

COMMENT

It is regrettably true that no one of even mildly progressive convictions would want anyone except Mr Mintoff to be governing Malta at the present time. It is true because there is no serious political alternative to the Labour Party: the Nationalists are a loose coalition of varying theorists and opportunists whose predominant tenet is simply that businessmen and 'professional' people should be left alone by the government; the left hardly exists politically. It is regrettable because Dom Mintoff seems to be moving steadily away from socialism as he exploits his undoubted personal appeal.

For example, not long ago there was arranged what is called the Marriage between the General Workers Union and Mr Mintoff's Labour Party; not a working alliance such as has often existed in Britain, but an actual merging of the union containing most of the trade unionists of Malta into the governing party. Does this mean that the workers are in charge? Not at all. Since the government is the largest employer in Malta it has simply resulted in a company union.

Consider what happened recently at Malta Spinning, a 'para-statal' industry (owned partly by the state and partly by private capital): the management announced that it was abolishing the ten minutes customarily allowed the workers for washing and changing at the end of a shift. A shop steward and three other workers organised a strike in protest; the strike was instantly condemned by the General Workers Union; the organisers were sacked; the ten minutes was then, in slightly modified form, restored. And all this is done in the name of socialism.

Even more depressingly indicative of Mr Mintoff's general trend has been his treatment of the University of Malta. No socialist would quarrel with the view that a tiny developing country cannot afford the luxury of a traditional-style university devoted to educating a privileged class. No socialist could object to reforms on the Cuban or Chinese lines which seek to integrate study and productive labour. Of course the Nationalist Party and the more reactionary of the University staff objected to any change in the position of privilege they enjoyed; that was to be expected; but what has brought the Maltese left almost into an alliance with them is the extraordinary character of the reforms that Mintoff has now enacted. Both the students and the staff of the university had proposed various ways in which a student/worker scheme might operate; their suggestions have been brushed aside in favour of a crude, universally applied, plan for alternating six months work with six months study. That is no doubt negotiable and in practice will have to be modified to meet the realities of both factory and university. What is really sinister is the method by which, in fut-

ure, students are to be selected.

A few days ago I was listening to Dom Mintoff telling a mass meeting that a man would be selected 'by his workmates' to go to university. In fact, it is perfectly clear that despite a token representation of the unions and others, the ultimate decision rests with the employer. This, of course, hands him an extremely effective weapon for ensuring a docile workforce. The university itself is left with the right to enforce minimum standards but apart from that, the choice of those to receive tertiary education will be in the hands of those unsympathetic to industrial militants and (perhaps) unsympathetic to political opponents of the regime. It may be argued that this is nonetheless an improvement on a system in which students are selected according to the wealth of their parents, but neither of these methods has anything to do with socialism.

Just to make sure that when he arrives at the University the student will not be subjected to dangerous influences, certain changes have also been made in the university itself. Under the guise of creating a new separate university it has been arranged that nearly all students will attend an institution purged of sociology, pure science, the humanities, philosophy and theology. Instead it will "provide courses to cater for the nation's requirements". Those faculties which largely produced the student unrest of the sixties have been isolated in the 'Old University'—with the exception of philosophy and theology, the teaching of which has simply been eliminated from the university and consigned to church seminaries. This, said Mintoff, "will ensure the absolute freedom of the Catholic Church in the teaching of Catholic philosophy (sic) and theology."

In an astonishing speech he said that:

"Theology is by definition, what the Church believes in. There is no room for opinion. This is a creed not a science. One either propounds it as the Church wants or one does not teach at all".

He also reminded us that "The Apostles never followed any courses in theology." As to philosophy, it was useful, he thought, only to those preparing for theology and thus should be entirely in the hands of the Church. Thus does a socialist leader dispose of the study of, for example, Karl Marx. (The Department of Philosophy is in fact extremely lively and intensively devoted to the study of, amongst others, Wittgenstein, Marx, Sartre, Austin and some fascinating Muslim philosophers.)

It is hard to say whether the saddest aspect of this whole business is the use of socialist rhetoric to cover the creation of a corporate state, or perhaps the even more disturbing fact that the Church authorities (unlike the local association of priests) seem by their silence to acquiesce in this absurd account of philosophy and

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of making a total mess of things as most of his fellow Germans had been doing in the Nazi years. When Bonhoeffer wrote his letters from prison in 1943 and 1944 he believed that one could only find genuine human maturity in a relationship with Christ at the centre of one's life.

If Barth and Bonhoeffer are correct in looking for the essence of Christian revelation outside human religion, it is certainly fatuous of so many clergymen to bemoan the fact that few people seem to be responding to religion and that the Church is failing to satisfy the religious needs of a minority who look to the Church. As Barth said, the crisis of religion is not that so few people respond to the Church as a religious institution; the crisis of religion comes when revelation in the form of Jesus Christ breaks in to challenge the assumptions of religion and to judge it as a form of unbelief and idolatry. Bonhoeffer in his rather different perspective considered that one could now be religious only if one was particularly shortsighted or culpably insincere. Either way there seems to be a straight theological choice between Barth and Bonhoeffer on the one hand and Troeltsch on the other.

In reality it is not as simple as that. Troeltsch had already criticised Ritschl for advocating a scientific study of religion while isolating Christianity from critical examination. It seems that an appeal to 'Christian revelation' can have two senses. It can either illegitimately isolate Christianity and refuse to submit its claim to truth to critical questioning, and Troeltsch rightly criticised Ritschl for this and anticipated the more problematical side of Barth. Or an appeal to revelation can emphasise the need to bring out the individuality and essence of Christianity. Bonhoeffer certainly aims at the latter as, I think, does Barth—though this point is arguable—and Bonhoeffer is particularly conscious of the *historical* development which has taken place in Christianity which a strictly phenomenological study of religion would ignore. The paradox is that the individuality of Christianity can only fully emerge and the plausibility of its claim to reveal God can only be upheld in the context of the 'objective' scientific study of religion which Troeltsch proposed and tried to establish.

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theology. There has been no protest from the hierarchy and none, so Mintoff assures us, from the Vatican. In the days when Mintoff was fighting for the rights of workers he was excommunicated and people were told that to vote for him was mortally sinful; now that he is casting aside his socialism his relations with the Church officials seem a lot easier. This has worrying implications far outside the tiny island of Malta.

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