

Dec. 194

COMMUNISM

It is quite easy in a number of instances to err in one of two ways:

- (a) By reading more into the events than the true facts warrant, i.e., to attribute to the ramifications of the Communist events and actions which were not inspired by them at all.
- (b) To refuse to recognize their influence and to play down their role.

To avoid this it will be necessary, I think, to attempt to isolate the Communists as a group and to assess the impact of their ideology on the organizations we have been studying, particularly on the Non-White people and to see how far and whether Communist leadership was accepted by the people.

Immediately, we come up against a very knotty problem, that of deciding when Communists constitute a group. It has become almost axiomatic now that a Communist is ideologically incorruptible. The saying is quite common that "once a Communist always a Communist". This is in effect to say that Communism has such an appeal that those who embrace it are transformed into new beings wholly dedicated to their creed. If we believe this, then we may as well throw up the sponge, because whatever we do we cannot prevent the circulation of ideas, even Communist ideas. Fortunately, it has been proved that this is not so: that Communism can be met and beaten ideologically and practically.

As I was saying then, does the presence of Moses Kotane, a known Communist, in the National Executive of Dr. Xuma's Congress, mean that that National Executive is Communist? Does the presence of three of them in that Executive mean it is Communist? The obvious answer is ~~NO~~ "No: but they can use that executive to carry out the Communist programme". We agree, but it depends on the influence they ~~wield~~ wield in that Executive. And we shall be able to gauge their influence by noting Communist consistency in the actions and utterances of that executive. But that is just the rub. Communists are consistently inconsistent: they are unpredictable and display an incredibly imaginative disregard for facts and truth. All that can be fairly stated about them is that they will support any action that will advance the interests of the Soviet Union. If chaos will suit the USSR, then they will do ~~at~~ all they can to create it: but if peace and order are what the USSR desires at any particular time, then they will even help the police to maintain it.

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It might be well for our purpose to approach the problem without any preconceived notions about the behavioral pattern of Communists. But such an attitude could be worse than useless because we shall not then know what to look for and will not be able to detect the tell-tale signs of the species. All we can promise ourselves is to apply our knowledge judiciously and with scientific objectivity.

It would be best then to start with the Communist Party during the period when it operated legally (i.e. within the period of our investigation) and study its methods and impact during that time.

We are immediately struck by the ceaseless activity, the dedication almost of the party technicians. They throw themselves into organizational work, the writing and distribution of papers, posters and handbills. They work in clubs, union offices and are generally untidy in appearance, everything about them (except their noses) giving the impression that they are acutely short of funds. Frequent appeals are made for funds in their papers and there was a period when "New Age" gave the impression that unless relief came they would be forced to close the following week. And always the relief came in half-crowns and ticcys from the "workers" and some well-off "Contributors".

By 1945, the Party had been in existence for over twenty years competing freely with the other political parties in the country, White and Non-White. It had just engaged in one of its characteristic volte face. After stumping up and down the country condemning in scurrilous language South Africa's entry into the War, it had (after Russia's entry into the War) crusaded most zealously for the War effort earning the gratitude of the Government.

But always they were credited with more influence than they actually commanded: and they took no pains to dispel the delusion. During the whole period that they operated in the open, Communist activity and influence, whatever it was, were confined to the two cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Among the Whites, their ideological converts were middle-class lawyers and trade-unionists. They made no impact on White workers who could never be made to see an identity of interests between them and black-workers. They were the "Aristocrats of Labour" and regarded certain types of work as infra dig - "kaffir-work".

The White Communists during this whole period were no more revolutionary than the Fabian Society. They demanded better wages and jobs and better living conditions for the Non-White people - demands made by the Salvation Army as well.

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Feb. 1944

Among the Non-Whites they concentrated on the organisation of Trade Unions and holding public meetings at the Grand Parade in Cape Town. Ideologically they made very little impact. What it should be so has puzzled a number of students of Non-White politics. Communist doctrine is, after all, straightforward and easy to grasp. Its slogans are catching and illustrate a most desirable form of society. "From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs" is a statement every poor man can be expected to welcome gladly, nor is Marx's theory of value one which a poor worker can find fault with.

It has been suggested that at that period South Africa had not become a truly industrial country. The gold mines were still ~~xxxxxxxx~~ the mainstay of the economy. Secondary industry was just getting into stride. Urbanisation was still in its infancy. Both the Coloured and White workers were rural folk who had been attracted to the towns by the rising factories. Their problem was not so much that of wages. They were being better paid than they had ever been before. Accommodation was their problem. But even here it is easy to exaggerate. The workers were not particularly concerned with the unhygienic conditions under which they lived. Those who lived in the slums were grateful to have a place to live at all, while those who were still pouring into the Urban areas were praying that the municipalities would not prevent them from entering the areas. Windermere in Cape Town, Cato Manor in Durban, Korsten in P.E. The Orlando and Moroka shelters as well as Alexandra Township and Sophiatown in Johannesburg were bursting at the seams. (Refer to Urban Areas Consolidated Act, 1945 : Influx regulations). In Johannesburg this is the period of the Nuanetsi and Local Advisory Boards - Local problems loomed large.

Needless to say these workers were ignorant and unorganised. The Party's duty was to organise them into Trade Unions. But since they had no complaint about their wages which though paltry, objectively speaking, to them represented a great improvement over what they had earned in the past, it was not easy to organise them. The roots of a sizeable Non-White middle Class (particularly African) were laid as taxis began operating and shops opened to serve the urban immigrants. This was not material for Communism.

Some indeed were organised into Trade Unions and were taught the rudiments of Communism. But more of this later.

Among the Africans it has been suggested that Tribalism is a strong bulwark against Communism. I doubt if such a view is theoretically tenable.

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Feb. 1964

Personal ownership of land which characterized the tribal system is more in line with Communist theory than with Capitalism. True enough cattle and personal goods were individually owned but by 1945 all these reports of the Tribal man's pride in his cattle etc., were more relevant to studies of ~~xxx~~ Anthropology than to the realities of the times. The tribal man was in the cities working to support his family back home. It was the insecurity of Urban life that made them leave their families behind, not a preference for tribal life. In the cities and schools and colleges the aggregation was on geographical rather than on tribal lines (see Monica Hunter's study of Life at Langal).

The inescapable conclusion is that Communism failed to make headway among the Africans, particularly, because it could not be reconciled with the harsh realities of the South African situation. The Communists were doctrinaire, believing that all conflicts in all societies are basically class conflicts. And so they interpreted and ~~xxx~~ analysed the South African situation.

But it did not appear so to the African worker who KNEW that the White labourer he worked with was a "baas", expected so to be addressed, expected the deference he had come to accept as due to one of his colour. The Black worker knew that while he was a "boy" to the White foreman or manager, his White fellow-labourer was "Mr. so and so". He belonged to the employing class. In fact he had a domestic servant at home and probably a "garden boy" as well. It was sheer nonsense to tell this man that he and the White worker were similarly exploited and oppressed. He knew that the White worker received as much as four or five times the wages he (the Black worker) received for no other reason than that he was white.

Furthermore, the Communist could not speak of an abstract Capitalism as responsible for the man's plight. He had to speak concretely of the "Capitalist" who pocketed the profits. But this term could not be reserved for the "factory-owner" only. It had to be extended to embrace butchers and shoekeepers and literally anyone and everyone who employed labour. This meant that African shopkeepers and other businessmen had to be regarded as capitalists and therefore responsible for the oppression of the black and white workers. The absurdity of such an analysis needs no comment.

Finally, although the White Communists were the most colour-blind and many of them became popular figures in African circles, it soon became clear that the African people while prepared to use their services were not prepared to accept them as friends. They were White and, therefore, particularly to the tribal man, objects of suspicion.

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Feb. 1964

But the Communists did get converts. There were genuine and dedicated African Communists who were proud to be known as such. They worked for the Party cause enthusiastically. But, unfortunately, they were not highly educated and were able to provide African political leadership only so long as the African educated classes - teachers mostly - fought shy of politics.

But with Dr. Kama's assumption of the leadership of the ANC and the subsequent birth of the ANCYL and Anti-CAD in 1943, politics became "respectable" and it became a mark of intellectualism to be able to discourse freely and intelligently on both international and local politics. This involved an intense and intelligent study of political science, political philosophy and history. As a result, the old Communists (Africans) lost their usefulness. European Communists found they could discuss freely and intelligently with the new lot and set out to capture them.

Fortunately or unfortunately, interest of the Non-White intelligentsia coincided with the advent of the "Nationalist Government and the Suppression of the Communist Party.

If it is remembered that this party came to power on the clearly stated purpose of "keeping the kaffir in his place", a promise whose meaning was clearly understood by both White and Non-White people, it is not surprising that the Suppression of Communism Act was not greeted with joy and gratitude by the African people. The Communists were revealed as the first martyrs for African National Congress because, so they argued, what the Nats opposed, was the emergence of an organised African national movement.

Both the Nats and the Communists made their contributions towards the fulfilment of Communist predictions. The Communists won over the educated leadership of the ANC and used these to further their purpose. They used difference methods. It is a known fact that a favourite Communist technique is to discover a man's weakness, exploit that until he compromises himself and then hold him under blackmail. It has been suggested that they have used wine, women and money to subvert a number of African leaders. This may or may not be so. But an additional factor with the ANC leadership which made him easy prey for the Reds was their lack of a political philosophy.

Christianity would not provide an anchor. It merely proved the correctness of the Marxists, for did not Marx say religion was the opiate of the masses?

Nationalism, too, offered no intellectual anchor. It was an emotional drive, a mystic concept. And in any event Stalin had dealt fully with it in terms of historical materialism and fitted it into its niche in the structure of Communism. It was an inevitable phase, under certain conditions (Colonialism): a preliminary phase to Communism. One after the other, the leaders capitulated.

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Feb. 1974

In these circumstances, Leballo's stand is glorious and heroic. Caring nothing for intellectual arguments, he took his stand on the emotional content of African Nationalism. The Red Press flayed him: smear campaigns against him were organised. He was accused of being a paid agent of the government and then of being a "war casualty" - a certified lunatic. But the lunatic held on, almost alone in his defiance - at least on the surface. By 1975 the Reds were sufficiently sure of themselves to ignore him and his small band of stalwarts - "the lunatic fringe" of African politics.

One thing the Reds believe in is the power of the Press. And they believe that ~~through~~ through the Press they can build up a nonentity into an accepted "leader" and discredit a recognised leader and bury him in ignominy. They discredited and buried in succession, Xuma, Tema and Moroka. They built up Sisulu, Luthuli, Mandela, Beba, Mokwe; although it must be admitted that Xuma, Tema and Moroka, unlike Leballo, retreated into their shells and made it easy for their political burial to be effected. Furthermore, they had no dedicated few around them, no organisational core, as had Leballo.

But the apparent strength of the Reds was their undoing. Assured of Conference support, they became increasingly impatient of opposition and crushed it physically. Their opponents were forced to adopt other methods to fight them. And they decided to borrow a leaf from the Communist's book. They began building up their own cells in Congress branches and creating new branches dedicated to Nationalism which they introduced to the ANC and thus built up their numbers ~~WIKI THE ANC~~. They began studying Communist literature seriously, and used Communist dialectics to fight the Communists. Thus it was that using the concept of identity of material interests, the Africanists, when they formed the PAC, forbade Whites from becoming members of the PAC. For a time Arthur Koestler provided the Africanists with ammunition until finally, in one of the issues of "The Africanist", the African Nationalists declared: "There are no Communists in South Africa: Just as Christianity has been unfortunate in its choice of representatives in this country, just so has Communism been equally unfortunate." And contradictory though this may seem, in view of their prolonged fight against the Reds, they nevertheless meant it. To the Africanists, the White Communists were the agents of White supremacy. The enemies of African Nationalism. And they had to be fought as such. The fact that they lived in posh suburbs and enjoyed the fruits of inequality, did not improve their image. And their un concealed eagerness to control African organisations while doing little to convert the Whites, put them in the same class as the Liberals of past decades. The Black Communists, strange to say, were never regarded as dangerous by the Africanists. They were dubbed lackeys and stooges of the Whites and left at that.

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Feb. 1964.

The situation becomes even more clouded when it is realised that the old guard, Xuma's colleagues, while not making common cause with the Africanists, made it clear that they would have nothing to do with Communism. As a result, the Cape and Natal, throughout, remained Nationalists and the Reds, to remain in the leadership, had to pose as Nationalists. They were subjected to pressure by both the White Communists who wanted to see a recognisable change in the ANC, and by the Africanists who wanted them to break off all ties with their White comrades. Thus it was that even after the Congress Constitution had been amended to admit Whites, none were enrolled.

By the time the PAC emerged, there were already factions and cliques within the Red camp. The early Black Communists (Marks, Tloome) did not relish the idea of being pushed into the background by the Mandela, Lokwa and Joe Matthews's. All of them were being accused by their White colleagues of having "middle-class aspirations", i.e., that they were interested more in becoming successful advocates and lawyers and amassing wealth instead of launching a determined attack against Apartheid.

The emergence of PAC helped to cover up the rift. It had been argued by Red propagandists that just as Tema's "National Minded Bloc" and "aseko's "Bun'begiya" had withered away after being severed from the parent tree, the ANC, similarly the PAC would wither away. But whereas these other offshoots had had no ideological anchorage, the PAC found in Pan Africanism the answer to Communism. African Nationalism took its place as a phase in the development towards Pan Africanism. Events to the North favoured the Pan Africanists and the suppression of Communist Parties in the newly-dependent African States further reduced the stocks of Communism locally. Nkrumah, Nasser and Lumumba were vilified by "New Age".

Then came the PAC's Positive Action Campaign followed by Lumumba's murder, the Pondoland Riots and the State of Emergency. The Reds dashed in realising that the AMI stocks were low, they proposed a "front". An All-In African Leaders Conference. But the people represented there counted for almost nothing in African political circles - but better make your own assessment.

The Reds, however, were convinced that the conditions were ideal. It therefore became necessary for them to emerge to the surface as the leaders...of the revolution. So it was that Mandela in person gave the call for the May Day celebration strike. It failed. Mandela disappeared.

I cannot comment on later developments as I lack the facts.

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Feb. 1964

But with regard to tribalism, I think it can be said that the Reds oppose it as much as the Nationalists do. But they do not understand Nationalism. In West Africa, leaders can appear in traditional dress because it is associated with no tribe. It is National. But in South Africa, not only is there no traditional dress for men except a blanket or the birthday suit, but woman's dress is distinctly tribal. But the ANC leaders wanted to use the emotional appeal of traditional wear, without thereby encouraging tribalism. That is why "Africa Day" Tambo wore a Sotho hat. The karross that Mandela wore at his trial apparently gave rise to heated controversy. You'll know better. But he wore it as a symbol of Nationalism, not tribalism. Needless to say nobody who knows the basis of African Nationalism, man, ~~xxxx~~ or woman, will ever wear a tribal dress.

In conclusion, all I can say is the picture that emerges from this study is of stronger and more frequent political resistance on the part of the African people, drawing in more and more people but with the leadership of each particular action more and more difficult to pinpoint. This we know to be the practice of International Communism, but it need not be the practice of local Communism. After all, there was a period when known Communists were conspicuous in such activities. It is quite conceivable that the leaders of the ANC, without being communists, could have come to regard this method of conducting the struggle as the safest, both for themselves and their organisation.

Among the leaders of the ANC we spot some known Communists and others with Communist leanings. "New Age", which, if not a Communist paper, expressed very strong pro-Communist views, became increasingly the mouthpiece of the ANC. This may be indicative of the leanings of the ANC leadership or it may merely be that the ANC were happy and grateful to have a paper that was willing and ready to popularize their movements. Efforts were made around 1957/58 to get ANC branches to sell "New Age" but the branches refused to do this.

This period also shows closer co-operation between the leaders of the various White and Non-White organisations that constituted the Congress Alliance. But there is no evidence of an ideological bond between the members of these organisations. There is, in fact, no positive ideology that binds these organisations. The "Freedom Charter" remained a document, unknown to the masses of the people. What held the masses of these organisations together was a common conviction to oppression, whether they saw that oppression as White supremacy or Apartheid or Capitalism.

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Feb. 1964

While the politician can have no doubt that Communism was at work, using the masses of the people for the achievement of its own ends, the student of politics cannot be so dogmatic. It is possible for a Fascist and a Communist both to want a Republic and shun a monarchy. Similarly, any one of the actions or even all of them, that we have been studying, could have been taken by Non-Communist organisations operating under the disadvantage under which Non-White organisations in this country function.

And, as has been pointed out time and again by various people, the South African Government's attitude of branding any opposition to injustice as Communist-inspired gives Communism a pre-eminence it does not merit. It amounts to saying that only Communists cannot tolerate injustice.

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