

BOLSHEVISM, THE NEW SECTARIANISM

THE present weakness of Western civilization may be more apparent than real, and in part the exaggeration of a press-hysteria which, concentrating on the plight of the modern and mushroom centres of industry and finance, makes little account of the deep-rooted strength which Europe draws from its countryside, traditions, and religion—convictions inarticulate perhaps, but largely operative. Still, a menace to our culture looms so heavily on the Eastern frontier, and its economic achievement is so impressive, its application of the dialectic of materialism so ruthless and complete, and its direction so intelligent, that it is easy to be overawed by the mere size of Bolshevism, to admit over-readily its claim to a universalism, and, granting it a weight in the order of ideas which it certainly possesses in the order of fact, to miss seeing it for what it is, a sect.

Then, considering its anti-God campaign and its emphasis on economical and mechanical facts to the exclusion of any other, thinking of it as a resolute common-sensism that scoffs at everything it cannot see, picturing it in a bright hard light and religion as a thing for the twilight, it is easy to pass over the fact that the whole movement derives its impetus from the worship of an ideal every bit as slavish as that of the religion it displaced, and without the justification. Prostration to the lord of eternal life and death is at any rate a pretty natural sort of attitude; abasement before a man-made projection, an *ens rationis*, the human herd considered as an economic group, however vast the herd, however insistent the economic pressure, is a definite degradation. The word is used quite coldly, not rhetorically.

Bolshevism: The New Sectarianism

Accustomed to take Bolshevism as a mercilessly scientific movement, people easily forget that its chief strength in practice is its intense religious feeling, with all the attendant bye-products of superstition, credulity, and mass-enthusiasm. It is too readily assumed that superstition is only bound up with dirt and drink and a crouching attitude. It is disregarded that it loses much of its humour and none of its strength when it is associated with shiny white tiles and big machines of gleaming steel and steady-eyed upstanding athletes extending well-developed biceps to the rising Sun of Progress, while electric rays shoot out from their loins. Superstition is largely a herd-disease. It is aggravated by modern civilization, to which Bolshevism is such a logical conclusion, with its invasion of privacy and destruction of personal responsibility.

A well-turned translation of *der Bolshewismus* by Waldemar Gurian has just appeared.¹ The author, who spent his early life in Russia, studied under Max Scheler and Carl Schmitt, and has been the political correspondent of the *Kölnische Volkzeitung*, attempts a critical encyclopaedia of Bolshevism. He is a Catholic and a European, and so neither panicked by its threat to a capitalist industrialism he cannot hold, nor gulled by its promise of a millenium he cannot admire. His objective and systematic account, with its documents relating to Lenin, Stalin, the Five-Year Plan, and the campaign against marriage and religion, and its dictionary of Bolshevik terms, is a welcome contrast to the stuff which is served up to Catholics rather too often—the unlovely spectacle of the Britons who can be found to fraternize with the Muscovite hordes, all duly noted last week and courageously condemned.

¹ *Bolshevism: Theory and Practice*. By Waldemar Gurian. Translated by E. I. Watkin. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932; pp. x, 402; 10/6 net.)

Blackfriars

Dr. Gurian makes a characteristically German approach to the underlying idea of Bolshevism. But he does not present it as a naked system, but as embodied in a particular situation. His method is concrete, not abstract. It is precisely here that he is able to rebut its claim to be a universalism, a system of pure mind, profoundly congenial to humanity, and the goal of all its evolution.

A thing may be usefully defined in terms of the four causes—material, efficient, formal, and final : by asking, what is it out of? by what? how is it organised? what is its purpose? Without trying to make the classification fit too tightly, for the thing under discussion is not a natural but an artificial whole, it will be a logical convenience to consider Bolshevism under these four heads, and to indicate how, in its groundwork, its production, its scheme of government, its goal, it appears a sectarianism—in the sense of representing only a section of reality.

The Material Cause. The Marxian idea of the economic determinism of history can be turned against the Marxian Government established in Russia when it claims to be the result of the profoundest striving of humanity as such. For the philosophical historian can very fairly hold Bolshevism to be the product of a set of definitely restricted circumstances. As an Aristotelean would say, it is not a necessary fact, the outcome of a movement intrinsic to nature, but a contingent fact, the result of a local, particular, and more than ordinarily artificial situation ; the impact of alien ideas on a vast people in chaos as the result of the breakdown of a bureaucracy and temporarily receptive of a particular form applied with extraordinary single-mindedness and decision by a small group, carrying to a rigid and exclusive conclusion the premises it had learnt from a half-mechanized West.

Bolshevism: The New Sectarianism

M. Sorel has seen the prototype of Lenin in Peter the Great, and indeed both imported something into Russia from outside and imposed a form not native to the soil. Dr. Gurian, by exploring the historical antecedents and social background—the material cause—of Bolshevism, is able to show that it was not a mass-movement. Indeed, its leaders would not claim that it was, either in theory or in practice.

Bolshevism was a revolution within a revolution. A compact body within the more general doctrinarianism of the Russian revolutionary movement. It is sect within a sect. The Russian revolutionary movement dates back to a little over a century, and was inspired by ideas drawn from Europe and alien to the masses of the Russian people.

These ideas shaded off from a vague and benevolent bourgeois Liberalism through Socialism to a violent Nihilism, and were directed in the main against the bureaucracy, a government after the eighteenth century European model. France sets the fashion in these things. Allowing for a time-lag, the Russian revolutionary movement was the attack on a Bourbon bureaucracy with the ideals of the Paris Commune. Even the changes of name of the battleships after 1917 is expressive of this. But, it is important to note, both causes were alien to ordinary Russian humanity.

The peasant, land hungry and accustomed to community ownership, represented the mass of the people. The organ of government—apart from the personal position of the Czar—represented an importation from Eighteenth Century Europe, from its official architecture to the half-mitre hats of the fashion of Fontenoy still worn by some of the guards.

Between the peasants and the bureaucracy lay the classes from which the Revolution was to come. The true universality of a movement is not to be judged by the counting of heads, but it is worth noting that

Blackfriars

these represented a small minority in the State. There was first of all a middle class more or less favourable to the ideals of the revolutionary movement. The movement itself was run by a small circle of active members of the intelligentsia. Then for national, not necessarily socialist, reasons the movement gathered support from the subject-races of the Empire—Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, and principally Jews, many of whom were to play a prominent part in the revolution. The revolutionary Jew was so, not because he was a Jew, but because he happened to be both educated and oppressed.

The ground was still further prepared by the rise of an industrial proletariat, shamelessly exploited, as in the initial stages of capitalism in every country. This class was relatively small, only three millions in 1914, but it was destined to grow with the war and impose its needs and character on the revolution.

This revolution did not come without warning. Abortive revolutions and social disorders broke out, and were repressed. But few of the government possessed the vision of Stolypin, who saw the cure, and attempted, not without success, to lay a broad base for national stability in the establishment of peasant proprietorship.

It will be seen that the remote preparation for Bolshevism was a set of conditions and institutions peculiar to Russia, and, furthermore, alien to Russian humanity. The proximate preparation gives no more title to a universalism. In 1917 the bureaucracy broke down under the strain of war, and the revolution broke out. At first it seemed that it would follow the usual course of the revolutions which Europe had already been trying out for the past hundred years, and repeat the rhythm of the three Louis, Philippe, Blanc, and Napoleon. But the arrival on the scene of one man, Lenin, and the formation through his extraordinary

Bolshevism: The New Sectarianism

strength of mind and will of the small but compact group of the Bolshevist party, abruptly interrupted the whole course of the revolution, and fixed on it a pattern of something entirely novel in the world's history.

The Efficient Cause. In the welter of universal indiscipline—the collapse of the army, the breakdown of transport, the opposition of local soviets to the Provisional Government—the Bolshevik party formed the one active and organized group. It was the spearhead of the revolution, and the one group that clearly knew its own mind and, possessed with all the force of a single idea, was prepared to apply it with a courage and persistence that would ruthlessly destroy every influence opposed to it. Once established, this group employed methods undreamt of by the governments it had displaced, a terrorism none the less complete because its main motives were disinterested and impersonal.

Its master idea was not derived from the masses, not from humanity as it exists in all its rich untidiness, but was the conception of a small group of entirely logical materialists. It was the idea of humanity as an economic group, to the exclusion of everything else. Parties with one idea that represents an extreme simplification by exclusion, not synthesis, are sects. If they attach a universal significance to it, they are religious sects. If they make it the open sesame of everything, show it a misdirected reverence, invest it with magic, and surround it with catchwords, they are superstitious sects. And, in fact, this new religion has its pilgrimages to the tomb of its prophet.

The Formal Cause. The Bolshevist bloc set itself to organize an authoritative and totalitarian state in the interests of the worker. He was thought of, not even in the sufficiently sectional English sense of the working-man, but bleakly just as a worker—in the

Blackfriars

same way that a bee is a worker, or a mechanical navy. It conceived itself to be acting for the economic totality of these, not that it drew its power from them, for from the first it resolutely combatted the idea that it was acting as the delegate of the proletariat as represented by the soviets and the co-operative societies. Force was imposed on the mass, not drawn from it. It does not claim to be a representative government. It is an aristocracy—if the word can have much meaning within a scheme of such extreme simplification. In the end, as will be seen, it comes to the sole pre-eminence of the engineer.

The Final Cause. Its purpose is the advantage of an industrial proletariat, which was only a small minority of the nation at the beginning of the Revolution. The air of universalism, which Bolshevism wears to us who are inclined to assess everything by the town worker, is its purpose to bring the whole nation to the condition of this class. The whole is reduced to the state of a part. The laws and needs of a section, and only the economic needs at that, are elevated as the exclusive law and need of the whole under every respect.

Within the state considered as an economic whole, no other rights are tolerated. Further, no right is allowed to exist and act outside it. It is easy to see the logic which has led to the abolition of personal rights antecedent to and independent of the positive laws of a mechanized group, and still more to the abolition of the rights of any other society, particularly the family and the Christian Church.

There is here a total mobilization of everything in human life for one purpose, the economic solidarity of the proletarian state. The totalitarian Fascist State has been criticized, but at any rate it set itself an ideal more human, social, and noble than economics; and its trend to a state absolutism has been checked by the

Bolshevism: The New Sectarianism

sharp intervention of the Pope, and mitigated by the dignified genius of the Italian people. The Fascist State by negotiating a concordat has at least recognized the rights of an order outside its own. But in Bolshevism there is the complete subjection of everything to an economic group of machine-minders.

The drive of Bolshevist theory has been tempered in practice by skilful accommodations to existing facts. The concessions to private traders and peasants made by the New Economic Policy of ten years ago were prematurely hailed as signs of the unworkableness of Bolshevism. But in fact they were merely tactical retreats, pauses for breath, leaving the goal to be pursued with undiminished, if more patient, energy. They have been succeeded by the Five-Years Plan, which is meant to establish a complete Marxist State through the super-industrialization of the country. The instinct is sure. The Bolshevists are beginning with the development of the heavy industries, the mechanization of agriculture and its organization as one big business. With Spengler they know the logic of the Machine, and they alone have had the courage to carry it to a conclusion. The Bolshevists at home are not the people who have scuffles with the police in the streets, but those responsible for such a thing, for instance, as a business building, with lighting from above, so that the clerks may not be distracted at their work by the prospect of the Thames through the windows.

The underlying philosophy of the Bolsheviks is described by themselves as dialectical materialism, a practice rather than a theory. Indeed what place is there for such an economically unproductive thing as contemplation? It is useless, St. Thomas would say, but he would say it for praise. And so philosophy is degraded to the state of a practical instrument for shaping a quantitative and mechanical mass. It is by

Blackfriars

no accident that the highest activity in the Bolshevik State has become the perfecting of industrial technique. Trotsky has been displaced by Stalin, the intellectual by the engineer.

People in glass houses cannot throw stones, and too much of the criticism directed on Bolshevism from the West has seized on its cruelties and alleged failures in practice. The criticism that Europe is in a position to make goes much deeper than the defence of industrial capitalism and springs from something better than an outraged humanitarianism, or, more accurately, vegetarianism. It can still test this new idea by what remains of its own profound philosophy. Ultimately it comes to a clash between two religions, Catholicism and Bolshevism. In the history of Christianity there has not appeared such an antithesis. There is nothing in common, except honesty and devotion. (The *doyen* of a diplomatic corps, if unmarried, is helped by the wife of the minister next in order of seniority to hold some important reception; it was a puckish spirit that saw to it once in Berlin that he should be the Papal Nuncio, and she the wife of the Soviet Ambassador.)

Both preach a kingdom, but one is a kingdom narrowed down to one aspect of this world and exclusive of everything else; the other is the eternal Kingdom of God, including in its power everything else. For the one, the earth is a closed system; for the other, it is open to all the winds of eternity. For the one, human society is a complexus of economic units; for the other, a companionship of persons in the promise of an enduring beatitude.

The opposition is fundamental and essential to the nature of both. Bolshevism, claiming to be a society wholly sufficient in itself, is logically committed to the denial of external sanctions. This fact has now clearly emerged. At first it was possible to think that the Russian revolution merely happened to be infected

Bolshevism: The New Sectarianism

with the anti-clericalism usual to most modern revolutions, and particularly when Christianity resided in a vested interest; that its attack on religion was to some extent justified by the vices of a mistakenly 'other-worldly' type of religion, that used Christian hope as a narcotic rather than a stimulant, and that did not produce the Christian rebel and social reformer but rather the tame and passive acceptor of social abuses. But, in any case, it is easy to see which is the narrower and more sectarian of the two, a form of Christianity that permitted a temporal and local disorder in the hope of an eternal and universal order, or a Bolshevism that produces an immediate and restricted order by a violent exclusion of the spiritual. A eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven can be understood, but not a eunuch for the sake of anything less.

It is a misreading of a man's whole nature to consider him merely as an economic unity. It may appear hard-headed and to have no nonsense about it. But in reality it is neither scientific nor practical. It is not scientific to accept uncritically the things you can see and hold them to be sufficient explanations of themselves, and not push on by the reason to the only logical consistence they can have in a spiritual philosophy. Nor is it practical, for practice is ordered to ends, and what is the end here except ultimate extinction?

In fact, the direction of all men's energies to the exclusive service of an economic group can only be sustained by tapping a source of energy from outside, by turning their religious reactions, their enthusiasms for eternal things, from their proper and common-sense objects, and diverting them to the service of the Machine. And this is happening. Bolshevism is a religion, the worship of something big and awe-inspiring over and above the individual. It has its

Blackfriars

mysticism, its credulities, its superstitions. Its anti-Christian propaganda is marked by a greater naiveness than was ever the thing it attacks. Peasants are applauded who rush from church to gape at an aeroplane. Miracles are disproved by solemn exhibitions of laboratory effects. The supernatural is shown up by a few sixpenny tricks from Gamage's. Many who saw Dovjenko's film, *Earth*, were not left wondering whose was the greater superstition, the old priest's alone in front of his altar, or the young man's on his farm-tractor. The ideology would be all so very puerile, were it not so threatening in practice; the barbarism of such a simplification so contemptible, were it not in possession of the Machine

The profound criticism of Bolshevism springs instinctively from the very mind of Europe. Even the present weariness and disillusionment of Europe proceeds from an experience nearer the heart of things and refuses to be satisfied with such a solution. Decadence is not satisfied with simple vice. The temptations of St. Anthony were not temptations to the devil who employed them. This is to argue from the weakness of the West. But Europe yet has some of the strength of a Christian and human tradition which is still native, still far from covered by the ribbon development of Industrialism and Finance. The qualities in Russia it finds attractive are not the big things, but such relative trivialities as the rescue-work of the ice-breaker *Krassin*, the beauty of some Soviet films, and the fact that Lenin had a taste for Jack London and was affectionate in his family relationships. These are the things that strike a mind still devoted to the eccentric and personal and bored to revulsion by an enormous industrial monotonization.

It is impossible to alter human nature by economic changes. A civilization that still draws its strength from Jerusalem and Athens and Rome cannot be en-

Bolshevism : The New Sectarianism

amoured of the Bolshevist idea. If Europe goes Bolshevist it will not be because it has exchanged one set of ideas for another, but because the growth of industrial capitalism has created a proletariat without any ideas at all beyond the need of regular wages and amusements.

The Church is the very heart of the fight against Bolshevism. It is a fight to the death, and the Church cannot die. Catholicism embraces the whole universe as it goes from and returns to the Logos—all things are mine and mine are yours; but its striking force is gathered in the visible society of the Church—the Word was made flesh—and comes bringing not rest, but a sword.

But in the meantime, Bolshevism is still growing in strength. It is still being accelerated, still being fed from outside. This seems a condition of its continuance. Achievement can only be sustained by a thing that holds within itself a stress. There is no just balance of human parts without freedom. Machines have not the power to keep themselves in trim. In appearance they may be firm and set, but they lack the elasticity of the really perdurable. Bolshevism has not yet achieved its rest, it is still a striving. But already there are signs of what Dr. Gurian calls the Bolshevist philistine, the go-getter who will exploit the group for his own ends. Bolshevism has not even the universality of original sin—the negative test of the universality of a religion. In this connection, it is possible to see what the man meant who said that one of the best things about human nature is original sin. He was not thinking of the *O felix culpa* which was the motive of the Incarnation, but of that universal unease which will always prevent the perfect running of the Machine.

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