

---

---

## The Curator's Corner

---

### THE SAME COURSE OF ABSURDITY

By CLAUDE R. COOK

The Korean "Crisis"—and the United States has gone through a series of crises in the last twenty years—which may or may not be called a war, brings into perspective in rather a retrospective manner the way in which we have brought war, if it comes, to our own shores and soil.

The last three decades have found us in two world wars, and if present preparations are any indication, we will be involved in another. The two world wars were fought on foreign soil. And that is the point to which we hope to adhere herein.

The burden of propaganda in wars one and two was that it was much better for American soldiers to fight on foreign soil than on our own. But it was that very type of thinking and meddling in European wars and "world savoring" that has brought us face to face with a war on our own soil and our own cities.

In a good many ways America has not learned to look or see very far ahead. For a young nation we have been past masters in looking back. We went into wars one and two with weapons designed for the past. Of course, due to our vast industries in which we excel, we caught up with our opponents.

Without further labor on that phase, it is sufficient only to remember what we did from 1945 to 1950. But more important is what we did not do. Nothing is more representative of official thinking at this point than the apparent misjudging of the aims and growth of Communism directed from the Kremlin. More astute thinking would have revealed twenty or more years ago that the infiltration came in many guises.

Youth organizations in the thirties were being used to advance the Marxist cause. But misguided leaders and professors living in sheltered esthetic realms, were dreaming of a better world, many unconscious, though not all by any means, that they were following the Marxist line. And Marxism was no new thing, but it had been a long time assuming either formidable or tangible proportions. But back of all of those movements was the shadow of Karl Marx.

It may be presumed that any idea once promulgated might be a long time receiving recognition, but once it percolates down to some succeeding era, may be seized upon by some individual or group, and without knowing or caring about its origin, promulgated as original. So Socialism may begin in a very mild form and appeal to idealists and they will nurture it and fertilize it with idealistic thinking and expression until one day the hybrid is revealed for what it is and was all the time—but needed the proper soil in which to grow—Marxism. And you have the full bloom of Communism in your government garden. Tom Dixon saw that in the early part of the twentieth century. Even I, in a speaking tour in 1936, that took me into every state west of the Mississippi except one or two, was expressing the conviction that we were heading into a situation in our own country, which one day would prove dangerous. That day is here.

So anxious have our political opportunist leaders been for world recognition, not world dominance, that they could not restrain themselves from going to and giving the aid that prevented Hitler from either conquering Russia or leaving it impotent, and what is more, leaving Hitler and Germany impotent. If we had had wise and sagacious statesmen at the helm at that time who would have permitted Germany and Russia to fight themselves helpless, both would have been prostrate, and then the United States could have submitted peace proposals that would have been enduring. Willing or not, both those nations would have been compelled by their helplessness

to accept an enduring peace imposed upon them by peace loving and seeking peoples. Prime Minister Chamberlin saw that. History has a strange way of catching up with men and events but catch up it does. Neither "death nor taxes" is more certain. But we had meddle lovers at our helm instead.

Any student of events knows that our present situation began over thirty years ago. When Japan invaded Manchuria, Secretary of State Stimson wanted to apply sanctions and stop her. England would not go along. Again, when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, the same proposal was made. England and France said no. Invasion of China met the same refusal. I heard an official from the Japanese consulate tell a Cornell College (Iowa) forum in 1936 that "whether you like it or not Japan is going to bring order in that area, including China, which is important to Japan." This was only one of many similar instances. But they were not heeded in any recognizable sense. These were instances in which we did not have the whole say-so. But we did have it when it came to making it clear to European nations that if they felt they had the responsibility for the continent of Europe, (and one of them thought that the world rested upon her shoulders, for the sun always shone upon it somewhere), that they could take the preventive steps necessary, or not depend upon American money and blood to bale them out after their refusal to clean up their own messes, in which they had embroiled themselves. "Every man or nation sows the seeds of its own destruction."

So, now we are confronted with the possibility, through our meddling, of having a war upon our own soil, cities and industry. Before this is in print such may be the case. And confronted with this possibility, in what position do we find ourselves? Ships in mothballs, ordnance plants in private hands purchased for a fraction of cost, and high school boys thrown into front lines in Korea against what is probably the remnant of the best fighters in the Japanese army, trained and supplied by

Russia. And a secretary of defense announcing that if we were attacked at 4:00 A. M. we would be ready at 5:00 A. M. His only defense of such a statement could be that he did not say what A. M. we would be ready.

High officials in the state department were so imbued with the so-called idealism mentioned in preceding paragraphs, that all they could see in the Chinese revolt against its National government was "agrarian reform." And that adds a new term to the many that masqueraded under Marxism. Better students of the theories of Karl Marx would have realized it was the same old Marxist cry of revolt, plunder, destroy.

So, again in thirty years, we face a world war. One every ten years. Is that to be the inheritance of our meddling? Meddling in overseas matters inevitably led to the same thing at home. The strange philosophies of economics that have come along under many guises developed the theory that American people are incapable of managing their own affairs. Regimenters hailed with delight the rationing program of War II. They could then put the people in the strait jacket they had long sought to impose upon them. It never occurred to the planners that they could not check inflation by the imposition of rationing; for inflation was produced by the amount of money in circulation. Instead of checking the flow of money the planners undertook to check the things it could be spent for, and black markets flourished everywhere. Rents were controlled by the government, but if you rented a house (even one idle for several months) you did a Peter and Paul act or a "let not your right hand know what your left doeth"—I know this. House owners were carrying rent insurance to keep houses idle.

One of the more absurd notions of the era was gasoline rationing. A gentleman high in unofficial government was permitted to outline a driving program with a speed limit of thirty-five miles per hour. He was a resident of the metropolitan New York area, and be-

cause one could not drive faster than that in that congested area, he conceived the idea of imposing that fantastic plan upon all the American people. More cars, built for higher speeds, were in repair shops during that time than in any other similar period, and this was due not only to a shortage of new cars, but to the fact that lower speeds provide inadequate lubrication. And while Iowans were limited in use of gas and fuel oil for machine and heating purposes, both fuels were being purposely set on fire and burned on the west coast. Now this same gentleman has hoodwinked cautious members of congress to provide for this same socialistic regimentation again. In his eighties and many times a millionaire, he seems to have forgotten that he made his wealth under the free enterprise system and that he could not do it now under the prevailing confiscation system of high taxes.

And now we are to be set on the same course of absurdity, except that there is to be more of it.

One wonders when sanity in national government may prevail. If as a result of our meddling we have brought to our shores the thing we contended we fought two wars to prevent, we may return to sanity. Individuals nor nations can continually inject themselves into outside situations without ultimately bringing disastrous results to themselves. If atomic war comes it may be the end of civilization as we know it. But it will not mean the end of the American people. If we mean by civilization, buildings, industry and the numerous advances we have made, then we can concede that atomic war may end all of that. It will not mean the end of the American people. But it may mean starting all over again.

Sagacious statesmanship could have prevented the possibility of such a thing. But why use the word sagacious? A man is either a statesman or he is not. Statesmen could have prevented our facing the situation which now confronts us. Perhaps they can yet. If so, let us have more statesmen. Rather let us just have statesmen.

We are in the anomalous position of being at peace and war both at the same time. In other words, most of us are facing two fronts simultaneously. Whichever prevails we must win. But in winning let us beware lest we see like some great mirage a mighty thumb turned down upon us and learn to our great dismay and distress—and too late—that it is “God’s Thumb.”

---

### IOWA'S RURAL ROADS

Authoritative data upon the condition of the rural roads of Iowa, as of July 1, 1950, has been secured from the Iowa State Highway Commission, indicating the present status of Iowa's surfaced road program. Chief Engineer Fred R. White, who has been at the head of this enterprise since its inception, gives the mileage of surfaced rural highways as follows:

Pavement, 5,775 miles; bituminous (blacktop), 1,535 miles; gravel or crushed stone, 55,720 miles; total surfaced 63,030 miles.

The mileage under all conditions as regards primary roads, farm to market roads and local secondary roads in the state, is divided as follows:

#### PRIMARY ROADS

Paved, 5,715 miles; bituminous (blacktop), 845 miles; gravel, 2140 miles; total, 8,700 miles.

#### FARM TO MARKET ROADS

Paved, 20 miles; bituminous (blacktop), 410 miles; gravel or stone, 27,450 miles, unsurfaced, 6,320 miles; total, 34,200 miles.

#### LOCAL SECONDARY ROADS

Paved, 40 miles; bituminous (blacktop), 280 miles; gravel or stone, 26,130 miles; unsurfaced, 31,950 miles; total, 58,400 miles.

The widening and replacing of pavements on primary roads, particularly those carrying heavy traffic and adjacent to cities where congestion of traffic occurs with frequency, is receiving especial attention of the commission at this time.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.