

concern here to analyse in detail the solution propounded, but merely to show that the capitalist system in the New World, offered to us by some people as a Utopia, is severely criticised by the Church.

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## MAKING CAPITAL IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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FOR the best part of this century, the exploitation of the East by the West has been a favourite theme with pamphleteers; and as the sincerity of the pamphleteers has grown, so has the interest of the public declined. The subject, it is argued, has been flogged to death and, taking an Epicurean stand, Englishmen have added—let sleeping dogs lie. In the common mind China appears a far distant continent—another world.

The attitude is typical of Englishmen as a whole, but it is also typical of many Europeans. In America the orientation is different, because Chinese *émigrés* make up a considerable part of the population of the United States. Often enough Hollywood may depict the Chinaman as either a pirate or opium eater, but to the American he is a person of distinct characteristics; he may run a successful chop-suey restaurant in Greenwich Village or he may be an astute lawyer. They are not deluded by the romantic notion of film directors that he is a man capable of saying little else other than 'Me muchee-muchee sad'.<sup>1</sup> They are well aware that he may as yet prove a powerful business rival, although his methods of business will not necessarily be those of the American businessman. For part of Congress's dilemma over recognising the 'People's Republic of China' is a fear of admitting to a certain national failure. The Americans, despite their vast propaganda machine, have failed to impress the Chinese with their way of life; the Chinese have remained impervious, philosophically isolationist. This was made quite clear by Mao Tze-tung's victory last October which, seen in perspective, was but a further assertion of Chinese independence from Western infiltration. Yet before developing this point it is worth pausing to note the way in which American policy re-orientated its attitude to the

<sup>1</sup>See *People of Freedom*, No. 117; February-March, 1950.

position by Chiang Kai-Shek's defeat. In future National Communists are to be extolled; they are to be used (like Tito in Yugoslavia) as tools against Russian imperialism. The order of the day is to bolster up national communism against international communism by fostering what has been described as 'Anti-Russianism'.

At first sight such a move may sound dangerously like trying to split hairs and it is only on close examination that one finds that the real reasons for this re-orientation are financial, are prompted in the interests of big business; nor is the economic expediency of the re-orientation confined solely to the United States. Under a thin disguise, it is to be found in the British attitude to China in which business interests have been allowed to supersede the moral issues at stake.

In England during the 'thirties, when the Labour Party was in Opposition, one of the main sticks with which it used to beat the Conservative administration was on the score of allowing foreign goods to undercut the home market. This line was even taken over by Mosley on behalf of the British Union. Constantly in his different speeches one would find him referring to 'cheap coolie labour, paid a third of our wages and working for ten hours a day'.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is one of the ironies of recent history to record that when Mao Tze-tung's victory last year inevitably raised this question of 'sweating the East', the Labour Party took exactly as pharasaical an attitude to the matter as the Conservatives whom they had castigated a decade previously for their exploitation of the East. To the impartial observer, so far as China was concerned, it seemed that there was not a pennyworth of difference between the Conservative and Labour views, whilst so far as the Chinese dislike of the West (or rather that section of colonial administration which is taken as being representative of the West) is concerned, there has merely been a shift of emphasis. As Mr Alan Wood has noted: 'Before the war the most powerful, and therefore most unpopular, foreign interests in China were those of Britain; during and after the war, America'.<sup>3</sup>

Now, it is against this background that one must accept Chiang Kai-Shek's defeat, because for many of the Chinese—especially the peasants—it was not a defeat, but a liberation. The

<sup>2</sup>I quote from a recording of a speech of his which I have in my possession.

<sup>3</sup>*Public Opinion*, January 18th, 1950.

Kuomintang was corrupt and rotten to the core: in any case its collapse was inevitable and all that can be said of Mao Tze-tung's forces is that they hastened what for some time had been a foregone conclusion. For when the peasants welcomed his forces they did so because they believed that his new regime would be more efficient, less open to bribery and crooked dealing: their preference for his regime to the old one did not make them into 'Red revolutionaries', as some political commentators have made out. Far from it. It is doubtful if as much as one per cent of the peasant populations are ever likely to hear of the Communist Manifesto, let alone read it. Indeed the only factor that is likely to turn the Chinese peasant into a 'Red revolutionary' of the Russian-style is, if fighting to better his condition, he finds that he is still being exploited; and that such exploitation springs from the West.

China's population is about 450 million people, of which the largest section is the peasant element; and, as history shows, it is the peasant element which is usually exploited first. At the moment British investments are reckoned to be in the region of £300,000,000. In statistical terms, that states China's position today; but there are other economic considerations which must be taken into account whose province reaches beyond both economics and statistical facts.

The industrial plant in China is small: outside of Shanghai and Tientsin the industrial proletariat is negligible, which means that, apart from the peasant population, there is a scattered middle and upper class element throughout the country; and it is this element which is being 'conditioned' by a certain doctrinaire pressure. In universities, courses in 'people's culture' such as befits a 'people's republic' are becoming part of the horarium: academic standards are being lowered and education is becoming more utilitarian. Meanwhile, although the Church has been persecuted, at present there is something of a lull in this respect, because missionary activity attracts foreign currency. By another irony one has a further example of exploitation in China, only this time from within, and one is faced with what might be called the dilemma of the two Chinas. As the West during this century, so the Chinese Communists today are concerned with *making capital* out of China (the phrase is appropriately two-edged); and this the latter realise can only be achieved by means of

economic transformation, by changing their country from a predominantly agrarian to a predominantly industrial country. Again if the terms of the West are exorbitant, or savour too much of imperialist exploitation, it may well be that Mao Tze-tung's government will turn to Moscow. Already there are indications that this may happen, and if this possibility is faced squarely, the prospect, I would submit, need only be so black in so far as one is committed to any rigid conception of capital, bounded by any narrow conception which postulates that economic values are ultimates. For once this happens economics become a mechanical art by which human life is made to conform to political pre-judgments, so that once this economic-political predestination comes to be accepted, the politicians and economists working within such a framework become tin-gods—of either the Marxist or Machiavellian type.<sup>4</sup>

This, then, is the challenge which one half of China throws out not only to the other half of her people, but also to the Western world in general: for capitalism when it is driven to becoming the direct antithesis of Marxism, to becoming a form of 'Anti-Russianism', sets up its own Machiavellis within its own followers. These minor dictators may not stride the world like a Colossus at Rhodes and the fact that they are on 'our side' may in the minds of some absolve their actions from too close a scrutiny. Such lines of argument have been advanced in the past by men of good faith, and today they are arguments both directly and indirectly supported by many Catholics whose private lives are beyond reproach. That is one of the tragedies of the contemporary world which has so frequently been referred to as one of the scandals of contemporary Christendom. One has seen it in the case of the support given to Fascist Italy during the 'thirties and one sees it once more in the case of Franco Spain; and during both decades one has seen it in respect of China. Christianity has appeared to be on the side of reaction and in the Far East it has proved an obstacle in the way of the progress of the missions, since it has meant that missionaries have first had to break down the instinctive distrust of the West by the oriental mind and secondly to go on to the much more difficult task of explaining, without being thought hypocrites, the Christian conception of

<sup>4</sup>See *Human Action* by Ludwig von Mises (London, 1950) for a development of this thesis.

ownership and property. And all this has had to be preached against a background of Western exploitation. Yet although Western exploitation may be at an end according to the 'People's Republic of China', what they fail to mention is that so far as the peasants are affected the change in government is merely a change in the methods of exploitation—from the Western to the Eastern brand. Nevertheless in this transition there is a ray of hope, because the transition may lead to China's redemption.

Inasmuch as Communism bases its philosophy on a glorious future, the life of a world to come (*Et vitam venturi saeculi*), it is merely materialising a spiritual concept; it is translating the Nicene Creed into earthly terms. It sets up an absolute, and this is something new in Chinese thought, because 'Chinese millennial tradition has neither known an absolute Creator in its religion, nor the concept of an absolute truth in its philosophy, nor that of absolute right in its law'.<sup>5</sup> So it is possible that whatever the fate of China during the next few years, however vigorous the persecution of the Church may become, the period may prove to have been one of preparation for the acceptance of the Christian ethic: the idea of one God, one Church, an *Ecclesia Gentium* will seem less foreign, less strange to the oriental mind in the future. One might even describe the exploitation of the past (and the persecution which seems imminent) as a purgatorial cleansing by which China may be prepared for her redemption: in fact it is not beyond the bounds of likelihood to suggest that in accepting 'the torch of the divine Christian life which Europe received before Asia',<sup>6</sup> China may keep burning that light 'which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world'. When the West lies in darkness, it may well be that the new missionaries may come from the East. It is spiritual pride to believe that because, historically, Christianity made its first home in the West it has, as it were, a monopoly of Christianity: Christianity is catholic and Catholic-Christianity's strength lies not in the realms of the material wealth of earthly powers and principalities, but in the spirit. Therein lies its only wealth, its only capital—and it is a currency which is as valid in Cornhill as it is in China.

<sup>5</sup>See 'The Communist Revolution in China' in *The Tablet*, January 7th, 1950. The article is by a correspondent and deserves careful reading.

<sup>6</sup>*Ways of Confucius and Christ* by Pierre-Célestin Lou Tseng-Tsuang, o.s.b. (London 1948).