

THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNISM

BY this time we are all aware of the Communist 'peril' and 'menace.' But is it so clear who is imperilled? what is menaced? The fearsomeness of the unknown attends the very words 'peril' and 'menace'; we feel that danger lurks unseen, that a hidden hand has sinister designs upon our pockets. Or alternately, the hidden hand is disbursing large sums of money sent from Moscow, much in the same manner as 'the man in the moon,' or a similar mysterious agent appeared at parliamentary elections to corrupt the enlightened but very limited electorate in the good old days of Eatanswill.

If we do not lie awake at nights pondering how the 'peril' can be averted and the 'menace' overthrown, it is from no lack of honest endeavour. We must be scared, it seems, if we are to realise what the Communists are after. We are to be scared first, and after that told precisely where the danger lies. 'I wants to make your flesh creep,' said the Fat Boy to old Mrs. Wardle in the arbour before he indicated the enormities of Miss Rachel. So we are to be thoroughly frightened by suggestions of secret conspiracy and dark plot, and then we shall be ready to go any lengths in the suppression of Communist propaganda and the imprisonment of Communists. The feeling that a plot exists is sufficient to create the vision of plotters, busy and all around us waiting the signal to commence their foul and bloody work. (Catholics of all people know what it means to be the victims of panic. In the atmosphere of fog and suspicion, how many of our Catholic martyrs were done to death!)

But what proportion of those scared by the Communist peril have given any study to the economic plans of communists, or have spent any time on the counter-proposals of Catholic Social reform?

Now, thanks to Fr. Lewis Watt, S.J., and Miss G. M. Godden, a very plain and informative account of what

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Communism really means can be bought and read, so that the intelligent reader need no longer go in ignorance of the Communist programme, and the 'red peril' can be estimated at its proper value.¹

The 'peril' may easily be exaggerated—too many perils have threatened us in our lifetime; perils of socialist insurrection nearly fifty years ago, perils of dynamitards and of anarchist violence, perils of syndicalism, perils red and perils yellow of the far east, perils of suffragette disorder, perils of utter parliamentary corruption, perils of big business and high finance, perils of enemy secret agents, perils through machinations of wicked capitalists and revolutionary trade unionists, perils of general strikes and overthrow of the British Constitution—there is no end to the perils we have survived.

We decline to be scared.

It is the challenge of Communism that is set out in Father Watt's pamphlet; a challenge direct and not to be avoided; a challenge to the rulers of Great Britain and to the voters who elect the rulers. A challenge to each one of us, to the Catholic in especial, since the faith and morals of Catholics are challenged and denied by the advocate of Communism.

Not solely to the faith and morals of Catholics is Communism a challenge; it is also a challenge to our social system, with its cash nexus between employer and employed, its financial basis for industry—does it pay? will there be a profit? a dividend for shareholders?—its multitudes standing idle in the market place because no man hires them. A challenge to the habits and customs we call civilisation. A challenge and an invitation to accept the methods practised in Soviet Russia since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Do we accept the challenge? Is it enough to sound a warning note of alarm lest the invitation be accepted?

¹ *Communism*. By the Rev. Lewis Watt, S.J. With additional matter by G. M. Godden. Pp. 32. (Catholic Truth Society; 2d.)

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This, apparently, is the 'peril,' this the 'menace,' that the people of Great Britain are in danger of being persuaded to turn Communist and go in for a revolution similar to the one Lenin and Trotsky brought off in Russia. The Communist party, small in numbers, may, it is feared, grow strong enough to impose their own rule on this land, having, of course, first wrested the sovereign power from King and Parliament. Now is it probable that so grave a change could be accomplished without somebody noticing what was happening?

First the various county constabularies and the Metropolitan Police Force, to say nothing of Scotland Yard, would have to be in the conspiracy before the Communists could get very far. Next the armed forces of the Crown, Army, Navy, and Air Force, must give at least passive consent. (Is there any sufficient evidence that admirals and colonels, sergeant-majors and squadron-commanders are going over to Communism?) After that the Civil Servants in Whitehall and the host of public officials up and down the land would be required to help the revolution along. Finally the Governor of the Bank of England and the heads of all the big banks would be needed, in an advisory capacity, to enable the Communists to have a fair chance.

Is it likely the Communists could get away with it—with Police, Army, Navy, and Air Force, Civil Service and banks all unwilling to help, and as far as one can judge entirely unfavourable to revolution?

No revolution has succeeded without arms. The revolution must count on the Army; to-day it must count on the Air Force and its bombs.

Besides, according to one of the most observant and indefatigable of our writers on social questions, the Reader in Economics in the University of Oxford, there can be predicted 'no early growth of a formidable Communist party, for the soil of British politics is still for the most part utterly unready to receive the Communist dogma.'²

² *The Intelligent Man's Guide through World Chaos.* By G. D. H. Cole. (Gollancz, 1932.)

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The Christian Communism of the religious orders wins many souls to-day; and this no doubt is a peril and a menace to Freethinkers—the increase in monks and friars, in nuns, active and contemplative. But numerically the Communist party does not grow. Neither can we discern any dictatorship of the working class looming before us in Great Britain.

As to the atheist propaganda of the Communist—is this a new peril in our land? Why, in the eighteenth century deism was an acceptable creed for intelligent persons in England no less than in France. Revealed religion and the Christian creeds might satisfy Dr. Johnson and his immediate circle, Wesley and his illiterate converts, they were not to be embraced by ‘thinking men’; by a Gibbon or a Hume—stout Tories both; any more than to-day they are to be embraced by the ‘thinkers’ who sit at the feet of H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell and C. E. M. Joad. Was the anti-God propaganda of Bradlaugh and J. M. Robertson in the latter part of the nineteenth century a ‘peril’ to Catholics and a ‘menace’—or a challenge? A weekly paper called *The Freethinker*, whose editor and publisher were sent to prison for blasphemy, some fifty years ago indulged in the obscenities that are the stock-in-trade of pictorial irreligion. It was not suggested that the obscenity was a ‘menace.’ Mill, Spencer, Tyndall, Huxley, and Darwin in their various ways undermined the faith of Protestants, but without any display of bad manners. Huxley in particular challenged the professors of orthodox belief to defend their ground, and the challenge was not disdained. Shall we in these latter days shrink in fear and trembling from the ‘peril’ of atheist Communism and its propaganda, and cry aloud that our faith is menaced? Impossible!

As a matter of fact the propaganda of Bertrand Russell and C. E. M. Joad, of H. G. Wells and Leonard Huxley is far more insidious, because less crudely expressed, than the secularist propaganda of the Communist. And it is true that young people of the professional and middle

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class—teachers, medical students, writers in especial—influenced by this propaganda, are renouncing authority in faith and morals—often but vague and undefinable at the best—to the imperilling of their souls. The challenge of Communism is a real thing. A challenge not only to cherished convictions of rights of property, that may or may not be well-founded; to conventions quite possibly rooted in prejudice; to customs and habits adapted to our comfort like well-worn clothes and unwillingly discarded; but a challenge to all who can see no way out of the present muddle in industry and commerce; to the rulers of a world distressed because there is so much of everything, a shortage not of real wealth but merely of money; a challenge to everyone that says the system, or want of system, cannot be changed, that excess and acute destitution are unavoidable.

Who takes up this challenge?

Hardly our present political leaders and their parties in Great Britain. We may concede the desire to walk justly expressed by our statesmen; their policies and programmes suggest no conviction that the causes of our social distress are diagnosed. Commissions of enquiry and conferences of experts—when the experts and commissioners themselves have landed us in this mess—provoke no confidence of cure. The pious opinion that somehow, we know not how, things will of their own accord get better; the contention that by tariffs that reduce trade we shall have more trade—as though trade in itself ever did or could produce wealth—that by juggling with the price of money and the rates of exchange we shall restore a prosperity that never was, for misery and unemployment stalked in the land when England had abundance of riches; such opinions, such contentions, are, it is felt, no answer to the Communist call of work for all and bread for all.

To the thousands driven to the humiliation of seeking public relief (only when the insult is large enough do we pocket it cheerfully) our political parties do not appear to give any answer to the Communist case. Neither does it

seem any answer to hungry men denied the opportunity of work to bid them beware of the Communist 'peril.'

Is there then no answer to the challenge of Communism?

There is.

And the answer has been broadcasted from Rome. The sound has gone forth into all the earth, and the reply to the challenge has reached to the ends of the world. More than that, the reply to the challenge is itself a challenge. A challenge to all who consent to the oppression of the poor, and refuse to do justice lest vested interests suffer.

When forty years and more ago that great pope Leo XIII summoned the faithful to do right on the social issue, he spoke to all nations a warning of judgement to come. Before *Rerum Novarum* was published, H. M. Hyndman, the leader of the English Social Democrats, wrote to Cardinal Manning, urging that Catholics should emulate 'the noble work of M. le Play or take a leaf out of the book of le Comte de Mun, so that 'something might still be done to stave off the relentless class-war which is impending in this England of ours.' This was in November, 1886. Later Cardinal Manning wrote to Rome on the urgency of the social question. In May, 1891, came *Rerum Novarum*. We are on guard against *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

By many the warning was unheeded and in 1932 Pope Pius XI again took up the challenge and, in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* called on Catholics throughout the world to give answer to the questionings heard on every side.

For the most complete and the most lucid interpretation of these two great encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* we may turn to *The Christian Social Manifesto*,³ by Fr. Joseph Husslein, S.J. In this volume the reply to the Communist challenge is set out. Evils are proclaimed, the evils and shameful wrongs that have their source in the lust of power and in covetousness and avarice, evils nourished on the system called 'capitalism,' so that

³ The Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, U.S.A.

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we have 'an immense army of hired rural labourers whose condition is depressed in the extreme' and 'despotic economic domination concentrated in the hands of a few, and these few frequently not owners but only the trustees and directors of invested funds, who administer them at their good pleasure.'

Father Husslein is positive that this 'immense power and despotic economic domination' mentioned by the Pope is 'such as no man or body of men should be permitted to possess.' The menace and the peril to souls through the evils of present conditions compel the attention of Catholics. 'By unchecked speculation prices are raised and lowered, out of mere greed for gain, making void all the most prudent calculations of manufacturers.' 'The worst injustices and frauds take place beneath the obscurity of the common name of a corporative firm. Boards of directors proceed in their unconscionable methods even to the violation of their trust in regard to those whose savings they administer.' More from this reply to the Communist challenge might be quoted.

It is not enough for Pope Pius XI to denounce as vigorously as his predecessor the iniquities attendant on 'despotic economic domination.' *Quadragesimo Anno* proposes a better way of life than the capitalism and competition of the old liberalism. (Of course a real Liberal can no more be a Catholic than can a true Marxist Socialist. Yet for convenience sake many Catholics in England are known as Liberals or Socialists, and sometimes as both.)

'To aim at the introduction of an altogether new economic system by just and legitimate means is fully within the rights of every man,' Fr. Husslein confidently assures us; adding 'that a new system would be possible, which would not lend itself to the abuses of which the present has been guilty is clear to everyone acquainted with the true history of the ages of faith.'

The Pope suggests co-operation: 'We deem it advisable that the wage contract should when possible be modified somewhat by a contract of partnership, as is already being

tried in various ways to the no small gain both of the wage earner and of the employers.' This is not a panacea but a guiding finger to the new system—co-operation.

At the root of all unjust economic systems are the misappropriation of the earth and the misuses of the land by its possessors. For, 'all that wage or salary can purchase for our sustenance and bodily well-being is really drawn from the earth. The food we eat is all ultimately the product of the earth, whether it consists in the grain and fruit that spring from it or the animals that live on it.' The clothes we wear, the houses we build, the very fuel—all come from the earth; and 'under an equitable social system therefore both those who own the soil and those who do not should be able to live from it.'

To the challenge of the Communist Pope Pius XI sounds the counter-challenge: a new and better economic system, newer and better in every way than the Communist system. While we disregard the papal call to action, close our ears to the trumpet of attack and continue to bleat about the wickedness of Communists without doing anything to change the system, we simply leave the Communists in possession of the field.

Perhaps if some of the attention given by Catholics to the proceedings at Moscow were diverted to the utterances of the Pope, and if this *Christian Social Manifesto* by Fr. Husslein were placed in our libraries and studied as carefully as the Communist writings are studied, we might go forward, with better hope and more flaming charity to friend and foe.

Catholic members of Parliament, in both houses, can plead expediency for their silence on social questions, and beg, 'on political grounds,' to be excused from supporting the Pope. Noble Catholic lords and honourable members may remind us of Newman's words in 1853: 'Political questions are mainly decided by political expediency and only indirectly and under circumstances fall into the province of theology.' We have but to call the social question a political question and the subject is closed. Nothing can

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be done, or need be done to fulfil papal commands or disturb the 'despotic domination' of big business, if politics are involved.

But what of our Catholics who figure prominently in big business? Our presidents of federations of industries, our Catholic directors of banking and insurance corporations? These ignoring papal encyclicals can hardly claim benefit of political expediency. The Communists challenge our present social disorders and propose a new system and a new religion.

This is called a peril and a menace.

Pope Pius XI also challenges our present disorders and the 'despotic economic domination' of a few rich men; proposes a newer and better system and the more faithful following of our religion. Perhaps this papal challenge reveals a graver peril to Catholics who decline to give ear; a more formidable menace to Catholics in high places who dismiss the encyclical as idle words.

It may turn out that the warning of Pope Pius XI to the supporters of the 'despotic economic domination' can only be unheeded at much hurt and loss. For the world is groaning under this domination.

It may be in the hour of our affliction Dives will remember, and regret. It certainly won't do to blame the Communists for our sufferings when the fault is in our own neglect. The Pope has sounded the call to direct action. Neglect the call, and we fall in at the call for defaulters.

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