

CHAPTER VII

PROPHETS OF THE PROMISED LAND

THE distress of the American masses, which the New Deal failed to relieve, brought a number of reform movements into existence that already exercise considerable influence. Among them are the Utopians, the Epics, the Technocrats, the Townsendites, the Social Crediters, etc. These movements developed first among the urban middle classes of the Far West, and later spread to the Middle West and East, and are drawing in many workers. At the time of writing, the most influential one is the Townsend movement which has drawn into its wake a considerable number of farmers and workers.

All of them claim to have found a simple remedy that will abolish all social evils. Whatever their differences, and at the moment there seems to be a pretty sharp fight between Sinclair and the Townsendites, all of them share the illusion that the troubles of our society do not arise from private ownership of the means of production, but are due to maladjustments in the sphere of money and distribution. All have some specific monetary panacea, which they believe will solve the paradox of hunger amidst potential plenty.

The Townsend movement, which has the largest following, has but one aim—old-age pensions. However, the Townsendites claim that when their scheme of old-age pensions is established it will abolish unemployment and provide well-being for everyone in the United States. They propose to withdraw 8,000,000 old people from production, thus making room for the younger generation unemployed. The Townsend move-

ment directs its appeals to both old and young on this basis.

The Townsendites, while not directly anti-capitalist, strongly attack concentrated wealth and the big bankers. They make severe criticism of reaction and of reactionaries and call for strong support of democracy, particularly the American democratic system.

The masses of people who have been attracted to the Townsendites sincerely want social security for old persons and jobs for the youth. They feel strongly on the subject of concentrated wealth. Hence, it is clear that the Townsend movement contains great positive possibilities. At the same time, there is the possibility, despite the intentions of the rank and file, that the movement will fall prey to some fascist demagogue. It can be led either against capitalism, or against the true interests of the masses.

The Townsendites, like the other groups we have mentioned, have sprung up as a result of the economic crisis. The movement began by focussing attention on an important issue of the day—the insecurity of old people under capitalism. It demands that Congress pass a law granting a monthly pension of \$200 to all citizens over the age of sixty, this money to be spent directly on the purchase of commodities during the same month. The funds for financing these pensions are to be derived from a two percent tax on all transactions. Dr. Townsend claims that his tax plan is not the ordinary sales tax in that he calls for the taxation not only of consumption articles, but of every commodity sold in the United States. He says that if his law is passed, about 8,000,000 old people will receive pensions and be withdrawn from industry, thus making room for that many younger people. This, he claims, would create a tremendous home market for industry, which in turn would solve the crisis of unemployment. The Townsendites correctly characterize the Roosevelt Social Security Act and its

provisions for old-age pensions as a fraud. They have their own bill before Congress, the so-called McGroarty Bill, which scales down their \$200 proposal to \$50 a month.

What should be our attitude, we who fight against reaction, to the members of such movements? There can be no question that the rank and file hate Wall Street. With proper leadership they can be lined up in the anti-fascist front. It thus becomes a question of the proper way of approaching the masses of Townsendites, Epics, etc., and convincing them of the necessity of a common front to achieve the aims that they themselves are fighting for.

We Communists approach the rank and file of these organizations in the most friendly spirit. We say that we agree with them in principle on the question of ending poverty, of providing a secure old age for everyone in the United States. We propose that our organizations and their organizations get together to achieve some minimum program that will be of benefit to the masses.

For example, when we are asked to support the McGroarty Bill along with the Townsendites, we propose a few amendments which would make that possible, and which show the only way in which real old age pensions can be secured.

We say that *all* toilers over 60, and not only citizens, should be entitled to pensions. There are millions of old people who are not citizens, but who have worked hard to create the wealth of this country; to leave them out is to endanger the whole program.

We insist that funds for old-age pensions must be raised by taxing high incomes and big fortunes. The two percent transaction tax would fall heaviest on the impoverished masses themselves. They would pay taxes when they bought things, and in the goods there would also be incorporated taxes paid by wholesalers, etc. In other words, the transaction tax would

take from the toilers with one hand what it promised to give them with the other. It would tax the hungry to feed the hungry. Our slogan is: Tax the rich to feed the poor.

And finally, we say to the Townsendites that the passage of an adequate old-age pension bill only takes care of one phase of social insurance. To cover all other phases—unemployment, health, and maternity insurance, etc.—we propose that Congress enact the fundamental measures provided by the Workers Unemployment, Old Age and Social Insurance Bill, H.R. 2827, which provides for the aged more effectively than the McGroarty Bill.

We tell the Townsendites that the passage of an old-age pension bill will not abolish unemployment nor cure the fundamental evil of capitalism. We point out that it will bring some measure of relief to the suffering toilers, but it is not and cannot be a cure-all. To eradicate the sore-spots in the capitalist set-up, we must abolish capitalism and introduce socialism. We must organize the toilers against the capitalists and reaction.

On this basis, we will win hundreds of thousands of Townsend followers for a strong fight for genuine old-age pensions in the first place, and secondly, for the general campaign to be waged by a Farmer-Labor Party against the growing forces of fascism.

With the other movements, our Party follows the same tactics. We strive to have them join us on a local and a national scale in a common fight for certain minimum demands, higher relief, unemployment insurance, the guarantee of civil liberties, and the opening of closed factories by the government to give work to the unemployed. We especially urge the Epics, for example, to join us in making this latter demand to the capitalists. Of course, our program, while it touches on the popular issue raised by the Epics, proposes a more practical solution.

We reject Upton Sinclair's idea of segregating the unemployed from the normal economic life of the country and putting them into a separate water-tight compartment apart from the general economy of the country.

Our proposal is for the government to open up the closed factories, wherever the capitalists refuse to run them. It shall pay regular wages to the unemployed in regular money. To the objection that this would cost too much, there is the obvious answer that the factories will produce values greater than the costs. The products would then be in the hands of the government for sale on the markets, or for distribution in the form of relief, or for public works. It thus has great advantages over the poor relief system and over useless "made work". To the threat of the capitalists that they will fight against it, that they would close down more factories, we reply that the more they close down, the more the government would open up. If all the capitalists should want to withdraw from production, that is their lookout. The capitalists cannot be allowed to dictate any longer; their dictation put our country in its present mess.

In this manner Communists try to establish active contact between their mass organizations and the movements we have talked about. They do not believe as some superficial critics assert, that the masses in these various movements are crack-pots and cannot be won over to the revolutionary program. Such an opinion is a form of political snobbery that would drive millions of sincere people into the arms of demagogues. We Communists believe that the great majority of them can be taken into the anti-fascist camp, if only we discuss things intelligently, have patience, and persuade these masses to engage in a united front of struggle for their burning needs.

We propose to unite for common protection all who follow the various contradictory Prophets of the Promised Land.