

Editorial

Which are the “Communist Lands”, referred to in the title of this journal? The phrase is intended to denote those countries where a Communist Party is in power, such as China, Cuba, the USSR and other countries of Eastern Europe. These countries, however, would not yet claim to have achieved a communist society—namely one in which each is given what he needs, regardless of how much he himself can contribute to the community :

. . . in Utopia, where everything is under public ownership, no one has any fear of going short, as long as the public storehouses are full. Everyone gets a fair share, so there are never any poor men or beggars (More's *Utopia*, Book II).

The Soviet Union only claims (since 1959) to have completed the construction of “socialism” as a stage on the road to communism. The ideal society, delineated by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, in which all will participate in the administration of the country and observe the elementary rules required by communal life, is yet to be created. So, the state is still necessary with its coercive power of police, army, penal system and law courts. The Party Programme of 1961, drawn up when Khrushchev was in power, rather optimistically claimed that “a communist society will in the main be built in the USSR” by 1980 and “the construction of communist society will be fully completed in the subsequent period”. The state was to “wither away” and be replaced by “social organizations”, but significantly the Communist Party would continue to exist and fulfill its leading role. That was the theory, but in practice the promised land is hardly any nearer in 1973.

However, there are also many countries where non-ruling Communist Parties are an important political factor. Should this journal also study the religious situation in such countries? According to George Rice's interesting study of non-ruling Communist Parties in 69 countries (“Non-ruling Parties and the ‘Peaceful Path’”, *Problems of Communism*, July-August, 1973), countries containing “more influential” non-ruling Communist Parties amount to thirteen—Chile (before the coup), Cyprus, Finland, France, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Martinique, Réunion, Sri Lanka and Sweden. Except for the last two, the Communist Parties in these countries have gained fifteen per cent or more of the electoral vote in national elections and also have considerable

influence in labour movements. In five of these countries the Party's membership amounts to more than one per cent of the adult population, although its influence is out of all proportion to its numbers (on 1 January, 1973, Party membership consisted of 3.85 per cent in Italy, 3.74 per cent in Cyprus, 1.70 per cent in Chile, 1.56 per cent in Finland, 1.40 per cent in Iceland). In all thirteen countries the communist parties have considerable freedom, exist legally and can operate openly. But they cannot achieve power as yet on their own. Thus their relations with other left-wing parties are of crucial importance for increasing their influence, and in some places their ambitions include the wooing of the left-wing of Christian-Democratic or Christian-Socialist parties, as for instance in Chile before the coup and now in Italy. In Chile (before Allende's demise), Iceland and Sri Lanka, the Communist Party increased its influence through participating in a coalition government. The French Communist Party, through its electoral alliance in 1972 with the French Socialist Party, regained during the 1973 parliamentary elections some of the seats lost in 1968. In Luxembourg too, the Communist Party gained influence at a local level by collaborating with left-wing parties, and in Finland between 1966-1971 communists participated in a coalition government.

It is obvious that there is an important relation between such parties and the various religions of these countries. In principle *RCL* wants to publish material about this and about the relation between religion and communism in general. But it will only be possible on a very limited scale (two articles on the Christian-Marxist dialogue appear in this issue) until we have the resources to produce a larger magazine. The Centre's sphere of concern is vast indeed and at this stage we can only deal in depth with a limited area. As our resources grow we shall give our readers more varied fare.

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DAY OF PRAYER

- Friday 11 January is to be a special day of prayer for Christians in Eastern Europe. Various societies have decided to mark this day in response to a direct request from the reform Baptists of the Soviet Union. Sunday 13 January provides an opportunity for special prayers and preaching in church. The CSRC will provide literature and help upon request.