

Who is ...

Frank Chodorov

BY MURRAY N. ROTHBARD

It was in 1947 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.

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 *sui 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,



Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995) was dean of the Austrian School.

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

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State is, in its very being, the organization and regularization of predation, exploitation, and robbery. 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.

Analysis was the crown of Frank Chodorov’s achievement. The chief writer as well as editor and publisher of this

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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.

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.

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.

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. ■



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