

SUMMARY OF MR ISAIAH BERLIN'S SPEECH

MR BERLIN counselled that, if one desired to study Communism, the first thing was *not* to read Marx, but rather to interpret what he was thought to have said, as taught by the leaders of the Marxists. It was difficult even in the Soviet Union to obtain the works of Marx and Engels, although one could get a short history of the Communist Party, some 80–90 million copies having been printed in the Soviet Union in various languages. The final version was that of 1938, in which Stalin himself took part, but this version had been ‘watered down’.

Communism was a theory of history and of what people thought. The doctrine was that humans had been wrong in supposing that human history had evolved from a nation's prominent men. It was interesting to note that there was no single work of Marx which contained the doctrine – it had to be gleaned. As in natural science, one could not be satisfied with finding out ‘bits and pieces’, with isolated events, until a coherent pattern was obtained, so history, if it was to be scientific, must be subject to the application of laws – and by application of those laws to be able to predict the future. All Communism rested on the theory that history was a science.

Mr Berlin illustrated the Communist formula as ‘Who wins what? When? What machinery do they use? Who controls what?’ And it was held that from those answers could be deduced the relationships between human beings in a given society, and that you could deduce the next step. The foundation of society was seen as economic relationships, and the sub-structure was that of its people, actuated by economic conditions. Communism recognised five stages of society – without regard to anthropological knowledge – derived from 1860 theories.

Primitive Communism was of the ‘once upon a time’ variety. Men wanted things in common. The next stage was primitive accumulation of capital (the Asiatic stage), in which monopolies and classes developed, although no one appeared to be sure where this had happened. In the Antique stage the class managed to get

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hold of the means of production, the social ideas which followed being 'emanated effects' which were said to justify the status quo. When techniques developed, the intelligentsia of the Party were seen to become impatient, and literally to burst the bonds of the old order. The Revolution then occurred. Then followed the class State. The progress of the State thus occurred between the collision of classes, with the 'have-nots' accepting the conditions thrust upon them by the 'haves' until the imaginative 'have-nots' burst the bonds and a new society developed. Progress never happened in a smooth way, but by collision of forces. Thus nations, nationalism, ethics etc. were regarded as the outcome. ('Who wins what, who uses what for what?')

The socialist stage was regarded as intermediate, where people were rewarded according to their skill and not to their needs. The Communist viewed the rational organisation of production as from everyone according to his capacity and his skill. Class warfare would go on until all classes were driven away, thus attaining the Communist goal of a classless society – 'a state of emotional bliss'. It was regarded as inevitable that capitalists would have to go on organising labour, because of their monopolies etc. The Communist theory implied that from past events the line of action could be predicted. The liberal State was seen as a cross between a traffic policeman and a night-watchman. The Communist theory implied that you could tell who was going to win, and you could therefore align yourself to the winning side.

As for the question of what the contribution of Lenin and Stalin was to Communism, the answer so far as theory was concerned was 'Nothing.' Lenin, however, had possibly added that Colonial States would lead to wars on the theory that capitalism would be in inevitable competition for colonial markets and in an equal ratio.

Speaking of the Soviet Union today, Mr Berlin drew the analogy that it resembled a large school more than a prison. Stalin and his followers had led the Russians to believe in the heritage which, according to Communist theory, must belong to them.

'Britain is regarded as being on the wrong side, inevitably,' added Mr Berlin. Stalin, he said, held the flogging-master's position in the school. It was interesting to note that, according to Marx, all 'accidents' cancelled themselves out. Foreigners were not allowed on the same ground and strangers had no business to be in the

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grounds of a public school – they distracted the boys. In Russia everything was ‘out of bounds’. While Mr Berlin felt that the Russian people knew things were different outside the Soviet Union, their reaction was to take it for granted, as would boys in a strict religious school.

Liberty meant the capacity of doing what you wanted to do, but the Communist realised that, so long as there was class war, this could not be achieved; so their advice was to submit meanwhile to temporary discipline. ‘In order to adjust yourself to the movement of history you must carry out the tasks before you without flinching’ was the dictum. Once the Party Central Committee had voted, their decisions must be accepted. Life had to be regarded as a perpetual struggle. Censorship was viewed as the protection of citizens from foreign influence. In the Soviet Union there was not very much Communism, but the position of the individual was exactly like that of a soldier in the army. The danger of Communism was not so much from the Soviets themselves as from its adherents in Eastern European countries.

Answering questions, Mr Berlin commented that the Communist view of socialism was that under it you could not have all the goods you wanted, and so there must be differential payments.

He did not know of many reliable books by observers who had been to Russia, but he recommended *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1921* by W. H. Chamberlain, 2 vols (London, 1935: Macmillan), and *The Scared Men in the Kremlin* by John Fischer (London, 1947: Hamish Hamilton).

He commented that, while there was a good deal made of the welcome accorded the Russian repatriated prisoner of war, the fact remained that the POWs were not allowed to return to their own homes for fear of their disturbing influence, and they had in fact been ‘scattered over the country’.

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