

Stevie and the 'Red Menace'

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IN 1970 the Mayor, Stevie Coughlan, alerted the city to the dangers of what he called "The Red Menace." He appealed to parents and to all people in authority to alert themselves to the terrible danger that is in our midst. "There are amongst us left-wing extreme agents of a foreign power who are distributing insidious propoganda and seek to tear down and destroy our Christian way of life."

"Unless we act now to wipe out once and for all this most undesirable element that is fighting for a foothold in our city, there is a real danger that our apathy will result in a take-over of all authority and the suppression of the freedom that we enjoy, and for which so many Irish people have given their lives."

Several sources weighed in behind the Mayor in his anti-Maoist campaign, not least the Leader in an editorial, which thundered: "This is the Maoist movement which may well be regarded as a threat to the peace of the nation - a fact which can be realised only too clearly if one is to read some of the publicity material distributed throughout this city. The people of Limerick must wake up to the threat that is facing them and they must unite to run all those connected with such a movement out of the area before serious damage is done to the community as a whole."

"The Irish Revolutionary Youth Movement must be crushed and run out of the city without delay. What the Maoist advocates is nothing more than the dream of fools. Have we forgotten the slaughter and the slave labour that is so much part of life in Red China?"

Regular contributors to the letters column like W. W. Gleeson and Daniel J. McCauley rushed into print. "Whack", as W.W. was known, was highly indignant that of all places, the Maoists had chosen St. Mary's Parish (Nicholas Street) to set up their propaganda book-stall. He said only two of the City Council ("the rest must be Cistercians") at their weekly meeting saw fit to speak on the setting up of a Maoist bookstall in his beloved parish.

'It saddens me to think that a group of fellow-citizens, once Catholic no doubt, but now Dermot McMurrroughs, Quislings, Fifth Columnists, anti- Christs, call them what you will, have set up in business calling themselves the Disciples of Mao Tse-Tung, whose avowed aim (in blood) is to make Limerick a second Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia (that's what they think)

"Already the facade of their premises, once white, has been painted red. See for yourself, dear reader, I do not exaggerate. What's next?" wrote W.W.

Daniel J. Macaulay, congratulated the Leader on its stand and said there as a time when the Irish Revolutionary Movement would not have stayed long in business here. "The Maoists must be crushed the same as the Communists crushed Christianity in China. They should be given the same reception here as Christians would get from Mao."

This was Stevie's "golden" era. He then turned his attention to what he described as the left-wingers within the Labour Party and attacked Barry Desmond. "Who does he think he is telling the people of Limerick what they should or should not do regarding the forthcoming visit of the South African team?" He also attacked Bernadette Devlin.

Moves were initiated to expel the Mayor from the Labour Party due to his outspoken comments, with the St. Mary's Branch making a statement "that steps have been taken to expel him." The Leader commented: "It is clear, however, that such a decision is most unlikely for Ald. Coughlan has been a constant poll-topper since he joined the party."

Shortly afterwards a sensation was caused when shots were fired through the window of the Maoist shop in Nicholas Street.

Just a month later, on April 17th, 1970, Stevie, when addressing the Conference of Credit Unions in the Parkway Motel, made references to the Jews in Limerick that revived a segment of the city's history buried in the mists of time, but which since then has been regularly referred to, especially in the national media.