

The challenge of communism

Fifth McGill Conference On World Affairs

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Dalhousie Delegate to the Conference

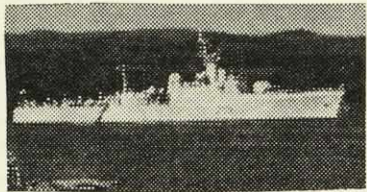
On the topic of the Conference, "Russia and the West: The Challenge and the Response", the 150 or so participants, mainly graduates and senior students from the U. S. and Canadian universities, heard addresses during their stay in Montreal, last November 20th and 22nd, from recognized authorities in their fields.

On this occasion I shall attempt only to give a few impressions and comments on our conclusions about the nature of the challenge and how we must respond. In a second article I will attempt an evaluation of the "peaceful" co-existence message extended to the delegates by His Excellency Amasasp A. Aroutunian, Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. to Canada, and by two Soviet student visitors.

Theory and Practise

Professor Alfred G. Mayer of Michigan State University, whose many publications on Marxist theory testify to his fitness to address the conference, spoke on "The Theory and Practise of Communism". The supposition here is that one had to know what the theory of Communism is and how it has been applied in practise before one could begin to consider the nature of the challenge. In a sound, rational and considered manner by which he impressed his listeners, he attempted to point out how Marxist theory — a theory which related to areas which had reached the stage of industrial maturity — necessarily had to be modified to fit the situation of a backward, agricultural area where the industrial proletariat, that army which was to precipitate the achievement of the millenium, was virtually nonexistent.

It was Lenin who modified this theory and took it to Russia. As a result of these modifications and of the rumination on them over the last 50 years, one can now conclude that while today's Soviets still believe implicitly in



the ineluctable advent of the universal communist society, they also feel, as inevitable as the occurrence might be, that this scientific evolution of predetermined laws of history must be speeded up so that any means (short of a major war) are now acceptable to achieve this utopia.

Marxist "Frame of Reference"
So Marxism as applied today is no longer a battle plan of strategic action, but more a tool of analysis. The ends have remained the same, but Marxism is not dogma; rather a "frame of reference". Perhaps Marxist theory can be compared to Christianity today in the West. Those of us who call ourselves Christians all go through the motions and believe in the Heavenly City of Eternity, but few accept the teachings of the Church in details. Yet, on the other hand, Communist

theory does have real meaning for the Soviet citizen (Christianity here largely falls down), for the accomplishments of the Soviet Union have vividly demonstrated the worth of the theory, and consequently he accepts categorically that capitalism is an evil to be destroyed in the world, just as it has been eliminated in the U.S.S.R.

However, they have now become a middle-class nation and wish to enjoy the fruits of their labour and of their stupendous sacrifices. Thus, the violent precipitation of the world revolution has been rejected, and "peaceful co-existence" is now vogue. Why should they jeopardise their position of wealth by believing that a war between capitalism and communism is inevitable as Lenin had said? This will be dealt with in the second article.

Marxism, as modified by Lenin, bears more relation to reality in the field of world affairs, for this is the only attempt yet made to give an overall analysis of the capitalist world: the reason for the continued survival of capitalism contrary to Marxist predictions and the reason for the backwardness of the under developed world, i.e., the exportation of surplus capital has enabled the capitalist world to survive by exploiting the rest of the world. This view has not been challenged and is being viewed as valid by more and more people everyday, even in the West.

The Marxist Analysis of Capitalism

Having a monopoly on such an analysis, it has great attraction for the leaders of the so-called "backward" world, who subsequently use the language of Marxism-Leninism to nationalize their own backwardness, because there is no other to use. This is perhaps the most serious challenge of communism, for in time one comes to believe the terminology one uses.

Professor William A. Elliott, of Harvard, gave a talk on the "Nat-



ure of the Challenge", but it was so incoherent that it is difficult safely to say what he thought the nature of the challenge to be.

This man surely could not have been a typical example of Harvard scholarship, yet he was a special advisor to the U. S. government on Soviet affairs. Despite this, we did come to some sound conclusions in our discussion groups.

Nature of the Challenge

The nature of the challenge is not primarily military and political, although it was recognized that these do exist, but rather ideological, from which the economic naturally follows, and moral. That it is ideological is self-evident, but this will be expounded upon. It is a moral challenge because the fact is that we do exist with the successful alternative type of civilization, while we in the West have always assumed that civilization has culminated in us. The successful survival of communism forces us to make the decision to either reject it and fight it, or come to terms with it, compromise our own ideals, and hope that this will be of benefit for the world.

The successful staying power of each system has surprised the other, and we have come to regard each other with a reciprocal paranoia for, neither being prepared to accept the validity of of or to live with the other, they because they have the one truth and this tells them they will succeed, and we because of our presumption of the inherent superiority of our own civilization, we have each built up gross delusions about the other. Normal forms of intercourse can overcome this, but the Russians refuse to concede this.

Returning to the ideological challenge, there is little likelihood that the West itself - Western Europe and America - will fall to communism because of the appeal of its ideology, but there is a great danger that the rest of the

world might. The rapid success of the communist alternative with its comprehensive ideology has made it most attractive to the "backward" world because it explains their 'backwardness'.

The Need for Revolutionary Change

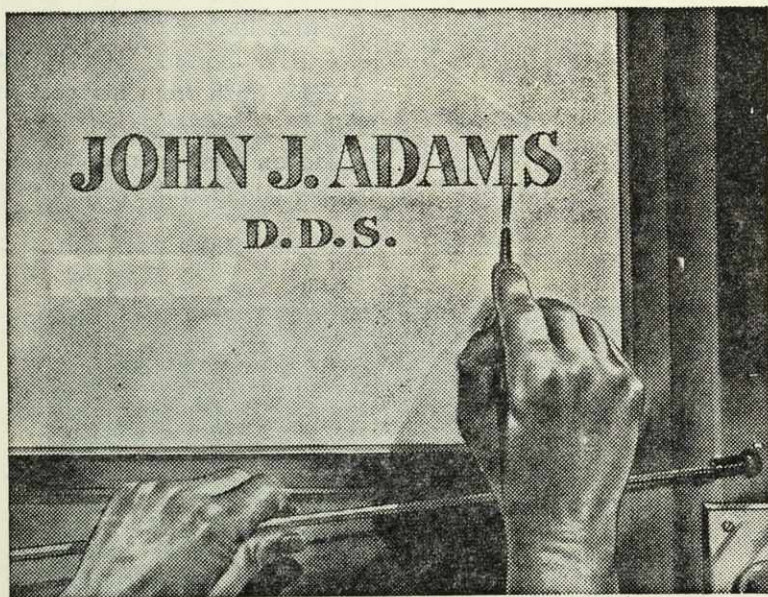
Why do they turn to this theory? The crux of the matter appears to be that there is a desperate need for revolutionary social change which no one but the communist seems prepared to foment, and what is worse, the West, America in particular, is completely unable to identify itself with this need, for in our position of extreme social contentment, rebellion against a particular social system is no longer ethical. We impute our concept of civil order, developed in an area with immense wealth where revolution has never been necessary, to a society where it is completely inapplicable because that society has so far been unable to develop the degree of social contentment we experience.

We live in revolutionary times and the test for the West will be its ability to adjust to this revolutionary situation and not to the cold war, which is really a fabrication to lead us astray. The less we can adjust ourselves the more the Communists can use their theory and their past success to their advantage. But the danger is that we have become so rigid as to be unable to change with them, and change we must if we want to identify ourselves with the revolutionary needs of the rest of the world. If, in their quest for a decent material life, they are not to turn completely to communism then we must present them with an acceptable alternative, and the image we present to them at present is not acceptable.

Reappraisal Of The West

This is where the challenge lies, and we have to be astute enough

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