

PC1/19/4/35



LIBERALISM & COMMUNISM

This seems the time to say something about Liberalism and Communism, their common elements and their differences.

What is Communism? Like all words that become charged with emotion, it has become a dangerous word to use from the semantic point of view. In one aspect Communism believes in the elimination of gross inequalities, of hunger, of poverty, and privilege. In another it believes that this can be done only under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that this dictatorship can only be achieved by a relentless class war. In another sense Communism believes in the exercise by the State of totalitarian power, the ruthless elimination of opposition, the employment of any means to achieve the desired end. In yet another sense, Communism - before it comes to power - is, in the eyes of the State, and certainly in the eyes of many conservatives and liberals, a destructive subversive force, that is willing to destroy in order to build, and will, in the pursuit of its goal, destroy many things that conservatives and liberals, and even some Communists, I believe, do not wish to be destroyed.

This account is both brief and inadequate, yet I go further in pursuit of brevity, and pick out the two features of Communism which concern Liberals most. These are, first, the socialist idealism of Communism, and, second, its belief in the use of totalitarian power (until, of course, the State withers away!). The first of these attracts many liberals. The second repels all liberals, except

the most frustrated and desperate.

There is one other important fact to be noted. South African Communism has another strong element, and that is its detestation of race discrimination. It is this element more than any other, and the courage with which discrimination has been fought, that have evoked admiration and affection from many Liberals, and above all have led them to treat with contempt the rabid anti-Communism which in this country is barely distinguishable from rabid white supremacy.

We should keep all these facts clearly before us. We should recognise the idealism in Communism and respect it, but we should not delude ourselves into believing that Liberalism can have anything in common with Communism in its totalitarianism aspect. We are pledged to cherish liberty and to bring about material betterment at the same time. To do so will be difficult, it will subject us to painful choices, but that is what Liberalism means.

I believe that CONTACT fell last month into a semantic trap when it wrote 'both communism and this newspaper believe in universal franchise and majority rule'. If CONTACT is writing of totalitarian communism, it is very wide of the mark, for universal franchise and majority rule mean totally different things to a liberal and to a communist (and they mean totally different things to CONTACT and to Joseph Stalin). Can one really believe that Stalin's regime was majority rule? Nothing is gained by ignoring these differences.

I know that some people - not all of them Communists - deplore the fact that Liberals affirm a viewpoint that lies between Afrikaner Nationalism and Communism. They call the Liberal Party a 'divisive element', which is 'blunting the edge of revolution'. Such critics do not understand the relationship between politics and temperament. We cannot all become something else just to avoid division. In fact - for a liberal - the being of oneself is in the last resort more important than the avoidance of division. Some people don't like such a truth, especially in critical times, but there it is. And indeed one might say - in a ^{somewhat} ~~rather~~ ~~high-flown~~ high-flown kind of way I admit - that the aim of a liberal state is to help people to be themselves, and not the tools of any State or Party.

(Mr. Editor - if you have space, please print the following)

Our former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev. Joost de Blank, is reported in the Press as having said that he could not see how a Christian could bear to live in South Africa. It is most difficult for me to believe that he said it. He himself left South Africa with a heavy heart. He left behind him his brother bishops, his priests, his people, and one cannot for a moment believe that he meant that they should leave too. I hope we shall know - and soon - what the Archbishop really said. Meanwhile I should like to say something about the proposition that South Africa is a country that a Christian should bear to live in. From a Christian point of view, it is quite untenable. The Christian lives in an imperfect society, and his duty is, not to leave it, but to leaven it. Christ made that abundantly ~~clear~~ plain.