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BUNDLE RATES ON APPLICATION

On the Record

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Another mighty project for social enlightenment is about to open and get to work. The purpose of the project is to find the basis for human conduct, why man reacts as he does to different situations or, to put it more bluntly — why do people do the things they do?

We like the question. It has often addled our poor head badly in our earlier years. When we see workers who own nothing but the strength and skill to labor, supporting capitalist politicians, attending capitalist churches, crossing themselves in honor of mythical deities who never materialized as much as one plebeian doughnut to appease the desires of lunchtime, telling everyone they meet about what good bosses and jobs they have, it does seem difficult to think of a quick convincing answer as to why the heck they are fools enough to do such things?

If this new and greatly ballyhooed project will succeed in putting the finger on the real cause of working class idiocy, as well as the means for replacing today's apathy with tomorrow's avidity, then we will be among the first to consider it "a thing of beauty and a joy forever." But we are not sold on such an optimistic outcome. We harbor grave doubts as to the intent and efficacy of the proposed venture.

In the first place, it happens to be a brainchild of the Ford Foundation. This does not indicate any definite move to the left of center so far as the treatment of the subject is concerned. All the lush foundations we have encountered seem bent on maintaining things just as they have been in the stolid, stodgy ways of the past.

The Rockfeller Foundation, which is older than the Ford, has always been an ardent advocate of the existing status in philosophy and political science. In late years they have moved, physically, farther away and the last we heard of them they were over in Africa promoting such worthy movements as ascertaining the cause of juvenile delinquency among the Mau Mau's, and the turning averages of the Whirling Dervish.

The Ford Foundation will likely become just as revolutionary. While we are not acquainted with the current sprouts of the family tree, we were well aware of the antics of the original Henry who belonged to our generation. Not only did he devise a form of horseless carriage, but he was also responsible for a new and improved mulish attitude on the part of his workers. He was in fact one of the most scientific labor exploiters of all time.

This new venture of the benevolent Foundation is connected with Stanford University. This in itself reveals its proletarian nature. It is termed "Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences," and is backed by a $4,000,000 expense account. Three thousand applicants from a dozen countries have been winnowed out and 38 of them selected from the ranks of economists, psychiatrists, biologists, sociologists, statisticians, and anthropologists to get their mental motors whirring for the next five years, and give the world in plain language an account of the thought maneuvers of the only animal that can be skinned more than once.

Strange as it may seem, we have not been invited to participate on this erudite panel. But the omission is not without its compensation. It relieves us from the embarrassment of being winnowed out.

Did we, by one of those rare, unaccountable accidents, succeed in getting selected we think we could save the Foundation a considerable amount of money for other noble enterprise like studying the growth of acorns in the petrified forests of Arizona, or measuring the effects of the ice age in the Mississippi valley.

Were we asked to inflict our theory of social psychology — the Marxian brand — on the assembled scientists, we would start from the premise that social behavior is not to be understood by laboratory tests of individual bipeds whose actions can be added up and presented as a whole, but rather the other way around. We would have to know the social nature of the environment in which the people live and, equipped with this knowledge, it would not be hard to ascertain the behavioral reactions of characteristic groups of individuals.

Of one thing we may be certain — that no real explanation of human behavior can be offered without due consideration of the social system and how it got to be what it is. The objectives which individuals seek to obtain, and the moving force that drives them on are determined by a definite class structure made up of those who own the wealth of the world, and the much larger grouping that possesses nothing outside their natural aptitude for producing wealth.

But this premise would never be acceptable to the learned scholars subsidized by the Ford Foundation. If they started from this basis it would get them into all kinds of trouble trying to explain what they are cautioned not to explain. We can depend upon it that the intellectuals assembled on the summit above Stanford will formulate a decision in harmony with the interests of those who sponsored the imposing project.

J. A. McDonald

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