

# Editorial

Can Christians and Marxists work together? Dr. Bonino in his book *Christians and Marxists* (reviewed pp. 35-36) argues convincingly – from his Latin American experience – that there is a basis for cooperation between at least some Christians and some Marxists. But what if the Marxists are also Leninists? What of those Communist Parties which were formed or strongly influenced by Lenin? Can Christians cooperate with these?

Dr. Bonino does not know Eastern Europe. His brief references to the USSR are superficial and reveal an ignorance of Soviet reality. He seems surprised (p. 89) that Lenin's utopia described in *State and Revolution* did not materialize as predicted. He describes pre-revolutionary Russia as a "feudal, backward society" (p. 88) without further explanation. It is true that Russia was backward politically and economically in comparison with Western Europe in the nineteenth century. But Russia never developed a feudal system remotely comparable with that of Western Europe, where the term originated. And this was one of the reasons for Russia's peculiar historical path. Pushkin realized this fact at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A century later Lenin, for whom revolution was the prime goal, created an élite Party of professional revolutionaries, who, he claimed, understood the laws of social development and could therefore *lead* the proletariat to the desired goal – communism. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin outlined the kind of Party he considered necessary. It was to be a disciplined, centralized Party which was to bring "socialist consciousness" to the working class. There was no room for ideological disagreement in the Party which soon became supreme in the Soviet State. And, since the Party claimed special knowledge and was committed to imposing its ideological view on the rest of society, it could not tolerate any rival loyalty. Therefore a scientific atheist world view had to be instilled into the masses by the revolutionary élite.

In *Socialism and Religion* (1905) Lenin distinguishes between the State's and the Party's attitude towards religion. "We demand that religion be regarded as a private matter in relation to the State, but in no circum-

stances can we consider religion to be a private matter with regard to our own Party." This sounds good. On paper, it is true, Church and State were separated by the Decree of February 1918, but since, after the Revolution, the State was transformed into an instrument of Party dictatorship such separation was a fiction.

The Stalinist system grew out of the monopolistic Party created by Lenin. Although in order to preserve Leninism as an ideal many now dissociate the period of Lenin's leadership from the "distortions" of Stalinism, the one grew out of the other by a well-established historical process. By the end of the 1920s Stalin's position was secure and it is no accident that the attack on the Church then became even fiercer. With the decision to collectivize agriculture and with the centralization of power, control of the Churches was also increased by the adoption of the Law on Religious Associations in 1929 (for the recent revisions see "The New Soviet Law on Religion" in this issue). This Law was the legal basis – so far as there was one – for the persecution of the Churches by Stalin in the 1930s. By the beginning of the Second World War institutional religious life had been almost completely destroyed.

The appalling era of the Purges – the 1930s – was not unique to the Soviet Union, according to Dr. Bonino in *Christians and Marxists*: "... the West, and particularly Christians, should be careful before indulging in self-righteous denunciation of 'Stalinist terror' and 'communist oppression' without realizing that at least as much terror and oppression – often even without hope – is abroad in the Western world ...". Dr. Bonino suggests that Brazil, Uruguay and Chile have experienced horrors equal to those of the Soviet labour camps. Dr. Bonino surely knows his facts when dealing with South America. But does he know the following figures of the camp population in the USSR? 1928 – 30,000; 1930 – over 600,000; 1931-2 – nearly two million; 1933-35 – about five million; 1935-37 – six million.

Dr. Bonino has, indeed, established that there are circumstances in which Christians and Marxists can and no doubt should work together, but when the Marxists in question are also Leninists this is no longer possible without gross deception or self-deception.

X.H.-J.

June, 1976.