

PRINCIPLES OR TACTICAL TRICKS?

Portrait of Communism: 1944

MUCH has been said and written about the physical starvation in German-occupied countries; and some preparations have been made to alleviate it. But almost nothing has been said about the political fast so long enforced upon those countries. This has in many respects been as real and acute as the physical hunger. The politics of the occupied countries until recently were reduced to a few essential elements: national union, struggle for survival, and silent warfare against the invader. Little scope was left for social conflict or political controversy within the enslaved nations. The liberation of those countries has changed this at a stroke. Political rights return. New alignments arrive. New and old parties unfurl their flags. With immense avidity Frenchmen, Greeks, Belgians—and even the satellite peoples—are now slaking their thirst for politics.

Everywhere in liberated Europe the Communist parties have come to the fore. Bodies of guerrillas and groups of resisters are led by them. In France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Rumania the Communist parties have entered broad national coalitions with other parties, and for the first time in their history assumed the responsibilities of Government. All the news from the Continent shows the widened range of Communist influence.

With the Lid Off

At first glance this looks like an odd paradox. Only last year the Communist International was disbanded. Its not too solemn funeral in Moscow was officially recorded. But already, it seems, the lid is off the coffin and the limbs of the "dead" International are alive and kicking in almost all parts of Europe. Suspicious people might ask whether it was the corpse or its observers who were in fact "taken for a ride," and whether the limbs of the Comintern do not continue to move under the control of one lively

THIS arresting article is by a correspondent of the London "Observer." We reprint it in full from a recent issue in the belief that it gives meaning to much in current European politics that to most people is almost unintelligible.

and directing brain. But it would probably be wrong and superficial to reduce the question to this. Great political movements, parties that embody—or appear to embody—some genuine social aspirations cannot be dissolved into thin air by a political conjurer's wand. Communism as a movement and a programme could not be disbanded together with the Comintern.

The Communism of the 1944 brand is an odd mixture. Its record of underground struggle has been a glorious tale of heroes and martyrs. Justly has the French Communist Party been called "le parti des fusillés." It has gained immense moral authority as the most uncompromising defender of the French national interest. This aspect of its activity has loomed so large that the lamentable record of Communism before June 22, 1941, its previous equivocal attitude towards Nazi imperialism, and its demand for a negotiated peace with Hitler have now almost faded into oblivion. This has been so in all occupied countries, probably with the exception of Poland, where the Communists have, in connection with the Russo-Polish conflict, openly clashed with the national interests of their country. Their influence in Poland accordingly seems to be less wide.

Patriotic ardour, however, is not the only element of the Communists' new strength. On the Continent the war itself has been a most powerful "subversive agitator." It has destroyed or disorganised the economic and social fabric of most of Europe. It has given new topicality to the old slogan that "the workers have nothing to lose but their chains." It has uprooted large sections of the middle-classes. It has shattered the prestige of many wealthier cliques, among whom

defeatism and collaboration were rampant. The longing for a swift and root-and-branch change of society has become widespread, and it has naturally become a source of strength for Communism. In addition, the Communist parties shine with the reflected glories of Russian achievement and victory.

Kind to Kings

The faults of the 1944 brand of Communism are very closely allied to its excellence. Chief among them are the supreme contempt for matters of principle and an almost superstitious belief in the tactical trick. So elusive have Communist principles become that sometimes one might even wonder whether Communism really ought still to be classed among the political forces of the Left. It was the Italian Communist leader Togliatti who blunted the edge of Socialist and Liberal opposition to the House of Savoy. Similarly in Rumania and Bulgaria the Communists have so far agreed either to serve under King Michael or, as in Bulgaria, which now has a Communist Regent, to preserve dynastic institutions, for the defence of which many a moderate Liberal would hardly lift a finger.

In all Slavonic countries they have embraced the Pan-Slav doctrine, which smacks of old Tsarist reaction and is unpleasantly reminiscent of some contemporary theories of racialism. Some of the most fervent nationalist propaganda now comes from Communist circles. Polish Communists—and the British—clamour for a Polish frontier on the Oder. Marshal Tito (just as the Serbian nationalist Pasitch 25 years ago) vigorously demands the incorporation of Trieste into Yugoslavia.

Change of Mind

Greek Communists demand slices of Bulgarian territory and Southern Albania for their country, while their opposite numbers in Bulgaria have cherished the dream of a Greater Bulgaria. Perhaps never before has any other party so completely and unhesitatingly altered its tenets and replaced its whole outfit of ideas. Never has the gulf between "ideological" labels and ideology been so wide.

Any other party thus juggling with ideals which ruthlessly contradict its previous attitudes would inevitably come to ruin. The Communist parties have come out unscathed. The contradictions in their policies matter little as long as they do not clash with the "myth" of the Russian Revolution, the one essential issue that matters. It is this faith that gives to Communism its strength, its coherence, its vitality. But it also makes Communism—even where it has grown into a great popular movement—irresponsible and up to a point even indifferent towards the real needs of social progress beyond Russia.

Irresponsibility and indifference breed the boundless opportunism as well as the erratic spirit of adventure now intertwined in Communist policies. The tension that has arisen in France over the issue of the patriotic militias has newly illustrated this. The French Communists have in many respects now gone to the



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extremes, if one can say so, of moderation and conciliation. They have not proposed the revival of the Popular Front. The National Front is the slogan of the day. They have accepted and recognised without reservation the authority of the Provisional Government, content to receive two second-rate and non-political seats in it. However, after having gone thus far in their policy of compromise, they have not shrunk from dangerous conflict over the ban upon the patriotic militias. There is obviously no logic and no sense in a policy that has accepted the authority of the Government and then challenges it over an issue which that Government is bound to regard as a test of its authority.

Men of Adventure

Europe has entered a period of tension, turmoil and change. What role will Communists play? They will not act on the programme of "proletarian dictatorship and Soviet revolution" that was formulated by Lenin in the years of the first world war. Their present attitude is much nearer to the conciliatory attitude of the Social Democrats after the last war than to that of the founder of the Comintern. There is, however, one important difference. The Social Democrats have propounded peaceful reform and social compromise from their own genuine conviction and inclination. This cannot be said about the Communists. Underlying their conciliatory policies there is always a certain adventurous streak, the relic of their revolutionary youth. Their pacific gestures are too abrupt and too enthusiastic to inspire real confidence in the middle classes, who are still prone to a Red Scare. Their spirit of adventure is too irresponsible to stir the more stolid workers to revolt.

For the European Left the 1944 brand of Communism is both asset and liability. Sincere enthusiasm, devotion, and desire for social progress animate the Communist following. Like a torrent of immense driving power that movement has stubbornly worked its way through the underground of Nazi Europe and has now struck upward to the surface. How will it now be used? Will it be dissipated in vain skirmishes and costly adventures, or will it be harnessed realistically to the teamwork of democratic progress? That is a crucial question of the years to come.



TWO GENERAL SECRETARIES: Harry Pollitt (left) of the Communist Party in Great Britain and George Siantos of the Greek Communist Party. The photograph of Siantos was taken in Athens in November last on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the Greek Communist Party