

DISTRUST OF SELF

— DICTATORSHIP AND GUIDANCE —

TWO ASPECTS OF THE SAME TENDENCY

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—May we not find a significant analogy between the quest for guidance in moral and spiritual affairs, now active in the Groups, and the demand for dictatorship in social and political affairs which characterizes the various Fascist movements of our time? Are not the people who look to supernatural agency for guidance in daily conduct psychologically in the same boat with those who call for "a great leader" and look to a Mussolini, a Hitler, or a Roosevelt to guide them in the paths of good government? Do not both movements reveal an equal distrust of *self* government, and an equal willingness to relinquish it, the one in the moral field and the other in the political? And is it not significant that both movements should be active at the same time?

I suggest that they are variant expressions of the same tendency. Both seem to confirm what Dr. Goebbels said at Geneva the other day (as Carlyle so often said before him), that what human beings really desire is not to govern themselves, but to be well governed. When Newman called upon the "Kindly Light" to "lead amid the encircling gloom," or when Wordsworth wrote "Me this unchartered freedom tires" and said to Duty "I myself commend Unto thy guidance from this hour," were they not alike turning their backs on *self* government and seeking *good* government as the better thing? What is Fascism, what is the demand for a dictator, but the same thing in a political dress?

Then, as to "sharing." This, on the face of it, is a communist principle—that of abolishing private property, here applied to our personal experiences, especially that part of them commonly known as "sins." These we are to "share" with our fellows by the process of openly confessing them. Whether in this way we get rid of responsibility for having committed our sins is not quite clear from the pronouncements I have seen on the subject. But at all events we get rid of them as our private property—returning (at this point) to the condition of those early Christians who "had all things in common." This might be defined as "moral communism," which all of us, indeed, practise to some extent in the ordinary process of communication, but with considerable reserves in the matter of personal experience, especially when it has taken a "sinful" form. In the Group Movement, if I understand it rightly, these reserves are abandoned. We are to complete our moral communism by sharing the knowledge of bad deeds and bad thoughts, as well as of our good ones, with our fellows. Whether in doing this we are acting quite fairly by our fellows, is a grave question. Personally I am not conscious of any desire to share the knowledge of my neighbour's sins, and have a feeling (perhaps a mistaken sense of decency) that I should be doing him a wrong were I to inflict upon him the knowledge of mine. Such knowledge, whether on his part or mine, I have hitherto regarded as inalienable private property, at least so far as one's fellows are concerned, so that, even if I were converted to communism in regard to all the other forms of property, I should make a reservation in regard to this. Apparently this reservation has to be abandoned by those who adopt the moral communism of the Groups.

The double tendency of the Movement towards spiritual dictatorship ("guidance") on the one hand, and towards spiritual communism ("sharing") on the other, synchronizing, as it does, with parallel movements in the political field, seems worthy of notice.

Yours faithfully,

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