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Political Pied Pipers

MOST OF US are familiar with the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. When the citizens refused to pay him for piping the rats out of Hamelin, he began to play another tune on his pipes. It was a gay tune. It seemed to promise a Never Never Land of toys, candy, and continual play. And all of the children came out of their houses and followed him and were never seen again.

WHILE most of us have heard this fable, how many of us realize that it developed from an actual incident in history? This incident was the Children's Crusade in 1212. And the children left not only Hamelin but all the towns through which the crusade passed in Germany and France. They were led by a "Pied Piper" who piped a tune the like of which had never been heard before. He said that only the innocents—the children—could free Jerusalem from the infidels.

This crusade was started by Stephen of the golden voice. There was a frenzy in the air. And the children came with stars in their eyes.

Some of the people watched the procession as a spectacle. Others wept at the folly of it. A few tried to stop it at the risk of being killed as heretics. And as always, the evil opportunists went along with the good-intentioned but misinformed leaders.

Can you imagine the procession of thousands of starry-eyed children with their crosses and their songs? But the people who went along with them were not starry-eyed. They knew where they were going, for they saw possibilities.

The children finally reached the sea—all but a few of them who could not keep up. There were ships waiting to take them to the Holy Land, presumably. But the opportunists who had attached themselves to the crusade sold the children into slavery and prostitution. And these children were never seen again.

THERE is a present-day analogy to that crusade. A "Pied Piper's" tune is being played throughout the land today. It seems to promise a Never Never Land of security and freedom from want—a utopia for the believers, the innocents. It bids us to trust our leaders, and to have no fear. It is the tune of socialism. And the analogy to the Children's Crusade is complete when we remember that under government responsibility for our welfare, everyone is treated like a child.

There are many sincere people—both Republicans and Democrats—who are joining this crusade. Most of them are as starry-eyed as children. Their intentions are good, but they are on their way to an impossible utopia that disregards all the laws of nature and economics.

With these starry-eyed people, however, are going a lot of people who are not starry-eyed. They know where they are going. They are the socialists and communists who desire to plan the lives of other people. All of them see their power increased by encouraging and taking advantage of this crusade.

One by one, the banners of this modern crusade are unfurled. The slogans printed upon them are popular because they promise a Never Never Land of something for nothing: public housing, government education, socialized medicine, government-guaranteed jobs, price controls, government subsidies, government-guaranteed pensions, and so on, and so on.

LIKE THE CHILDREN of 1212, most Americans seem to be participating in a spectacle; they are merely following the good-intentioned but misinformed leaders who have promised to lead them into a utopia. Many Americans wring their hands and weep—and do nothing more because "We can't stop the trend of the times." But a few Americans protest and try to stop it; they are the "heretics." They are those who distrust any person who wants power over others, however good his intentions.

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