

COMMUNISTS, AND THEN COMMUNISTS

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We wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that two (or more) different Mormons in good standing have rather different attitudes and opinions. Aside from matters of Church doctrine, they may belong to opposing political parties. On social issues, they may differ enormously in their opinions on matters of race, poverty, crime, etc. Even on matters of doctrine, Church history, ecclesiastical practice, etc., they may differ significantly. One Mormon may believe that Mormonism endorses a negative view of man; that all scripture is literally true; that the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith virtually every move he was to make; and that every aspect of Church practice was instituted by revelation. The other Mormon may deny each and every one of these views and many more like them. We are not surprised to discover that there are such different sorts of Mormons, because most of us know Mormons personally who actually do differ that profoundly and still are in good standing (as measured, say, by the fact that they both hold temple recommends).

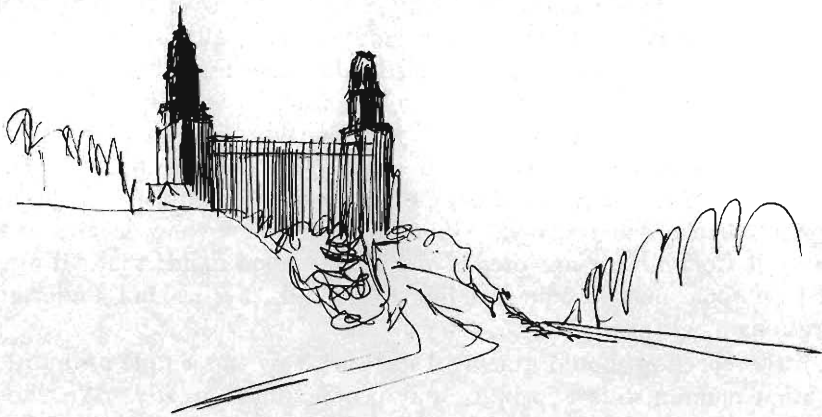
With Communists, however, it is quite a different story, unless I am mistaken. Most of us do not know any of them personally, with the consequence that there are no restraints on our imagination. We somehow believe that each and every Communist believes exactly the same things, holds identical principles, and believes in precisely identical means to unanimously accepted ends. Furthermore, communist nations are somehow taken to be all alike: equally brutal, equally repressive, and equally intransigent to any change. The slogan "You can trust the Communists to be Communists" is supposed to be more than an uninformative tautology. It is somehow meant to suggest that all Communists are pressed out of the same mold; that all are assembled on some mass production line to careful, precise, and undeviating specifications.

A little reflection should quickly dispel such easy and simple assumptions. After all, Communists are people, and people differ greatly. We should, therefore, not be surprised to realize, upon reflection, that there are Stalinist Communists, Titoist Communists, Maoist Communists, Dubcek Communists, Brezhnev Communists, and even Gomulka Communists. There are Communists who invaded Czechoslovakia and Communists who vociferously opposed that invasion (the French, Italian, and Chinese Communists, among others). There are Communists who have believed in human extermination as a legitimate political means, others who believe that political isolation is the ultimate weapon in eliminating dissident opinions, and others who renounce both the above means to given political ends as inhuman and even harmful to healthy communism.

Two years ago, in March of 1968, there were numerous student demonstrations in Poland. The proximate cause of these demonstrations seems to have been the cancellation of a play by the genial Polish dramatist and writer, Adam Mickiewicz, because the play contained some strongly anti-Russian lines. The deeper causes, however, are to be found in a deep disenchantment

with the government, and this disenchantment was used by certain political factions in Poland to embarrass the present government in a power struggle that was going on at the very highest levels of the Polish Communist Party.

My wife and I arrived in Poland at the end of July, 1968, and during the next year we were able to observe some repercussions of these demonstrations which were for us rather interesting and which disturbed the traditional view we had held, that all Communist governments are alike. There were the usual arrests of students, and during the course of the winter these students were tried in secret trials and given long sentences. This didn't surprise us at all, because we had been led to expect this sort of treatment. What did surprise us was the treatment accorded to some faculty members, who were publicly criticized for having implanted in the minds of the students certain anti-socialist ideas. These men were without any doubt in a serious situation, but I invite you to contrast what became of them, as nearly as we were able to tell, with what has become the usual scenario for treatment of such people in the Soviet Union. Such people in the Soviet Union seem usually to be



arrested, and then either banished to some far-off section of the Soviet Union where they are never heard of again, or they are committed to a mental institution. What happened in Poland was in sharp contrast to this sort of thing, however. Most of these people in Poland were informed that they could no longer teach students in their regular university positions. However, they were not stripped of their academic rank, and for the most part they were given jobs in the Polish Academy of Sciences to do research on a full time basis. Furthermore, it appears that their research will be published in regular books and scholarly journals by the usual Polish printing houses. What is, perhaps, even more startling is that some were given passports or exit permits to take positions in the West, where they could talk all they wanted — even to the detriment of the Polish government — if they so desired. I submit that this is in striking contrast to what appears to happen in some other communist states.

There are in Poland about two million members in the Communist Party—out of a total population of about thirty-two million people—but it was interesting to discover that only a small percentage of these Party members are ideologically motivated. A number of the members are opportunists, who have joined the Party to enjoy the benefits accruing to them from Party membership. What was even more interesting was to discover the motives students have for joining the Party. The Polish students are very well informed about the West, and have full access to all of the significant western periodicals and books in each of their academic disciplines. Up until about two years ago, city dwellers in Poland could even buy *Time* or *Newsweek* right from their newsstands under a cultural agreement with the United States. Unfortunately, under the pressure of reducing our foreign aid expenditures, especially to communist countries, this very valuable program was cancelled by the United States about two years ago, in spite of the fact that the expense involved was very minimal. There is also a surprising number of good books, of both a popular and academic nature, translated into Polish. The upshot of all of this is that students, as I have said, are well informed about the West. But, they have great difficulty in getting reliable political information about their own government or about political occurrences in the Soviet Union which might directly or indirectly affect them. They know that the newspapers and news magazines give a consistently slanted and unreliable view of political events. Therefore, a number of students join the Party in order to gain access to the only source of reliable political information available, namely the Party. There is another reason, or ulterior motive, that some of these students have in joining the Party. They hope eventually, by working through the Party, to be able to effect some changes in the policies and political structure of their government. Some of the very best "revisionists," in the best sense of that word, have been Poles.

There are other surprising aspects to life in Poland. An unexpectedly large number of Poles are given passports to travel out of Poland to the West and even to the United States. Often the biggest impediment to travel to the United States is thrown up by our own government through its refusal to grant prospective travelers the necessary visas. The reason for this is our government's suspicion that the travelers may be wishing to emigrate from Poland, and we have strict immigration quotas and restrictions.

Again, unlike the situation existing in the Soviet Union and in East Germany, there are no travel restrictions imposed on visitors to Poland. My wife and I could travel wherever we wanted within Poland, as often as we wanted, and with no prescribed routes.

With regard to religion, we were rather surprised to discover in Poland that Roman Catholic priests and nuns in quite large numbers can be seen on the streets of many towns and cities. There are even religious stores in the cities with the unlikely name of *Veritas* (Truth). (Of course, the State, not the Church, is supposed to have a corner on truth.) There is even a store in Warsaw where one can buy Bibles in all translations, including a very good and scholarly translation into Polish. Approximately 95% of all Poles