

THE PARTY LINE

As might have been expected the successful participation of the U.S.S.R. in the Second World War has proved a godsend to the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was claimed in August that over 30,000 had joined its ranks since the beginning of the year, bringing total membership up to well over 50,000. Literature sales by Central Books amounted to £92,000 in that half-year: despite the paper shortage plans are announced for increased output. It may be of value to attempt an analysis of the current communist appeal as it is put forward in this propaganda. This analysis is given without comment. Its aim is not to confute communism but to provide information for those who lack time or opportunity to examine the literature themselves.

The readiest objection likely to be made against the Party is that of tergiversation. It is met by the explanation that Communist Party policy is to suit tactics to circumstances while always keeping the final goal of socialism in view. The circumstances of the war have changed: it was an imperialist war until June 22nd, 1941, and as such opposed: since that date it has been supported because it has become a People's War of Liberation. Similarly the Soviet Non-Aggression Pact with Germany in 1939 is justified as having shattered plans for an imperialist anti-Soviet coalition. Our present Russian alliance is established on a basis of 'temporary common interests' and 'the mass of the people' desire co-operation to continue beyond the war and peace settlement. New members are however reminded that 'socialism cannot be won by votes, but only by the workers setting up their own Government, with armed strength behind it to put down any attempts by the rich to overthrow it.'

In his attractive pamphlet *Why You Should Be A Communist* W. Wainwright is careful to point out that 'there is no bar against religion' for prospective comrades; a statement which is amplified thus by R. W. Robson: 'Communists have no prejudice against religious beliefs, but they see them as arising out of material conditions and being modified by material changes.' Besides, did not Lenin himself say, 'In relation to the State, religion is simply a private matter.'

Nevertheless some churchpeople have the notion that all is not well with religion in Russia. They need not worry. Pat Sloan can assure them that 'any person in the U.S.S.R. may use his or her

spare time for religious worship if they wish.' And then there is Article 124 of the Stalin Constitution: 'In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognised for all citizens.' Generous words, which 'breathe freedom and aid to culture and education' (W. J. R. Squance). There has in fact been no persecution at all in Russia: 'no case has been discovered of a priest or anyone else being punished for practising religion': this was stated officially in the House of Commons in 1929 'on information supplied by Sir Esmond Ovey, British Ambassador in Moscow.' Church membership has it is true declined but Soviet Information Bureau figures show that there are 8,338 places of worship and upwards of 58,000 ministers in the Soviet Union to-day.

There has indeed been conflict. This began when the elected Church Council, which was in session in October 1917, excommunicated the Revolution and thus, notes the Rev. Stanley Evans, M.A., expert on Russian religious affairs, 'it was the Church that declared war on the Revolution and not vice versa.' Soviet policy, writes Mr. Evans elsewhere, 'is to separate religion completely from the State and by confiscating its endowments, remove the basis of its temporal power. Any attempts by religious bodies to oppose the progress of the people are strongly opposed and this was the basic reason for anti-religious campaigns. . . . Anti-religious campaigns had the object of countering the unscientific views which led priests to oppose mechanisation of agriculture and to defer sowing until a particular Holy Day. All evils—plague, famine, etc., had to be opposed, and not accepted as "will of God."' The conflict came to a head in 1921 when the Church resisted the Government's decree confiscating Church treasure for famine relief. It was for this that 45 clergy were executed and 250 subjected to long terms of imprisonment.

To the Roman Catholic Church the Revolution brought freedom and equality with the Orthodox. 'The first Roman Catholic Corpus Christi procession ever to take place on Russian soil was in the streets of Petrograd in 1918.' But the Papacy's attitude to the Soviet Government has embarrassed the position of its priests who have in consequence been 'consistently anti-Soviet.'

In general it is claimed that relations between State and religion have improved: that the restrictive 1929 legislation is being mildly applied—for example 'religious books may now be published and each church has a paper quota for this purpose.' For their part the Churches have shown themselves wholeheartedly behind the

Soviet war effort, sending enthusiastic messages to Stalin and contributing to the Defence Fund.

It is instructive to see the way in which other popular prejudices against communism are met. It is thought to be something foreign, anti-British. Hence, we are assured that 'communists love their country' and in fact the C.P.G.B. 'springs from the finest traditions of the British people.' It was in Britain, we are reminded, that the working-class movement began: others followed our lead. Robert Owen preceded Marx and Engels who in any case 'did all their scientific work in England.' Similarly those who are afraid of losing their belongings are reassured. Public ownership of land and industry leaves a man in possession of his home and personal effects (which might include for instance a car); in Russia this is guaranteed by the Stalin Constitution. Words like Dictatorship, Pacifism, Rigidity have somehow become associated with communism. Yet in reality the Communist Party is 'a thoroughly democratic organisation' in which policy is only decided after discussion by all the members. Britain is too little democratic: in the Soviet Union, that 'great family of free peoples,' exists the largest measure of freedom and democracy, and the only dictatorship is that of the citizen working class. Nor are communists in the least in favour of pacifism for it 'makes no pretence of opposing the economic causes of war.' Far from being rigid, communism is a science and therefore 'develops and perfects itself': Stalin for example has added to it considerably.

Communist propaganda of the older type seemed addressed almost entirely to working-class men. To-day the appeal is wider. Middle-class people, professional as well as commercial, 'all suffer to a greater or lesser extent under the capitalist system' and will receive help and security in the socialist society of the future. They need not fear lest their superior ability go unrewarded: in the Land of the Soviets steadily-increasing wages vary according to skill or urgency of work done and range from 110 to 2,000 roubles per month. Farmers in particular will be freed from the burden of rent, helped to buy machinery and implements at cost, aided by scientific agricultural knowledge. Women are wooed by being shown a utopian picture of Russia, the land where women first received full enfranchisement and have won complete equality with men: equal wages, equal opportunities for promotion, equal availability of higher education. In a country where illegitimacy is abolished and prostitution has almost vanished, having children involves a two-months' holiday with full pay and the subsequent good offices of the nursery school. To youth the Young Communist League appeal is on the whole more rhetorical: 'What couldn't we do with Socialism here?

Just think of it! If all those opportunities were open to us, the youth of Britain, what wouldn't we be able to do! 'We the Youth of Britain' is a recurrent refrain.

The Red Army is obviously the strong suit. 'They said the Red Army would not fight, had rotten boots, rotten guns, rotten tanks.' How wrong they were! and naturally this 'example of how people were deceived about the Red Army should bring home to all the unpleasant fact that . . . a false picture of Soviet Russia was presented to them.' The Russia To-day Society is eagerly striving to bring it home and it is doing its work very well. Russia is presented as a land of universal happiness and the Russia To-day camera has even caught Lenin and Stalin smiling, as the cover of one pamphlet testifies. But mainly, nothing is so successful as success: the able resistance of the Soviet forces proves the advantages of socialism. Socialism made it possible to set the whole country on a war footing immediately Hitler attacked; it enabled whole industries to be shifted without great loss of production. There were no vested interests to check a scorched-earth policy as 'it is hinted' there were in Malaya.

In peacetime a seven-hour working day and a fully-paid fortnight's holiday give the Soviet people 'more leisure than the working people of any other country' with no fear of unemployment, ended for ever in 1931. Education till seventeen is practically universal in towns: higher education depends on mental not monetary endowment. The free medical services; the cultural value of Soviet theatre, cinema and music; science; the Sports Movement by which U.S.S.R. 'is rapidly becoming a nation of champions'—thus is the picture completed. In brief, socialism *works* and would work better here where 'we will start with greater advantages than the Russians': well-developed industry, highly-skilled and well-educated workers.

Against all this breathes the fiery dragon of fascism. New members of the Y.C.L. are taught that fascism is 'capitalism gone mad . . . For fascism is a last attempt of the bosses (capitalists) to keep the working people down.' Hence the comrades are all out for victory and for that 'bigger and better war effort,' that 'unity between all classes, all parties and all sections of the people,' that closer co-operation between the United Nations, by which alone victory can be reached. Deeds match words. Initiated by the Y.C.L. the Shock Brigade movement grows. Shock Brigade principles are: (1) 'To be always on time and not to be absent from work. (2) To work conscientiously at their job, and by the example of their individual and collective effort aim to increase output.' Not longer hours but 'efficiency, initiative and planning' is the aim. Stakha-

novist competition between individuals, departments and factories is encouraged and *Shock Brigade News Bulletin* 'gives news of what is happening all over the country.' Young communists are bidden use their initiative to aid the war effort: Saturday afternoon house-to-house salvage collections exemplify such activity.

Foremost among the Party's strategic proposals remains the immediate opening of a Second Front in Europe. There is also a strong plea for unity both in the Labour Movement at home, where 'the Blimps at Transport House' have failed to achieve it, and in the direction of the United Nations' strategy. The freedom of India and of Ireland is demanded: this it is claimed will bring the people of both countries wholeheartedly into the struggle.

The Communist Party 'supports and sustains the National Government,' we read, but attacks with vigour all who are trying to hamper the British war effort. These obstructionists include of course capitalists, who are accustomed to sabotage the national effort unless they make large profits out of it, and 'Trotskyist phrasemongering disrupters who cover up their fascist activities behind the pretence of being "socialists."' These are rather general statements but in *Russia's Enemies in Britain* Reginald Bishop makes more detailed charges. Here the main attack is directed against Kenneth de Courcy and the Imperial Policy Group which is regarded as the core of anti-Soviet activity in this country. Wrath is poured on the notorious June issue of the *Review of World Affairs* which declared that 'Britain and America, in fact, still look upon the continental military scene with some measure of detachment,' and much is made of Mr. de Courcy's pre-war visits to continental capitals (especially his reception by Mussolini in 1936) and to his luncheon parties at Claridge's. It is noted that though most of those connected with the I.P.G. are Conservatives, and many of them Catholics, the great majority of Conservatives and Catholics 'abhor the policy.'

The strongest disapproval is expressed of Michael de la Bedoyere and the *Catholic Herald*: 'alone of all the public prints issued in this country, it launched a virulent attack on the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, at the moment of its announcement.' More commendable is the 'magnificent way in which leading Churchmen have rallied to the Alliance,' notably the Archbishop and Dean of Canterbury and the Bishop of Chelmsford. The conduct of the Bishops of Gloucester and Chichester is found to be less satisfactory and that of 'a certain Dr. Zernov' entirely reprehensible—for at a Redhill meeting he neglected the social and economic changes wrought by the Soviet and his countrymen's epic resistance to Hitler, preferring to dwell

on 'what he called "the irreconcilable conflict between Communism and Christianity."''

In the political field a number of other 'enemies of the Soviet Union' are shown up in this and other writings. Prominent among them is Lady Astor (and indeed the whole 'Cliveden set' of 'appeasers'). Then there are sinister factors like Major Cazalet's *With Sikorski to Russia*, 'Moore-Brabazon's statement that he wished to see Russia and Germany exterminate each other,' and the perversity of Lord Kemsley's newspapers apropos of the Second Front. Short shrift is demanded for some who are in key positions: the Men of Munich—Halifax, Simon and Hoare; Sir James Grigg, 'the chief obstacle to an offensive strategy'; Lord Croft, 'the notorious supporter of General Franco'; and, inevitably, Mr. Amery; 'the chief stumbling block to an understanding with India.'

This condensed summary of communist propaganda in 1942 is intended to be informative merely and is in no sense a polemic. There has therefore been no attempt to criticise, to praise or to condemn, to check statements or to disentangle corn from cockle. From what has been said the general facts emerge: that the Communist Party though small is growing rapidly; that its appeal is carefully calculated and made to all save the wealthy few; that its literature is very largely concerned with the twin purposes of winning the war and depicting Socialist Russia as paradise. It is possible that there are some of those eager to rebuild Christian society in post-war Britain who will judge it worth while bearing these facts in mind.

J. R. WINGFIELD DIGBY, S.J.

THE SEVEN LIGHTS OF THE CROSS¹

From a letter of St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence.

. . . JESUS came into the world to give light. He was prefigured by the golden candlestick, which was placed in the Temple with seven lamps, and gave light to the whole Temple. And the seven lights which enlighten the temple of Holy Church are the seven words which Christ spoke from the Cross.

¹ These extracts are taken from the second of twenty-three letters, the translation of which will, it is hoped, soon be published in book form.