

FRANK CHODOROV

R. I. P.

It was almost twenty years ago that I first met Frank Chodorov. It was at one of those luxurious but terribly dreary cocktail parties that have long served as rallying ground for the intelligentsia of the American right-wing. There the more articulate of the rightists are wont to gather to declaim at each other for the umpteenth time on the perils of inflation, the immorality of welfare recipients, and the clear and present menace of Walter Reuther to the vitals of the American Republic. These and similar cliches have long provided the feeble structure of application for the glittering but always vague generalities on "free enterprise", "limited government" and the American Way. The men of the Right have long been content to set forth this windy rhetoric as a convenient and almost "non-controversial" substitute for hard-edged ideas, while on the back stairs they dicker with the brokers of Big Government for an increase in their subsidies and privileges and a cut in their fiscal burdens.

In that crowd of time-servers, Frank Chodorov stood out like a blaze of radiant light. He stood out at that cocktail party, too, the only person alive and ablaze amidst the whole gaggle of one-dimensional and identical men around him. There he stood, his tie askew, his balding head disheveled, the ashes from his beloved pipe flying all around, his intelligent and merry eyes twinkling as he scored some outrageous, logical, and beautifully penetrating point to some clod who couldn't tell the difference between the host of cardboard "individualists" and this one genuine article. For Frank was suu generis, and the vast gulf in the quality of mind and the rigor of ideas

between him and the other "rightist" intellectuals was, in a sense, embodied in that other gulf of spirit and outward form.

Unflinching honesty, courage, love of the intellect and the products of the mind, these are some of the things that distinguished Frank Chodorov to the very core of his being and set him many light years above his confreres. While the others prattled on about liberty and individualism, Frank Chodorov really meant it; he was an individualist, and when he died in late December, 1966 an entire era died with him. The outstanding disciple of his beloved mentor, the great libertarian Albert Jay Nock, Frank Chodorov, again unlike his "libertarian" colleagues, never forgot for an instant that the State is the great predatory enemy of the human race, that the State is, in its very being, the organization and regularization of predation, exploitation, and robbery. He did not, as do most classical liberals and alleged libertarians, merely regard the State as another instrument of social utility, which in proper measure might be useful and even praiseworthy. Scorning evasion and compromise, Frank Chodorov saw the State, from early days to last, as a profoundly anti-social institution, the canker in the heart of any attempt at peaceful cooperation by free individuals in society.

I shall never forget the profound thrill--a thrill of intellectual liberation--that ran through me when I first encountered the name of Frank Chodorov, months before we were to meet in person. As a young graduate student in economics, I had always believed in the free market, and had become increasingly libertarian over the years, but this sentiment was as nothing to the headline that burst forth in the title of a pamphlet that I chanced upon at the university bookstore: Taxation is Robbery, by Frank Chodorov. There it was; simple perhaps, but how many of us, let alone how many professors of the economics of taxation, have ever given utterance to this shattering and demolishing truth? Frank was always like that; while the pusillanimous rightists pleaded with our rulers to cut the income tax by a few percent, Frank had the perception and the profound honesty to "tell it like it is." While the general run of rightists decorously deplored the increase in the public debt and urged the government to retrench a bit, Frank Chodorov boldly and logically exhorted his readers: "Don't Buy Bonds!" Since he was a real individualist and not a would-be member of a team of White House advisors, Frank's "alienation" from the

government of the United States was total; hence, he was the only one of the host of ostensible believers in the free market economy in this country to call for the outright repudiation of the public debt, and to see that such repudiation is infinitely more libertarian and infinitely less criminal than looting taxpayers to redeem that debt.

Being a genuine individualist, Frank again pursued the logic of liberty without flinching to arrive at an even more dangerous position: "isolationism", in short, absolute limitation upon government action in the foreign as well as the domestic sphere. This brand of "isolationism" meant, quite consistently, economic and cultural exchange to the uttermost (free trade, freedom of migration, friendship with all foreign peoples), coupled with the political isolating of the U.S. government from all forms of meddling with and pushing around of the people of other countries. He abominated militarism or conscription in any form. For his intransigent opposition to American imperialism's entry into World War II Frank Chodorov was obliged to leave his post as director of the Henry George School of Social Science in New York, and to eke out a precarious living as the owner, publisher, editor, and distributor of analysis, one of the best, though undoubtedly the most neglected, of the "little magazines" that has ever been published in the United States. Over a decade later, and toward the end of his writing career in 1955, Frank, as editor of the revived Freeman, did his best to reaffirm the values of isolationism and to stem the headlong and tragic rush of the right-wing toward the even more disastrous imperial crusade of the Cold War. Also toward the end Frank tried his valiant best to stem the concomitant rush of the right-wing to adopt the label of "conservative." Frank knew his intellectual history; he was and always would be an "individualist", and he recognized "conservatism" to be the embodiment of the creed of the ancient Statist enemy. Writing to protest the designation of himself as a "conservative" in the pages of National Review, Frank retorted: "anyone who calls me a conservative gets a punch in the nose." His cri de coeur, alas, went unheeded; and a lot of deserving folk remain unpunched to this day.

Analysis was the crown of Frank Chodorov's achievement. The chief writer as well as editor and publisher of this four-page monthly broadsheet, Frank, sitting in a dingy loft in lower Manhattan, month after month, published his beautifully written, penetrating, and infinitely logical-and hence radical,-essays. As a stylist he was a distinguished craftsman, emulating Albert Jay Nock; his

characteristic mode was the quietly penetrating parable. And so: the attacks on taxation, on public schooling, on government debt, on militarism; and the loving evocation of his heroes -- Nock, Thoreau, Spencer. Going through the back files of analysis will not take much time; but the reward in communicating with the mind of a keen and fearless and clear-headed individualist at work will make this an experience infinitely more educational than years of courses at the multiversity.

For Frank as a person one adjective, corny though it may seem, persists in crowding out all the others: "lovable". All of us loved Frank, and loved him deeply; even those who were scarcely fit to be in the same room with him, even those who used him only to betray everything he stood for, even they realized that here, above all others, was a man. Wedded to that keen intelligence and merriment, to that fearlessness and candor, was an infinite gentleness of soul, an almost childlike simplicity and open-heartedness that poured forth his generosity and his spirit to the eager young. From that very first meeting at the cocktail party I was drawn irresistibly to Frank, and would sit at his feet imbibing his wisdom and his unvarnished insight. Always eager to give young libertarians their start, he was the first to publish my own fledgling work; I remember proudly my first article in print: a review of H. L. Mencken's A Mencken Crestomathy in the August, 1949 issue of analysis.

One of Frank's great attributes was his love of intellectual discourse, of the play of ideas and the life of the mind. A son of rough-and-ready days of Old New York, Frank cut his eyeteeth in intellectual discussion and debate when these flourished in the cafeterias of the Lower East Side in the early decades of the century. It was characteristic of Frank that he once lamented to me that there didn't seem to be any Marxists around anymore. With Marxists one could argue and converse; one could slash away at the labor theory of value and make an impact. But what can you do, he went on, with pragmatists, with men whose statism or socialism is not grounded upon any logic or principle?

It was a sad, sad day for me and maybe for Frank as well when his wonderful one-man publication died; it was like the death of a dearly beloved member of the family. Officially, as with almost all publications these days, analysis did not die, but was merged with the Washington weekly Human Events. In those days Human Events was not the conservative puff sheet it was later to become,

but a newsletter of some distinction; but still, the loss was irreparable, even though Frank continued to write frequently for Human Events as associate editor. I shall never forget the last time I saw Frank as he was packing to make the move to Washington, a move that was for him truly cataclysmic for he was going, he said a bit fearfully, into the heart of the State itself, into an environment of almost pure statism, and he hoped that he would be able to remain uncontaminated by the deadly atmosphere.

Frank, in those days, was far more unsentimental and radical about politics than I. I was an ardent "extreme right-wing Republican", in the days of course when this term meant isolationist and at least partial devotion to the liberty of the individual, and not a racist or enthusiast for the obliteration of any peasant whose ideology might differ from ours. But Frank, even then, would look at me quizzically and want to know why I was concerned with political clap-trap; he personally had not voted for decades and had no intention of ever voting again, regardless of the degree of statism of the particular candidate. I replied that extreme right-wing Republicans, though of little hope in rolling back the statist tide, at least would keep things from getting worse. "What's wrong," Frank countered, "with things being allowed to get worse?"

Frank remained a few years an exile in Washington, and then returned to New York for an all-too-brief stint as editor of the Freeman during 1955. Our paths crossed when I had the honor of succeeding Frank as Washington columnist for the now totally forgotten "little" West Coast magazine, Faith and Freedom. After 1955, however, Frank's great voice was stilled. Partly for lack of suitable outlet, then largely from the tragic illness that was to cut him down following the death of his beloved wife, shortly after their golden wedding anniversary. Frank's final flowering was his last ideological testament, the brilliantly written The Rise and Fall of Society, published in 1959, at the age of 72. For the rest, we must hastily draw a veil over these years, not only because of his lengthy illness but because of the betrayal of his name and his ideas in the latter years by those whom Frank, in his nobility of heart and simplicity of soul, embraced and trusted implicitly. The mark of Frank's life now transcends all of that, as a giant blots out the pygmies that might attempt to surround him. And yet it will be a long time before they can be forgiven. One of the last times that I saw Frank I recalled to him how much I had

loved analysis, and how much it had meant to me, both intellectually and personally. A gleam, a strong hint of the old merry twinkle, came back into his tired eyes, and he said, wistfully: "Ah yes, analysis. That was the one time in my life I could write what I really believed."

As we gathered a few weeks ago at Frank's funeral, we old acquaintances, friends, and enemies, there was a very real sense that in paying last respects to Frank we had found a life with a very special meaning, a meaning that could transcend the very real grief at his loss. Surely one part of that meaning is that we must all pledge to fight to bring about a world where a Frank Chodorov will receive all the honors, all the acclaim and even all the simple honesty of treatment, that is his just due. And especially we must do what he wanted us to do above all: to hold high the torch of liberty, and to pass it on to succeeding generations. We *mourn and grieve his loss*; but we are proud that Frank has joined the Immortals. Above all, we are proud and privileged to have known him and loved him as a friend.

Murray N. Rothbard