

Myths about Communism

Do communists want your color tv?

by Jim Griffin

In 1957 J. Edgar Hoover wrote a book called *Masters of Deceit* telling "what the communist bosses are doing now to bring America to its knees." Of course, it has since become clear that Hoover himself had few masters when it came to deceit, but that is another story. His book has become a textbook of anti-communism. Its ideas both mould and reflect popular attitudes toward communism and communists.

The Organizer wants to debate these ideas with the arch anti-communist Hoover. While J. Edgar has passed on, his ideas have not. And while he no longer is able to speak, his book continues to speak for him.

"Communists want to control everything, where you live, where you work, what you are paid, what you think, what streetcars you ride (or whether you walk) how your children are educated, what you may not read and write. The most minute details, even the time your alarm clock goes off in the morning or the amount of cream in your coffee are the subjects for state supervision."

Pretty frightening, this picture of a communist commissar watching over your shoulder to see if you put the right amount of cream in your coffee. This is the portrayal of communists and socialism throughout *Masters of Deceit*, and it is one familiar to all of us from countless other sources of anti-communism.

The typical communist of this myth is power-hungry, ruthless, conniving and manipulative. These imagined communists seek only to control the minds and hearts of unsuspecting, salt of the earth people and turn them into mindless, joyless, hardworking zombies.

The socialist state that these communists wish to create is described as a cross between a government as bureaucratic as a giant U. S. Post Office, and as democratic as San Quentin penitentiary. The communists themselves, of course, become the masters and overlords of this bleak machine-like society and lavish themselves with power and privilege.

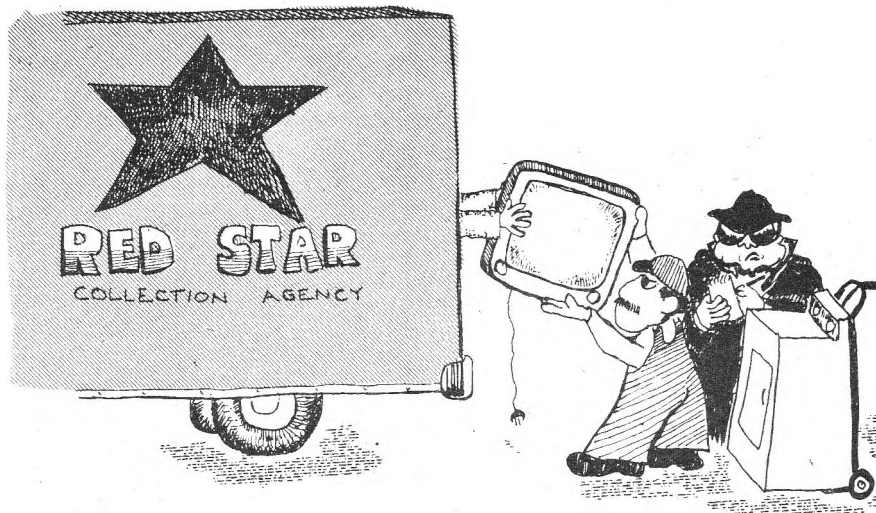
If this were so, it would be hard to imagine why millions of people throughout the world join communist-led movements for national liberation and socialism. Are all of these people being duped, like children accepting candy from a molester?

If you stop to think about it, the picture of communists as evil-in-the-flesh monsters who exist in some sort of sinister political underworld is pretty hard to swallow. Ask yourself these questions: Who are communists and where do they come from? Why would anyone struggle, undergo imprisonment, torture, and death to create the rigid and austere socialist society of J. Edgar Hoover's fevered imagination?

WHO ARE COMMUNISTS?

Hoover's view is that communists are rootless conspirators existing in a society but not as a part of it. History contradicts this myth, however. The communist movements of the past century have drawn their members from the working class, from the peasantry and from the ranks of revolutionary-minded intellectuals.

People become communists because in the course of their daily living experience and in the course of their study of their



society they have come to the conclusion that the system of capitalism and imperialism is their real enemy. These lessons are learned in the course of struggles for national independence, in the trade unions and the workers' movement, in the struggle against racism, sexism, and discrimination, and in the hundreds of daily struggles for the basic necessities of a livelihood and for democratic rights.

People become communists because they have come to understand that the interests of the working class and all oppressed peoples of class society are, and will always be, in direct opposition to the interests of the ruling capitalist class.

The ills and injustices of capitalist society cannot be cured by applying band-aid reforms to diseases that require major surgery. The surgery that is needed, communists believe, is to remove the bankers, corporation executives, and the super-rich family dynasties from political and economic power, throw out the greedy profit-first economic system, and replace it with rule of the working class and an economic system that places human needs as its first priority.

ORGANIZERS OF THE WORKING CLASS

The capitalists will not give up their power without a fight. Communists see their job as uniting the working class and oppressed people and preparing for the showdown that will surely come with this ruling class.

The socialist society which communists seek to create is one which is ruled by and for the working class. It aims at making democracy a real tool in the hands of workers, not just the window-dressing electoral process that is called "democracy" in class society.

Hoover plays on popular attitudes toward the existing government in the U. S. to build up anti-communism. Under capitalism the state *is* an organ of the ruling capitalist class — it *does* interfere in our lives in order to better control us in the interests of the *monopoly corporations*. Under socialism, the state represents the interests of the working class and its policies; laws and forms of "interference" in

the lives of its citizens are, as we shall see, in the interests of the *workers*.

ARE COMMUNISTS OUT TO STEAL YOUR PROPERTY?

According to J. Edgar the communists are not only going to set your alarm clock in the communist society of the future. They are going to steal the alarm clock you've already got. "Communists work constantly to steal your rights, liberties and property", we are told.

One thing is true. Communists are out to take away the property of the exploiters—the huge monopoly corporations that presently own and control the productive wealth of the countries. Under socialism, the means of production — the factories, mines, mills, and productive land — will be owned collectively by the working class.

We do not seek to "steal" this property, for in our view it rightfully belongs to the workers who have created it, and has already been stolen by the capitalist class! The system of private property and wage labor makes this massive theft legal. The working class, by sweeping away this system, will simply be taking back what rightfully is ours.

Hoover has a hard time explaining why the worker will be threatened by the expropriation or seizure of this property in a socialist revolution. So he just lumps together the means of production with personal property and argues that the communists are going to take away your color TV.

He says the confiscation of property in a socialist revolution "would include your home, business, bank deposits, and related personal possessions." There it is in a nutshell. The fearsome communists are like a big collection agency. They are going to come into your home and repossess your furniture and grab up your personal savings.

The truth is that the socialist revolution has no interest in repossessing the personal property and savings of working people. The revolution has no need of such property. And most important, a revolution made by and for the workers

that took away the hard-earned possessions of these same workers would hardly make any sense.

PERSONAL PROPERTY UNDER SOCIALISM

But isn't it true that in communist countries the state owns everything and the individual nothing? No, it is not. Personal property still exists and indeed is protected under socialism. Let's take housing as an example.

Socialist revolutions have not confiscated the homes owned by working people. In some instances the mansions of the very rich have been confiscated. This happened following the Russian Revolution where these huge homes were turned into apartments for workers.

In China the very rich owners of mansions have been forced to share them with the workers. One former Chinese capitalist described his home today: "We live in our old house, my wife and I, sharing how with some others. That's all right. Good people. Hardworking people. We don't need the rooms".

HOUSING UNDER SOCIALISM

The major emphasis in socialist countries is on building state-owned and cooperative housing in order to meet the needs of the masses of people as rapidly as possible. Renting apartments for profit is against the law. While rents paid to landlords in the U. S. average at least 25% of the workers income, in the socialist countries rents for state and cooperative housing average 5%.

But privately-owned homes still exist. In the Soviet Union 60 years after the revolution one-third of the housing is still in private hands. And it is still possible to build and own a private home. Land is available free of charge and loans can be obtained at 2% interest. In many rural areas, this is the most common form of ownership. In the cities, publicly owned housing is preferred and private home ownership is dying out.

In capitalist society, home ownership represents the single biggest investment for the vast majority of workers. Holding onto and protecting that investment is important to the meagre financial security of the average working class family. This is not the case in socialist countries where there is no unemployment, and where no one is denied education, medical care, food, clothing or housing for lack of money. Thus the workers in these countries for the most part see no special value in owning a home as opposed to living in low-rent state-owned housing.

In the socialist countries consumer goods (cars, TVs, furniture, etc.) purchased by individuals belongs to those individuals. and similarly, personal savings belong to the individual. Hoover's talk about confiscation of these items has no basis in fact.

The truth is that the workers in the socialist countries had little in the way of personal possessions or savings before the revolution. Now, because of the growth of production and the new distribution of wealth under socialism, the working people have many more possessions than before. Of course, this is not the only way to measure standard of living — education, medical care, and the general quality of life are factors too. In all these respects, socialism has raised rather than cut the standard of living for the working people. . . J. Edgar to the contrary.

(to be continued)

**The Organizer debates
J. Edgar Hoover on
socialism and
private property**