

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

TOWARDS FREEDOM. A Candid Survey of Fascism, Communism and Modern Democracy. By Sir Alexander MacEwen. (Hodge; 5s.)

'The world to-day is worshipping the idols of Bigness and Materialism. This may result in a great increase of production, but it cannot bring peace or good will to the nations. We live in an age in which violence is preached as a necessary preliminary to order or social reform. This is not going to contribute to the world peace for which we all sigh.' Bigness and materialism are indeed devils which cloud our vision of end and means alike. One of the root causes of the evils under which the capitalist-democracies labour is the ever increasing centralization, both economic and political, which robs the individual more and more of the personal responsibility which is his right. But equally in the theories which have arisen, and found practical expression, as an answer to those evils, there is discernible the same root failure: the same worship of bigness and materialism, even though it be expressly denied by the upholders of the theories. The end in view is the regeneration of a class, a nation, a race; its redemption from economic or political slavery; but the first question to be asked is whether the desired regeneration can be achieved by a system which perpetuates the very evils it ought first to remedy—the absorption of the person in the vast impersonal collectivity, the denial to the person of the im-material freedom which is anterior to, and ought to be regulative of, human society. The method adopted, or to be adopted, is the method of force; and again, the first question to be asked is whether any movement which sets out to achieve the happiness of men can hope to be successful if it consists in the infliction of misery, and the consequent arousing of hatred and desire for revenge. The violent subversion of the existing order, and the substitution in its stead of a system which imposes either statist-political or collectivist-economic slavery upon the masses, thereby robbing them of the exercise of their deepest personal rights: this, it seems, is the sort of practical alternative to our existing disorders. It is no wonder that many who long to see the end of those existing disorders are repelled alike by Right and Left, and long for a sane and coherent policy to which they can give whole-hearted allegiance, a policy which while starting from the idea of the person as the supreme human value, assuring to the person economic, political, religious freedom, at the same time avoids the pitfalls of individualism as we know it, and

gives new life and vigour, within sane limits, to the ideals of social service and unity.

Happily, there is no lack at least of impressive statements of such a policy. We have had recently, in this country, translations of Maritain's *True Humanism*, Mounier's *Personalist Manifesto*. From a different angle, but substantially in the same sense, is Sir Alexander MacEwen's valuable study. As a leading personality in the Scottish nationalist movement, his immediate preoccupation is to discuss the absurdities of over-centralization from the point of view of Scottish politics; but his primary problem is precisely an application of the central social problem of our time: devolution is not a narrow parliamentary issue, but the vital issue of freedom or slavery. Thus his book includes a valuable discussion of the ideas of fatherland, liberty, democracy, fascism and communism, the 'good life'; and after a section on the specifically British problem, it passes to the substance of the whole essay: the idea of co-operative democracy, ending with an inquiry into the relation between religion and life.

Devolution cannot, if it is to be part of a constructive and practical programme, mean simply retrogression to primitive conditions. There is much that is attractive in the idea of the completely autonomous village community; but the task before the reformer to-day is the task of regaining freedom for the multitudes which inhabit the world of to-day—and the supplying of the necessities of life is part of that freedom. It is not simply a question of local autonomy versus centralization; it is a question of achieving a right balance between them, in economics and politics alike, for the preservation of individual freedom and the promotion of the personal good of all. Thus, economically, there is the whole question of co-operation to be discussed: the possibilities of co-ownership on the one hand, and on the other, of devolution of control. Politically, there is the business of delimiting the area in which centralized control is necessitated by the common good, and of restoring to the local group—nation or district—the autonomy which enables the individual to exercise more satisfactorily and fully that part in government which is due to him as a human person. In these questions, Sir Alexander MacEwen's argument is strengthened by the wealth of fact he is able to adduce from the experiences which have been gained in this and other countries; and against the valuable results achieved by attempts at co-operative democracy he is able to set, with equal command of fact, the disastrous consequences of less personalist theories.

His realism does not forget the question of means. How is this revolution to be achieved, without doing more harm than good? He quotes Dr. Davies: 'Co-operation is a system which, without violent revolution and without injuring anybody, can grow within the capitalist system and gradually undermine it and transform it from within, and which experience has shown to be practically immune from capitalist attacks.' That does not mean that the task is easy; but it does mean that it is practicable; it does mean that a new synthesis, which both in end and means can approximate to the ideals of Christian sociology, is a possibility—provided that as individuals (for such a revolution is a *personalist* revolution; and starts therefore *from* the person, cannot be the result simply of external imposition from above) we have the energy and courage to work for it.

Clarity of thought is the necessary precondition of success in action. This book, as readable as it is realist and judicious, should help towards the formation of that consensus of mind in which alone can be found sufficient spiritual power to move the mountains which confront us.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

COMMUNISM AND CHRISTIANS. Translated by J. F. Scanlan.
(Sands: The Paladin Press; 7s. 6d.)

This is a translation of the collection of essays, *Communisme et Chrétiens*, evoked in response to the famous 'outstretched hand' offer of the French Communist leader, M. Maurice Thorez. 'The offer,' says J. F. Scanlan in his prefatory note, 'was doubtless as sincere as it was misconceived, but the question of its sincerity or insincerity is not discussed here, and the tactical and vote-catching aspect of this policy . . . has been deliberately eschewed.' The discussion in fact is not tied up with French politics of the recent past or with any historical event of which the veracity has been controverted. It maintains a high level of understanding and of truthful and exact exposition, and in this it may be hoped that the 157-page examination of Communist doctrine by Père Ducattillon, O.P., may set a standard to future Catholic writers on the subject. He says truly: 'It is easily said of Communist doctrine that it is crude; the interpretations of some of its opponents are infinitely cruder . . . Such crude interpretations . . . should . . . be avoided with regard to the determinist character of Communism and even with regard to its materialism: and the caution holds good with regard to property.' But he does not merely say it, he proceeds to show how and why; expounding