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Communism

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I have just returned from a visit from January 26th to March 31st to the following cities and towns: Paris, Strasbourg, Zurich, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Uppsala, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Amsterdam, Leiden, Brussels, Liege, Louvain, and again to Paris and London. Most of the persons I talked with were doctors teaching in the medical schools - a few university professors and administrators, a few were business men. I talked with no professional politicians.

To inquiries regarding the future of Europe, the replies took always the form of the quiet but earnest question, "What is America going to do?You have the leadership.... poor Europe can do little." This was not a retort. It was a request for the basis on which my inquiries could be answered. The more discouraged said, "Europe is finished;" the more optimistic said, "Another war will finish Europe."

Certainly in those countries which the Germans had occupied, but in some measure everywhere, the future is being faced with a long-suffering apprehension, a sort of self-controlled patience and seasoned suffering, that reminded me that old people weep quietly when tears come at all.

Some bits of conversations I remember convey the atmosphere I encountered. In Denmark, someone said of the Occupation, "We have not found the Germans/^{very}polite and so many of our young men have lost their lives." In Sweden, "We do not know what the Government has promised to the Russians but it must be very much." I was shown there a large room in the basement of a mental hospital built in 1943, still vacant, as an air raid shelter "against the Russians." In Belgium, I asked a professor's wife whether there was any talk among her friends or relatives of emigration from Belgium. Her reply was, "There is no talk of anything else." In England, a professor's wife said, "My life falls into these divisions: prewar, 1914-18;

between the wars, 1939-45; and this last postwar period. It's curious but these last years since the war ended seem the longest stretch of all. We thought winning the war would end our troubles but it hasn't." In England, Sweden and Switzerland there was some interest in helping some of the Germans; in the other countries there was no evidence of interest. It seemed to me that everywhere people were simply avoiding the long term view of the future. To contemplate so large a series of uncertainties was unendurable.

Have you ever had to paddle a canoe overloaded with children and essential baggage? Your attention was concentrated exclusively on paddling. Cursing was no use. Strength was to be applied or conserved, not wasted in talk or speculation or outcries. Too much at hand - paddling, watching the gunwale, and occasional swift glances at the sky. In Europe they are similarly preoccupied with the present.

In terms of food and clothing and shelter, there has been marked improvement. But everywhere taxes, repairs, delays and a monotonous struggle with rising prices preoccupy everyone's strength and attention. No one feels out of the woods yet, no one is breathing easy for there is so much uncertainty ahead. In this quiet preoccupation word coming of the American reaction to the changes in Czechoslovakia seemed simply incredible. It seemed hysterically unreal to have a war scare in Europe of all places. And would "they" fight it here again? How could we Europeans survive another war?

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Behind these apparently superficial impressions there are a number of factors whose interpretation is in some degree a matter of personal judgment.

Western Europe's present population of upwards of two hundred million has depended as it grew during the last hundred years upon manufacture

in exchange for foodstuffs imported from abroad. Unless that trade can be re-established I can see only emigration as a solution, or the alternative of slow starvation and dying out because of hardship, accompanied by varying degrees and kinds of social breakdown.

Men and women of the requisite intelligence and integrity for leadership in maintaining the traditional forms of nationalistic sovereignty are not available because too many of them were killed in the first world war - and deported to death in Germany in the second. Besides, the concepts and traditions of national sovereignty are outworn and ineffective in a world transformed by technological changes in manufacture, transportation and communications.

Even the traditional idea of one country making war on another is disconcertingly inapplicable to the present Communist technique of political infiltration and class warfare by means of strikes and seizure of police control. We Americans would do well to be studying mass psychology as well as atomic bombs, for what faith have we ever had in force when pitted against deep conviction?

Can we never awaken to realize the illogical and unreasoning power of jealousy and envy, and the strength of a conviction of injustice - whether or not that feeling is justified? What durable wisdom is there in trying to maintain by war, privilege and upper-class evasion of obligation either here or in Europe, when war increases the very poverty that makes privilege intolerable?

Communism is at home in adversity. Its appeal is to the dispossessed, to the envious, the covetous and unscrupulous, but also to the young, to those who want to hope and to those who are cynical and disgusted at lethargy or corruption or irresponsibility in high places - or even not so high.

Twenty separate parties of the Right passionately divided between themselves are no match for a single disciplined group of professional politicians.

Great Britain, France, and the United States have made mistakes in the past that now are costing us dearly - Archangel in 1918, Manchuria, Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia.

The unexpected price tag of victory over a totalitarian country is that you have to govern it afterward - and with what enthusiasm or effectiveness? And, in addition, do not forget the destruction in Europe, the present indebtedness and taxation, the mounting poverty.

More war would not settle all these problems. It would only multiply and aggravate them and make even more difficult the most important task of all. This most important task is for us to forego the false security of privilege and the anesthetic comfort of power. We have got to create the security that comes from justice, and the comfort that comes from hope and peace. I do not deny that the covetous and deceitful who put their trust in violence would be stopped by violence. If they were to choose violence as a weapon they would betray what would control their conduct most. But if Communism spreads, it is not because it employs physical violence. It spreads because it is patient, devious, flexible and realistic - the very qualities we don't possess. It spreads because it appeals to persons who have not before been dispossessed, disillusioned, discouraged and, especially, envious and indignant.

I say especially the envious and indignant because human beings have borne and can bear an unbelievable amount of suffering and hardship as long as there is universal sharing of misery and even-handed justice in sharing relief or respite from hardship. Jealousy and envy are the uranium and

plutonium of human societies; what they can liberate in destructive energy is not funny. If during the blitz in London a completely effective and luxurious air raid shelter had been built and reserved for any group of five hundred persons, even for the key personnel of the Government, British morale would have been smashed to angry pieces. Privilege and power may override the embitterment and sense of injustice they produce, but they cannot survive forever the resultant weakness in the society they corrode. The embittered distrust and stubborn sense of injustice among British coal miners have taken years to accumulate. With what glib promises may they now be removed? The patient no longer trusts the surgeon and least of all the anesthetist who tries to calm him for another operation. Don't underrate envy and distrust.

Communism appeals to the dispossessed. On evidence at hand they have nothing to lose. They have lost not merely their savings but far more disturbing the chance to earn. To the meretricious hope of sharing the wealth they add the vindictive hope of seeing others suffer as they have already suffered. Misery loves company - with a vengeance. Inflation as a way of increasing the numbers of the dispossessed is as infuriating as it is slick. Why so many of the big manufacturers in the United States have chosen big dividends rather than lowering their prices, entirely eludes my comprehension. I say big companies because the larger the targets the more people can shoot at them. The small companies can make the same mistake and so take their own mean share in swelling the numbers of those who will listen hopefully to a change in our form of government.

Communism appeals to the disillusioned, to those who may not have lost most or all their property but who have lost their confidence in the ability but above all the honesty of their governmental authorities. They have come to believe that justice is open to all - like the Ritz. They have

concluded that having a smart lawyer is more important than coming before a good judge; and our rewards financial and otherwise for the judiciary in America can hardly serve conclusively to disprove their cynicism. A friend of mine who is an expert in American municipal government belittles the loss of respect for the law during the Prohibition era. He says that the loss of respect that comes from Americans' use of their political friends to tear up parking tickets and summons for breaking traffic rules is far more serious. Hendrik van Loon once fished a fifty cent piece out of his pocket, regarded it pensively, and said to me, "'In God we Trust' - this is the polite equivalent of your real national motto, 'I should worry'." Of course if we get away with it we don't give law breaking a second thought, but, I warn you, losers have long memories. Penalties evaded are soon forgotten, penalties inflicted rankle for years if they are imposed on some people and evaded by others. We are admittedly not a law abiding nation. But getting away with it leaves even smart people with a sense of guilt. This shows long after as a sudden and passionate interest in law and order against those who didn't get away with it, whom we so airily call "disgruntled." The Europeans who didn't know how the other half lived are finding out how the other half hates.

Communism appeals to the discouraged. You begin to think of alternatives when you can't even hope. It is no good to point out that even if the present is bad, Communism would be worse. If the present gets bad enough people will take a chance on a change being worse. I've seen plenty of people change doctors - for the worse. And they don't feel guilty if the loved one dies when the change has been made. Hopeless people get hard-hearted.

Does all this confuse you? Do you want me to go in for nice clear-cut unambiguous statements about what impressed me most in Europe or on my

return? Well, what has impressed me the most has been the American passion for over-simplified statements, for Yes or No, for Ideal or Atrocious, for Black or White, for Now or Never. We even prefer to have our thinking simple. I would not be surprised if my stating the varied appeals which Communism possesses seems like a suspicious sort of procedure. But I cannot believe that the situation in Europe is simple, nor that it would be useful or even honest to summarize it in simple terms. And to resolve the difficulties there by war or by the talk of war seems to me an over-simplification.

Two more points. Don't be surprised if the Europeans are slow to recover. There is something in their situation we do not comprehend. We have not had it here within the memory of the living. I refer to the loss of their leaders, first in 1914-18 and again (in the occupied countries) in 1939-45. Let me give you some examples from my own knowledge. In an Oxford University Club of the year 1914 numbering twenty young men, three survived the First World War. Of seven honors graduates in 1906 at the University of Grenoble, one survived the First World War. That gives an idea of the losses of 1914-18. In 1943, the Germans prepared a list of French men and women whose characters and abilities made them leaders in their villages, towns and cities; 280,000 persons on that list were deported and only 28,000 ever returned to France - and they in all too many instances broken by prison torture and fear. A similar toll laid on a city say the size of Cleveland and its suburbs would mean twelve thousand persons removed from the leadership of that city. That is a bewildering kind of loss, and repeated twice in thirty years it verges on extinction of strength and even the plans to recover. What kind of leadership do you expect under such a handicap? Let us not be critical if they ask quietly, "What will the Americans do?"

They look to us. In England during the war, the children, I was told, would look hurriedly to their parents when a bomb exploded. They didn't look at the bomb, but to their parents' faces, to learn how to interpret the explosion. If their parents showed no fear, the children stayed calm. But if the parent's face showed fear, the children were terrified, for they knew they were not strong. I think I need not say more. The major task within our reach is the example we set to the envious, the dispossessed, the disillusioned, and the discouraged.

And so inevitably comes your question, "Well, what do you see as the solution, if it is not war, or waiting for war to be waged upon us"?

In terms of defense I think the construction of airplanes and the training of their crews deserves attention. So does the education of expert technologists. Universal military training without the psychological stimulus of war will produce either a fascist state or disaffection where it is least wanted.

I do not believe that with 10,000,000 dead and hundreds of cities and towns destroyed the Russians want to wage war. They want the extension of ideas but I am convinced that if any western European governments or our own government tallies the welfare of the greatest number of its citizens as its greatest concern, Communism cannot extend. The Russians have never known prosperity for the mass of its people. Until a government has learned how to survive prosperity it has not met the severest test of all. I believe that if the Russians were to secure general prosperity it would break internally the strength of Communism. Russia invaded has ~~triumphed~~; Russia the invader has resulted in revolution.

It is when pieces of gold are within reach that bands of thieves fall upon each other. There's honor among thieves until they get the booty. Then envy, jealousy and embitterment begin. The odd thing about my view is that I really believe in self-control and what is known as the Christian ethic - not at all because it enjoined upon us an ideal but because it is the only thing that works in the long run. I don't believe the Russians have begun to meet the real

difficulties, so if prosperity should come to them it will corrupt them and destroy them.

You can't crush ideas with force alone. If this talk seems to have dealt with ideas it is because ideas, especially self-control and good will, are the only corrective I can see to the spread of Communism.

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APRIL 7, 1948