

Comment -- and  
Discomment

One of the best articles we have run across in a long time is the following, from the pen of L. P. Edwards, published in a recent issue of the Atlantic Monthly. Mr. Edwards doesn't believe that all of the bolsheviks are manufactured as the result of the efforts of paid propagandists from Russia. Instead, he points out a few ways whereby perfectly decent, hardworking foreigners may be induced to herd with the Wobblies. Here's his theory:

Whatever modicum of truth there may be in current stories of the Soviet government's plots against the United States, it is evident that many of these stories are, on their face, gross and palpable exaggerations. Without doubt a certain number of 'Reds' enter this country from abroad; but the manufacture of extremists goes on in the United States all the time, and in such a manner that it may well be doubted whether the final number of such radicals would be greatly different if every 'Red' newspaper, magazine, book, and pamphlet were suppressed, and every foreign agitator safely deported or locked up.

A little while ago the writer had a rather unusual opportunity to investigate the I. W. W.'s in Chicago. A wealthy radical had provided funds for a Hobo college which enjoyed considerable local fame for a short time. It became a favorite gathering-place of the 'Red' radicals, where they freely discussed their opinions; for the government had not yet started its policy of suppression, and even cooperated to the extent of having United States health officers lecture on personal hygiene and contagious diseases.

The writer visited this Hobo college on various occasions, and with the aid of the superintendent,—himself a thoroughgoing extremist,—obtained the unpremeditated stories of about thirty-five representative I. W. W.'s. He even delivered two lectures there on 'The Evolution of the Alphabet,' and strange as it may seem to some people, the 'wobblies' were evidently interested. They paid close attention, and at the end asked numerous questions—some of them very intelligent.

Tabulation of the case-studies shows that one of the causes of I. W. W.-ism in the United States is the ordinary American policeman and the ordinary American municipal code. One of the surest proofs of a man's Americanism is whether he understands or does not understand how to take the policeman. The American policeman is a strange species. He earns his living with his feet instead of with his head. For the most part he is scandalously untrained in even the simplest rules of evidence, and annually arrests hundreds of thousands of citizens without the smallest legal justification. His social position is inferior—he is the proper beau for the kitchen girl. No respectable middle-class American family would ever dream of treating him as an equal. He is frequently underpaid. Finally, he is very often brusque and domineering in his attitude toward the public. In most, if not all, of these respects, he is different from nearly every other policeman on earth. The English policeman is a courteous and obliging public servant, the Italian policeman is a trained lawyer, the Japanese policeman belongs to the aristocracy.

Pietro is a laborer from Milan. He is standing on a street-corner in Chicago. The 'cop' tells him to move on. Pietro does not understand English and remains where he is. The 'cop' thinks he is insolent and hits him with his club. Pietro makes wild gesticulations, which the 'cop' interprets as violations of law and order; so he beats Pietro up and takes him to jail. Next morning Pietro is sentenced to a ten-dollar fine for resisting an officer. He hasn't the money and works out the fine by ten days in the stone-quarry. By the time he is released, Pietro firmly believes that the government of the United States is brutal, unjust, and tyrannical. He finds an I. W. W. pamphlet, or hears a soap-boxer, and a 'Red' radical has been manufactured.

Lax state banking-laws are fellow causes with the policeman for the production of 'undesirable' citizens.

Anton comes from Prague. He saves up a few hundred dollars and deposits it in an unregulated private bank run by one of his own countrymen. Anton does not know that the banker is a person without financial standing, and when the bank closes its doors, Anton quite naturally, even though quite unjustly, accuses the United States government of robbing him of his hard-earned money. The unregulated private bank being an institution unknown in Prague, Anton most mistakenly takes it for granted that the same is true of Chicago. Instead of blaming his own ignorance for his loss, he most mistakenly blames the government of the United States. The actual party at fault in the case is the legislature of the State of Illinois, but of this Anton knows nothing. He meets an I. W. W. organizer while still smarting under a sense of the injustice done him and another 'Red' radical has been manufactured.

Angelo comes from Calabria. He pays a labor agency fifteen dollars for a job up in Wisconsin. When he gets there, he finds that the job is good for only ten days, instead of for three months as the labor agency had assured him. He had to walk two hundred miles back to Chicago, gets locked up as a vagrant in one town, and is warned to 'beat it' out of another. When he gets back to Chicago Angelo joins the 'Reds.' The labor agency was not a government institution; but because, if such a thing had happened to him in Calabria the government would have been responsible, Angelo's justifiable anger, instead of being turned against the agency, as, under similar circumstances, an American's would be, is directed against the United States government.

Tom is a negro I. W. W. from Texas. He raises cotton for a white farmer on shares. When the time comes for sharing, Tom finds that his white partner has robbed him of more than fifty per cent of his due. On asking redress he is told to 'get to hell out of here,' and on his further return his life is threatened. He makes threats in return. He is eventually hunted like a wild animal, and on reaching Chicago, he is ripe fruit for picking by the 'Reds.'

George is a Greek. By hard work and frugal living he saves a thousand dollars. His great ambition is to become a land-owner and raise fruit after the manner of the wealthy peasants of his home land. He falls into the hands of a 'Florida' Land Company which maintains an office in Chicago. He invests his little hoard in ten acres which, he is assured, will make him independent for life. On reaching Florida he finds he has purchased a sand-bank. After a hopeless struggle for a year or so, he gives up and comes back to Chicago trying to get justice from the company. It is vain. The company is not actually fraudulent. The land for which George paid a hundred dollars an acre is really worth twenty-five, and if properly developed by a person with plenty of capital and able to wait four or five years for returns, could even be made to pay. This, however, is no consolation to George. When he is told that the company is perfectly legal and that he can get no redress at law, his rage turns against the government, which he believes, most falsely, to be in league with the company to swindle him. —So, he too, joins the 'Reds.'

Such cases could be multiplied, but those given are very typical. As causes of I. W. W.-ism they are not nearly so spectacular as untold millions of Russian gold smuggled into the United States by the Bolsheviki, but they have the advantage of being unquestionably real causes. They are causes which operate twenty-four hours a day on seven days a week. Radical propaganda is undoubtedly at work, but it is in general merely the last step in a long process, and would be quite powerless in the great majority of cases except for these previous causes. Such causes cannot be counteracted by teaching George to recite the Declaration of Independence or by making Anton sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner.' They can be counteracted only by the reform of court procedure, adequate state banking-laws, education of the police force, stricter surveillance of employment agencies, and by the hundred and one works of righteousness and reform which are being carried out, often with little public encouragement, by a great host of private agencies for social justice working in all parts of the country.

TOO HOT TO MOVE

"I have changed my mind about going to Arizona for a vacation," said Al Meierhofer a few days ago. "I received a letter from a friend there the other day and in an effort to show how hot it was he wrote: 'Saw a dog chasing a jackrabbit and they were both walking.'"—Minok (Ill.) News-Herald.

IN PLUNKVILLE

"Mrs. Flubbub is mad at the Plunkville Palladium."  
"Didn't the paper mention that she was 'At Home' last week?"  
"Yes, but they didn't put a scare head on it."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

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