

COMMUNISM IN BRITAIN

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THE Communist Party in Britain has at this moment only some 35,000 members. This makes it sound small by comparison with such Communist Parties as those of, say, France or Italy, which are millions strong. But if such a comparison is to be of any real significance we need to observe the different roles and the different circumstances within which they function.

In France and Italy there are no mass Socialist movements. The result is that the biggest mass working-class party there is the Communist Party. Under such circumstances the party consists of a hard core of well-indoctrinated, highly disciplined members, who know what they want, where they are going and exactly how they are going to get there, and a great mass of less well instructed members who follow the party 'line' most of the time but cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as well-instructed Marxists. The role of the hard core within such a party is to try to leaven the entire lump, to raise its 'Marxist-theoretical understanding' (to use the Communists' own jargon) and to keep it constantly active on behalf of Communist policies.

In Britain, the workers' mass movement is Labour-led and the Communist Party is small. Its role in such circumstances is precisely that of the hard core in the continental-type Communist Party, i.e. to make the great working-class mass as Marxist as possible and to activate it on behalf of Communism. Had the Labour Party been prepared to admit the Communist Party as an affiliated body (as it once hoped would be the case, and for which it runs campaigns from time to time), the job would have been made much easier for it. But early in its life it was disaffiliated and so, whilst seeing itself as the Marxist hard core of the wider Labour movement, it must do its leavening from outside, so far as the political wing of the movement is concerned, although it can work from within in the case of most of the trades unions and the co-operative movement.

Its strength may therefore be more fairly judged, not by its comparative smallness, but by the extent to which it is able to influence the policies and actions of the Labour Party, the trades unions and the co-operative movement. Whilst there are obvious dangers in over-estimating the strength of Communism in Britain, I think that the dangers which result from under-estimating its strength and power for mischief are greater. And we shall not, in any case, be exaggerating if we say that, although its influence on the Labour Party is today mainly an indirect one upon the Left-wing (who are nonetheless a significant force and one to be reckoned with), its impact upon many important trades unions is considerable.

Indeed, the greatest strength of Communism in Britain lies, broadly speaking, (a) among the industrial workers and active trades unionists, and (b) among the middle-class intellectuals and professional workers.

In the case of the first group, the party's influence is decisive in one or two highly-important unions such as the Electrical Trades Union (whose members are to be found, for example, as maintenance electricians in almost every factory in the land and, in the larger enterprises, in every department, having free access to move from one department to another as agitators) and is considerable in a number of others which are vital to our economic prosperity and our defence. The Communists hold a disproportionately high number of positions as trade unions organisers and shop stewards—positions which give them good opportunities for making trouble if they wish.

Probably a third of the party members and fellow-travellers are of middle-class origin or are intellectuals or professional workers, in positions where they can make their influence felt in the moulding and making of public opinion.

The party is clearly today in no position to threaten us with Communism—although it is strong enough, and its members are sufficiently well placed strategically, for it to be able to cause a lot of trouble. But in the event of a profound economic and political crisis, such as that of the early '30s, it would be capable of leading large numbers of disillusioned, discontented and ill-nourished men and its chances of then 'leavening the larger lump with Marx-

ism' would be immensely increased. It is such a situation as that which the Communist Party sees as its moment of opportunity. And it believes that such an economic and political crisis must come sooner or later. Its whole life is keyed to that expectation, all its work is a preparation for it; the life of each party member is a training in leadership for that moment of opportunity. Past experience shows that it would be unwise to suppose that there is something about the Anglo-Saxon character which would prevent our people from accepting such a lead at such a moment. When the workers have been primarily concerned about 'getting bread and butter', as the unemployed were last time, they do not care whether their leaders are Communist or not—any more than striking dockers or engineers or transport workers do either, even in relatively normal periods.

The fact is that the majority of our people today have no real spiritual defence against Communism. There is no rational reason why a modern pagan should not follow a Marxist-atheist if he is able to convince him that he alone can lead him out of a desperate and humiliating situation, get him the elementary necessities which are being denied him, and provide him with a social system in which there will be no unemployment, no recurring crises. At such a moment, a deeply-held and well-understood faith is needed to stand against it. And for sensitive, intelligent men who are concerned at existing social evils, at the threat of ever more terrible wars, or who are in revolt against the rottenness and purposelessness of modern life, the general crisis of our times is itself sufficient to have the same effect upon them.

As that crisis develops, so, more and more, Catholics equipped with their complete philosophy of life, with the social teaching of the Church, with a strongly-held and invincible faith, are, and must see themselves as being, the main bulwark against Communism. That is, as it were, a by-product of the practice of their Faith. They will best turn back the Red tide, not by being just negative anti-Communists, or by seeing their Faith as just a rival ideology and a weapon against Communism, but by living it, understanding it and applying it to modern life and conditions.

That last has as yet been hardly attempted. Even in the social sphere, very few Catholics, technicians and specialists, for example, are applying their minds to working out practical schemes of re-organisation, for restoring the individual's worth in the great State and private monopolies which between them employ a majority of our work-people today. Yet every Papal pronouncement on the social question stresses that the individual now stands in danger of being crushed by the Leviathan. And that is a process which leads almost inevitably to totalitarianism.

That is but one example of the job which needs to be done on an admittedly limited front. But the times call for large numbers of dedicated Catholics providing Christian leadership and making their maximum impact at every level of modern life and thought.

FOR EMMANUEL, ON HIS NAME

Rejoicing, the assembly draws
Breath that will blow through land and sea,
Be heard in Babylon, and cause
Comfort from Dan to Bersabee.

A tuba booms, there is a flurry
Of arms and legs and drumsticks, and
Quietly without fuss or hurry
The ark arrives and takes its stand.

Outburst of breath from seven choirs,
Of instruments that squeak and jangle,
Discordant glory that requires
A thousand ears to disentangle.

Acrobats tumble, jugglers lift
Their platters, and in front of them
King David in a linen shift
Dances into Jerusalem.

The seven choirs go bragging by,
Each victory multiplied by twenty,
And marketwomen prophesy
A quite impossible age of plenty:

Be comforted for here is peace
Abundant as the morning dew
On Hermon, and it will not cease
Though the world crack and fall askew.

B.W.