

BRITAIN'S SHAME IN CYPRUS

R. PAGE ARNOT

WHEN Shakespeare in one of his most famous plays told how the Cyprus situation had become so urgent that it was necessary to replace the civilian governor by the great military chief, and to send troops there in great numbers, and even stressed 'the importancy of Cyprus to the Turk', no one could have imagined that this background would be repeated three-and-a-half centuries later, with Field Marshal Sir John Harding taking the place of the civilian governor and with the Turks brought in as a threat; but that instead of a domestic tragedy there would be the drama of a national struggle, with all the apparatus of repression enforced by a Tory government whose actions have brought the name of Britain into disrepute throughout the world.

Month after month of this year and last year this has been going on, and getting from bad to worse. All the repeated claims with each new act of repression that 'law and order' would soon be established have been disproved by events. They claimed that the deportation of Archbishop Makarios would put an end to 'terrorism'. It has not had this effect. All the howling of the millionaire-owned newspapers to drown the voices of protest within Britain cannot suppress the growing demand within Britain for the ending of this sorry business.

Think what is happening. In the second week of June under the significant headline 'Big Operation in Cyprus' a despatch from the island begins:

All traffic was banned today in the west Cyprus mountains, where 5,000 British troops are searching for the terrorist leader Dighenis and his subordinates.

(The Times, June 12, 1956.)

'5,000 British troops' in part of that small island, with the islanders numbering little over half a million, or one-hundredth part of the population of the United Kingdom. To grasp the scale of it, you must think of half-a-million troops engaged in a search operation in the Lake District or some other corner of Britain. Why, the search for 'Bonny Prince Charlie' two centuries ago, with a price on his head, was conducted by 'The Butcher', the Duke of Cumberland, with fewer troops in proportion. It was one of the charges against 'The Butcher' that a price was put on the head of the fugitive: for this used to be considered barbarous. It was the mark

of a semi-civilised government. The despatch from Cyprus goes on :

Dighenis—believed to be George Grivas, a former officer in the Greek Army—has a price of £10,000 on his head.

If every record of these days were wiped out leaving only this single column of *The Times* newspaper, what an atrocious age this would then appear to be: and how future historians would ponder over the similarity to earlier actions in the Empires of Assyria and Rome. One sentence more, from this same despatch, runs as follows:

A British service man was accidentally shot dead today when he walked into an ambush laid for terrorists in south-west Cyprus.

What sort of set-up is this? It is no use telling his next-of-kin that these things are all part of the day's work; or claiming, as they used to do in 'colonial wars', that such methods must be used against savages. For the people of Cyprus are far from being savages. Cyprus is one of the cradles of civilisation. They were speaking Greek in that island, aye, and writing Greek and reading Greek two thousand years before any but the merest handful of Englishmen could read or write their own language—as candidly stated by Alfred the Great about the barbarous people of whom he was king.

The Greeks of Cyprus, like so many others, have fallen often enough under alien governors: but while they have little reason to regret the Turks from whom Disraeli's Tory Government took over the island (together with a Turkish minority, the deposit of three centuries of Ottoman rule) as 'secret commission' for backing Abdul the Damned in a Concert of Europe conference ('Baksheesh!' it was called in the Levant, as is recorded by Scawen Blunt who felt keenly the shame of it), nevertheless they must now share the modern world outlook where one after another peoples previously subject to the Ottoman Empire have acquired and vindicated full rights of nationality, freed from both Turk and Western European.

These Cypriots have been oppressed beyond even their neighbours. British newspapers and politicians for this last quarter of a century have managed to keep an almost unbroken silence about the fact that ever since 1931 when the corrupt J. H. Thomas was Colonial Secretary, this crown colony, deprived of previously-existing small rights, has been governed despotically. Cypriots in Britain, like most other 'British subjects', have full rights as citizens. Back in their own island, even before this last fifteen months, they have been for the last 25 years under an irresponsible despotism, lorded over by officials, taxed without representation and able only in the case of the large towns to elect their mayors. And these

mayors, elected with the backing of AKEL and the trade unions, are now in prison, 'detained', not charged with any offence—except the offence of being almost the sole elected representatives of the townspeople. But now, after these many months—to quote the mild language of the Secretary of the Ethnarchy Council in Cyprus on his arrival in London on June 12—'collective punishments, deportations, detention camps, evictions of citizens from their shops and homes, imprisonments, executions and various other repressive measures complicate the problem instead of solving it'.

This is coming to be recognised in some of the more sober British newspapers, as witness the *Manchester Guardian's* dismay:

What will the Government do next to hurt Britain's reputation? Now it has deported a priest simply because he was chairman of a fund which, by its own account, was intended to help the families of people detained in Cyprus under the emergency regulations. . . .

The British authorities will appear—perhaps justly—as intent on suppressing a humanitarian measure. They will seem devoid of compassion and determined on vindictiveness. Is this really cause for proud cheering from the Conservative back benches? The display in the House yesterday, if reported widely abroad, will deepen the repugnance towards British conduct over Cyprus.

(June 14, 1956.)

It was the *Daily Worker*, however, which so far has been the only newspaper to draw the obvious conclusion with its call 'Stop this bloodshed in Cyprus' and its Peace Plan, published on June 2, which demanded: no more hanging of Cypriots, no more collective punishment, no more use of Turkish Cypriot police against Greek Cypriots, release of Makarios and all political detainees. These were immediate measures, to be followed by

Recognition of the unconditional right of self-determination.

End to the Emergency Regulations and an amnesty for all sentenced under them.

A round-table conference of all Cypriot parties to draw up a plan for self-determination and to form a coalition Government to which Britain can transfer power.

Recall of the troops. The Cypriot Government to hold a general election for an Assembly to decide the island's future.

This peace plan is bound to find a response in the Labour movement where there is already a strong feeling against the Tory repression in Cyprus, a feeling notably voiced by Mr. Aneurin Bevan at his Newcastle meeting when he said:

The Tories suddenly became bloody-minded. Because they have just evacuated the Canal Zone and were so angry and irritable at waking up

to the fact that they were in the twentieth century, they have decided to be tough in Cyprus and our boys are now paying the price for it.

(*Manchester Guardian*, May 28, 1956.)

This speech, when his leader Hugh Gaitskell followed him a few days later to a similar effect, means that the lead given by Mr. Kenneth Robinson in his speech in the Cyprus debate of March 14 has now been officially adopted by the Labour Party chiefs, and may now be expressed by official opposition in Parliament. But the Bevan speech, although emphatic enough in one respect (in its laying of blame upon the Tories) is still incomplete as a statement of policy so long as (in the same speech) he takes a stand for retaining British troops in Cyprus. This further stage, inevitable if the logic of opposition to Tory repression is to be followed through, has still to be reached by the official leadership of the Labour Party.

The temper of trade unionists has been rising as the millionaires through their press have been slandering trade unions both for their standpoint on Cyprus and for their resistance to the government's effort to force down the standard of living in Britain. A strong answer and a clear policy was given, ten days after Bevan's speech, by Abe Moffat at the Scottish Miners' Conference:

This union has gone on record for the withdrawal of British troops from Cyprus. . . .

We will continue to demand this in order to save the lives of British people and the lives of the people of the Colonial countries.

Between this complete policy and the as yet incomplete statements of the Labour front bench there is a clear difference. The difference can disappear if the feeling among trade unionists and the Labour movement generally is sufficiently strongly voiced. But if the difference remains, it plays into the hands of the Tories who will take full advantage of it. On the other hand, victory for a thorough-going Labour policy on Cyprus would be a serious set-back for the millionaires, for their newspapers and for their Tory government.

The Combination Acts of a century and a half ago not only outlawed trade unionism but made it a crime to gather money for the defence of those accused of being trade unionists. Baldwin thirty years ago showed himself the vilest creature that was ever Prime Minister when he called to the people of North America not to send help to the starving families of the British miners. The Beaverbrook press went one worse than these, lower than Baldwin, when the millionaire newspaper the *Daily Express* launched its attack against the Electrical Trades Union's Executive for having sent £20 to the Cyprus Emergency Fund (the fund for legal aid to men kept in

goals in Cyprus with no crimes laid to their charge) and tried for a ballot of their vast readership to back up their attack. It was a challenge not so much to the E.T.U. as to the whole trade union movement; for, as was rightly said in the *Daily Herald* of June 13:

Every trade union branch, every Labour Party should send a donation to the Cyprus Emergency Fund.

This loudly-trumpeted ballot brought in .05 per cent. of the *Daily Express* readers—a result which only the present Home Secretary could lap up, like a dog that eats dirty puddings.

What a government! What a press!

What shame they bring upon Britain.

CURIOUS BUT FAMILIAR

SANCHO PANZA

SOCIALISM AND SOCIALIST IDEALS

There is no argument nowadays about the Labour Party being socialist: on the contrary, some more or less friendly competition proceeds as to who are the best and most effective socialists.—*Herbert Morrison.*

TO be a socialist in the Labour Party does not necessarily mean approval of socialism, though it invariably means approval of socialist ideals. The socialists in the Labour Party can be therefore roughly divided into two categories—those who want to achieve socialist ideals through Socialism and those who want to achieve socialist ideals without socialism, in some other way. To the second category belong some of the older ‘realistic’ leaders and most of the younger, more modern, more ‘dynamic’, more ‘responsible’ and more ‘idealistic’ leaders like Mr. Gaitskell and those university dons and such like who have not yet arrived. This combination of old ‘realism’ and modern ‘idealism’ is very curious.

The first category want to abolish the causes of social inequality, unequal opportunities and other social abuses. They argue that it is necessary to get rid of capitalism, to deprive the private owners of big industries and enterprises of their power over the work and lives of other people and to establish common ownership. They argue that these measures are more urgent in the modern era because of the tremendous concentration of power in a few hands.