

governmental policies. The state should not dictate religious beliefs. We Communists are completely opposed on principle to state coercion in regard to religious beliefs.

Of course, Communists do not consider religion to be a private matter insofar as it concerns members in our revolutionary Party. We stand without any reservations for education that will root out beliefs in the supernatural, that will remove the religious prejudices which stand in the way of organizing the masses for socialism, that will withdraw the special privileges of religious institutions. But as far as religious workers go, the Party does not insist that they abandon their beliefs before they join the Party. Our test for such people is whether they represent and fight for the aspirations of the masses. If they do, we welcome them into our Party, and we exercise no coercion against their religious beliefs within our movement. We subject their religious beliefs to careful and systematic criticism, and we expect that they will not be able to withstand this educational process. It is our experience that their work in the movement will bring them to see the correctness of our viewpoint on this question.

It is significant that the Communist Party, more than any other labor group, has been able to achieve successful united fronts with church groups on the most important issues of the day. This is not due to any compromise with religion as such, on our part. In fact, by going among the religious masses, we are for the first time able to bring our anti-religious ideas to them. We have been able to unite with them because we have been able to convince many church leaders, and especially their followers, of the necessity for unity if we are to protect our rights, among them religious freedom, which are endangered by the rise of fascism. They have found that it is the anti-religious Communists who fight for freedom of religious belief. They have seen that it is the fascists, who sup-

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT ABOUT RELIGION?

THE united front work of Communists, especially their anti-war work, brings them into contact with large sections of the American population which are connected with church institutions in one form or another. In working with these masses to forge the united front against fascism and war, Communists take their religious beliefs into account. We respect these beliefs, because we think that religious-minded people will participate in the Socialist revolution. This does not mean that we cease to regard religion as a capitalist-controlled institution. But we do respect the right of the masses to hold on to their views, and are entirely opposed to any system of coercion, such as the fascists in Germany are trying to impose upon Protestants and Catholics.

Communists believe, as Marx pointed out at the very beginning of his career, that the social function of religion and religious institutions is to act as an opiate. They keep the masses passive and persuade them to accept bad conditions in the hope of a reward after death. It is this social role of religious institutions that the Communist Party fights against uncompromisingly. We try to rouse the masses from passivity, and organize them in struggle for a better life on earth. Naturally we fight against anything and any institution that propagates the idea of passive submission to the ruling class.

But the Communists maintain that the religious beliefs of a person are his private concern in relation to the state and

posedly march under the flag of religion, as in Germany, who destroy all freedom including religious freedom. Hence, many church organizations have joined in the broad united front against war and fascism, and are glad to find the anti-religious Communists fighting alongside of them, shoulder to shoulder.

It is true that we have learned to be much more careful about the quality of our mass work in this field. We take pains not to offend any religious belief. We don't want to close the minds of religious people to what we have to tell them about capitalism, because of some remark or action offensive to their religion. We can well say that the cessation of ineffective, rude and vulgar attacks upon religion is a positive improvement in our work.

Our aim is to remove all obstacles that stand in the way of mobilizing the religious masses of this country into a movement against fascism and war. This is especially important work because the greatest organized section of our population is in or around church groups. Only a "Leftist" simpleton would suggest that we Communists should keep ourselves "pure" and uncontaminated by association with the millions of church-goers in this country; only a reactionary will advise the church followers to keep themselves uncontaminated by the united front with the Communists.

This aim of ours clears up a question much discussed by critics of the Communists, namely, our united front activities with the followers of the self-styled God of Harlem, Father Divine. It is significant that most of those people who criticize us for associating with Father Divine and the members of his church are willing enough to permit us to have united activities with more "respectable" church organizations. In other words, they demand that we should be "discriminating", and should not associate ourselves with "bad" religious organizations, but only with "good" ones. They are especially

outraged by the fact that Father Divine's followers place their God on 115th Street in Harlem, instead of the more romantic regions of the heavenly firmament. Their sense of decorum is outraged because Father Divine's flock loudly demonstrates its religious enthusiasm in the streets, and not quietly behind stained-glass windows.

But these critics do not understand that we Communists do not distinguish between good and bad religions, because we think they are all bad for the masses. We are not interested in the exact location of God's residence or in the enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm in religious worship.

We judge religious organizations and their leaders by their attitude to the fundamental social issues of the day. What church organization has so completely demonstrated its opposition to fascism and war as that of Father Divine? Other churches could very well follow his example. We would be delighted if thousands of other churches would support the Workers' Social Insurance Bill, the fight to free the Scottsboro Boys, and would fight against Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, as the followers of Father Divine have done.

It is especially important that we bring our united front program to the Negro masses where there are the greatest suffering and oppression, and where there has been the greatest response to our message of organization and struggle. Our activity is gradually succeeding in giving a social and political education to the Negro men and women who belong to Father Divine's church. Who would deny the tremendous importance of this education in the center of Harlem, where a people are bound in the chains of segregation, misery and oppression? These masses will be liberated from religious superstitions only by our economic and political work, which reaches them in the only way possible at this particular point in their development.

We have nothing in common with the religious beliefs of Father Divine, in whose fantastic features we see the fundamental characteristics of all religions. But we have much in common with the masses of Negroes who follow Father Divine. They are our people. We will fight for them and for their interests. We will do everything possible to draw them into the common struggle against a common foe—the capitalist system. We will not deny to them the right to religious beliefs that we grant to Catholic workers, Jewish workers, or the members of the numerous Protestant sects. We fight for all of them; at the same time we reserve our own right to oppose all religious superstition wherever we find it, and with the most effective means at our disposal.

There are common objectives that Communists and religious organizations can strive to obtain. We have seen this take place in the United States, where they have fought jointly against fascism and war, and against coercion in the field of educational freedom by reactionaries. Such joint struggles will develop more and more, and many religious bodies will be valuable allies in the battle against oppression.