:

"... a political system whose essential principles are still wholly distinguishable from the society it governs. In no other civilized country is this distinction so clear."

We can well understand why these spokesmen of imperialism would want to maintain, in fact, the gulf between professed democratic principles and social practice; but it is not so clear why they choose to brag about it in public.

Not only are the asserted principles of The American System divorced from social reality, but the editors of *Fortune*, themselves, give evidence of similar isolation. They find it possible, for example, in discussing the question of civil rights in the United States in 1951—the year of the Martinsville Seven, Willie McGee, the Smith Act decision—to make the astounding assertion that "the most remarkable fact about these rights today is their pristine integrity and the success with which they can still be invoked against huge odds."

One underlying purpose of this roseate picture of The American System, later made explicit in the chapter on "The Busy, Busy Citizen," seems to be to drag out and refurbish the hoary doctrine of *laissez faire*

—in so far, that is, as it might deter the state from discharging its social responsibility to the people. The editors quote approvingly, for example, a 19th century Englishman's statement that "self-government is better than good government," and likewise this philosophic gem from Jimmie Durante: "Don't put no constrictions on da people. Leave 'em ta hell alone." Anent which *Fortune* generalizes:

"People should do as much as possible for themselves and by themselves at all levels of society. This view sadly needs re-discovering by those many altruistic bureaucrats who, in every nation of the world, are deliberately or absent-mindedly feeding Leviathan in the name of helping or guiding the people."

It is clear that *Fortune's* chief concern has less to do with governments "feeding Leviathan" than with governments responding to the demands for guarantees that their peoples be fed.

These are fair samples of the obscurantism and ruling class thinking which characterize this main "theoretical" division of *U.S.A.—The Permanent Revolution*. The rest of the book simply elaborates upon the general theme here set forth.

IN PART II the editors of *Fortune* discuss "The Transformation of American Capitalism":

"Fifty years ago American capitalism seemed to be what Marx predicted

it would be and what all the muck-rakers said it was—the inhuman offspring of greed and irresponsibility, committed by its master, Wall Street, to a long life of monopoly. It seemed to provide overwhelming proof of the theory that private ownership could honor no obligation except the obligation to pile up profits.”

With cynical disregard for the most basic reality of our society—unprecedented monopoly and profiteering — *Fortune* blandly asserts: “But American capitalism today is nothing of the kind.”

As to political parties—“the only vehicles through which labor, or any other group, can achieve legitimate political power” — they are said, approvingly, to operate under our “permanent revolution” on a basis of “simple bipartisanship,” with mere “‘organic’ rather than ideological” distinction between them. The two party “platforms are apt to be almost identical”; but this is inconsequential because “the ‘party line’ is used more as a political convenience than as a matter of conviction.” With unabashed pride and unmatched decadence in political theory, the authors are happy to explain that

“as contrasted with political parties elsewhere, which are generally based upon doctrinal differences, the American parties are like big clubs—more specifically like athletic clubs, whose aims are both competitive and social. The purposes of these clubs are to win political power and to distribute political patronage. To that end they adopt platforms and define policies,

which are then submitted to the voters; but it is important to note that the party precedes the platform.”

The chapter on “The Busy, Busy Citizen” has an extended, 15-page “Note on Alcoholics Anonymous”—whose mutual aid program for victims of alcoholism, say the editors, “illustrates certain native American characteristics that provide a basic soil for voluntary social activity of all sorts.” In a gratuitous footnote to this discussion—“Of all groups needing A.A., the American Negro stands first”—our editors also illustrate the mentality of white chauvinism frequently reflected in their book.

The chapter on “The U.S. Labor Movement,” even more than most others, is highly revealing of the ruling-class standpoint of this book and its undercurrent of anxiety over preservation of the profit-making system.

By and large, the editors of *Fortune* are very well pleased with the manner in which the U.S. labor movement has been integrated into their so-called “permanent revolution.” For example: “the union has made the worker to an amazing degree a middle-class member of a middle-class society;” and “never have left-wing ideologies had so little influence on the American labor movement as they have today.”

Yet, despite this over-all favorable state of affairs for the monopoly exploiters of the working class, there are dangers of which our editors are fully aware. For example: “We cannot assert . . . that the industrial

worker will surely remain 'de-proletarianized' . . . for there undoubtedly runs a powerful undercurrent of hostility to management and to enterprise, to competitive economy and to profits, throughout the American working class." Worse still, unless management is clever, the U.S. worker, despite his beliefs,

"will be pushed by his daily experiences into pressing for more and more anti-business laws, more anti-business taxes, and more government welfare. He may even, in an economic or political emergency, develop a susceptibility to that very [un-named!] collective infection to which he has hitherto shown such singular resistance."

Fortune's proposed "corrective" for this recognized and genuinely revolutionary potential of the U.S. working class is a corps of trade union leaders still more tractable than those responsible for labor's class-collaborationist policies today. Exen the dutiful president of the C.I.O., it seems, does not adequately meet this requirement.

"As judicious and as conservative a man as Philip Murray, for instance, cannot help using the usual hate rhetoric of union negotiations, though it both embarrasses and frightens him."

But there is hope: "today's labor leaders are largely at the end of their careers. . . . The majority will retire or die within the next ten years. Most of their places will be taken by new men, unknown today."

This prediction of *Fortune* is prob-

ably correct. One suspects, however, that our editors are more than a little anxious lest "these leaders of tomorrow" turn out to be victims of a certain unmentionable "collectivist infection."

PART III of the book develops the premise that "*having learned (sic!) in the past how to apply their Proposition, Americans must now extend it into the future and into the world.*" Its four chapters bear the titles "The Problems of Free Men," "Individualism Comes of Age," "Have We Any Friends?" and "U.S. Foreign Policy." Here, more clearly than anywhere else, one senses the fundamental anxieties which led *Fortune's* Wall Street editors to concoct so irrational a treatise as *U.S.A.—The Permanent Revolution*.

In the first place, there are, indeed, social problems which press for solution; and our editors try mightily to steer efforts to this end along the innocuous path of *individual* rather than *social* action: "Only as the individual matures can his society mature." They categorically deny the proposition "that men can achieve a problem-free society by solving the economic, political and social problems facing them," and hail the great contribution of modern psychology in making "more and more people aware that the real problems lie *within* man, not in the external complexities of his world." Further, there is the difficult problem of U.S. imperialism's relations with the peoples of other countries, among

whom, our editors note, "misunderstanding [about America] exists on a frightening scale." They document the point with nearly two pages of anti-American quotations by non-Communist Europeans.

They propose as "correctives" bigger and better governmental and private information and educational exchange programs, an expanded propaganda budget of "at least \$500 million a year," and especially a greatly enlarged program of bringing more and more "visiting teams" of workers and students to the United States. There is one further proposal, which is hardly flattering to the reformist leadership of the trade union movement: "Labor . . . is fairly bursting its seams to do more missionary work in Europe—and the more this is encouraged, the quicker will we reach European labor."

Finally, there is the question of foreign policy—its failures, its goals, and what needs to be done. Running through the rather tortuous discussion are the premises that past blunders have left things in a "dangerous mess"; that "we" have got to resort to "the preventive diplomacy called balance of power"; that there is no possibility of co-existence between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.; that World War III is inevitable; and that we must (1) "rearm ourselves and our allies . . . as fast as possible," and (2) "wrap the Truman Doctrine in the flag of the U.N."

Here, then, is the program by

which the editors of *Fortune* propose to extend the "American Proposition"—"into the future and into the world." It is a program born of frantic desperation. It is clothed in obscurantist philosophy, revolutionary phrases and roseate distortions of social reality for the sole purpose of disguising the aggressive imperialist expansionism which constitutes its essence. It reflects the unparalleled decadence of the ruling class and the exploitative system for which the editors of *Fortune* speak.

The fears which motivated U.S.A.—*The Permanent Revolution* are not difficult to understand. The general crisis of world capitalism poses insoluble problems for the colossal U.S. imperialism. Rising colonial liberation and working class struggles the world over are undermining its very foundations. Inter-imperialist conflicts with would-be allies further aggravate its position. Above all, the growing peoples' coalition for democracy and peace on a world scale threatens to block its vain efforts to escape along the path to war.

There is, indeed, a social revolution under way in the world today. Socialism is an inevitable historic development which neither the "radical" phrase-mongering of the editors of *Fortune* nor the monopoly power which guides their pens can long hold back. And its destiny is to achieve, *through collective social action*, the genuine liberation of all mankind.