

People: Frank E. Coulter

If you ask a hundred persons what manner of man is Frank E. Coulter their composite answer will be that he is a contradiction. He is a high-minded idealist, or he is a crafty dissembler. He is a philosopher; he is a practicalist. He is an aesthete who sees not only the beauty about him but creates in his imagination beauties which do not exist, or he has only a mechanical mind which keeps in the groove in which it was started by heredity or early environment. These and many more contradictory appraisals are made by the superficial who take his measure in their own limited perspective.

Coulter is *not* a contradiction. It is true that he is an unusual pattern, but his life follows that pattern consistently. To his fellows he appears in these varied and contradictory characters because of the myopic vision of those who see him.

This article is an attempt to present the man as he appears to one who has known him nearly two decades, one who has observed and tried to analyze his seeming inconsistencies. Possibly this measure is as untrue as the measures which have been applied by others, for it borders on presumptuousness for anyone to profess to be able to look into another's soul and see the hidden springs which move the individual to the acts which make up his life and portray what we call character.

Following violin making as a vocation, his avocation is politics—not politics in the commonly accepted sense of scheming and working to gain a public office, but in the better use of the term to denote the science of government. He has been a candidate for office, polling 28,000 votes as an independent candidate for a seat in the United States Senate in 1924. But Coulter knew he would not be elected; he made the race as a means of advancing the theories which he advocated. It is too much to believe that if by some inexplicable turn of fate he had been elected his influence would have made national history different in the "prosperous era" of the late twenties, but his clearer vision would have inspired a message foretelling the catastrophic events which followed. He might have been able to assist in furthering policies which would have lightened the blow. All of Coulter's theories may not be accepted by the reader, but no one can dispute that he rises far above the level of public opinion and discernment which accepts fallacious political and economic practises

as sound merely because they have not been rejected by a formal action.

The one subject which has been subordinate to all others with him is money, the monetary system, the manner in which national credit has been given into private hands. If it appears that his interest in the symbol of gold is inconsistent with aestheticism, with art, with philosophy, it is only because one does not see all of Coulter's dream. He sees the beauties and his imagination pictures the possibilities for human happiness under a system which gives equal opportunities. He sees these possibilities frustrated by an artificial control of credit and the tokens used for exchange. In his opinion, a change in the present financial system—removal of control from private hands—would solve many—perhaps most—of our economic ills, and would make possible the better life for the masses. If many believe the problem is bigger than that; if we believe that a better distribution of income can be achieved only by a more drastic change than can be effected by any monetary reform, still we must concede that Coulter's program would go a long way toward releasing the forces necessary to accomplish economic emancipation.

At the age of 73 Coulter stands erect and is physically agile, twenty-five years after eminent physicians gave him but two or three years to live. He refused to accept their verdict and recovered, not by any mysticism or by supernatural aid, but by a rigid discipline based on sound scientific practises, a discipline which not one man in ten thousand would have undertaken, much less carried through.

Coulter left the ministry when he had promise of reaching a high place in the profession, for he is a fluent speaker with an extraordinary command of words and is a brilliant thinker. Once when asked why he left the ministry, he replied that the incident which decided him was the contribution to his salary fund of \$20 by a poor widow who was supporting a number of children. He admitted that perhaps this incident was only the last straw, and then related a conversation he had with the bishop of the church. The bishop held out to the minister the bait of a desirable church, but warned that the successful preacher must avoid championing economic or social issues which might adversely affect wealthy parishoners. In his characteristic manner, Coulter replied that he would "stay with God and let the church go to hell."

Frank Coulter has ever been of the minority, perhaps for the reason that the majority cannot

keep up with the advanced thinker. This experience causes him to question himself when his advocacies appear to be accepted by numbers. He is a pioneer in the realm of thought who has ever moved onward and onward into the wilderness to blaze the trail. He is so human as to love the plaudits of his fellow man, but he has not let that desire restrain him from keeping so far in advance that he has but infrequently heard the applause. This trait is illustrated by his course in the Townsend movement. His sympathies with the privations of aged people and his approval of the issuance of new money, threw him into the movement in its infancy. When it had attained strength, and might have rewarded his labors had he remained regular, Coulter renounced the organization because he was convinced that it was following strange gods of unsound economics, and he denounced the head office for practises which he considered dishonorable.

The reader should not become imbued with the thought that Coulter is some sort of an ethereal creature, infallible and devoid of human traits. He can, and frequently is, exasperatingly irritating. As is often the case with persons intensely interested in a cause, he is intolerant of opposing opinion, though in no circumstance would he deny to an opponent the privilege of presenting his side.

On his aesthetic side, he is consistent with the practical. Music and poetry are not something aside; they enter into—they *are*—his politics. On the door entering his cluttered, yet orderly, shop he has built a set of chimes, which are set in motion when one enters. The visitor is greeted by soft tones of music which disarm against the sharp shafts of wit which at times are loosed to the discomfort of the visitor.

Years ago he confessed to the pleasure he experienced from holding his fingers lightly on the shell of the violins as he made them, and feeling the rhythmic vibrations which were caused by the rumblings of heavy interurban trolley cars which passed in the street below—a sound which was almost intolerably annoying to other denizens of that section of the city.

A poet, a wit, and a philosopher, a truly great humanitarian, but known to the unknowing world as a crank, Coulter is too far above to make a good companion, for who would choose to be chained to a god?

Great occasions do not make heroes or cowards; they simply unveil them.—Canon Westcott.

Third Party Movement Under Way

Distinguished progressives of the nation held a two-day conference in Chicago on July 5 and 6 and took a first step toward the formation of a new political party. The conference received little space in the daily newspapers, yet it may mark the end of a political epoch in the nation.

Boiled down to a few words, the program of the movement is to establish a system of "production for use." In three words the conference proposed a complete change in the whole social, economic and industrial system. This is also Upton Sinclair's EPIC program. The theory is much older than Sinclair. By reason of mechanization of industry and prodigious increase in productivity it has become obvious that a way must be found to distribute national income. No one disputes that this cannot be accomplished under an uncontrolled profit system. The only question now is whether profits shall be controlled or abolished. The new party—if it is organized—proposes to abolish profits; not at one stroke, but by adoption of a program of gradual conversion.

The name for the new party most favored at the Chicago conference was *Commonwealth party*.

If the reaction is favorable throughout the nation, a convention will be called late this year, and that convention may name a national ticket, or it may only adopt a definite platform and leave the selection of candidates to a convention to be held next summer.

Undoubtedly this conference will stimulate the formation of progressive political organizations in many states. There is in Oregon the nucleus of such a party in the Progressive Society. This may be developed, or a new organization may be formed. But there is pretty sure to be a distinct and separate third party movement in the state by the summer of 1936. This movement may nominate a full state and district legislative ticket, or it may not do more in the next campaign than to endorse acceptable progressives running on old party tickets.

Liberalism in the Far West

Upton Sinclair and Peter Zimmerman, the liberal gubernatorial candidates on the coast at the last election, compared notes at dinner together last Sunday night, when Zimmerman introduced Sinclair at Salem. A checkup revealed that one more daily paper supported Sinclair in California than supported Zimmerman in Oregon. One daily paper supported Sinclair.