

THE RECKONING IN ULSTER: RELIGIOUS HATRED INFLAMES THE PROVINCE

When an Ulster Unionist MP recently declared that the Home Secretary was moving in the right direction it was certain that Mr Maudling was moving in the Right direction. Shortly afterwards the policy of internment was put into effect and resulted in a further escalation in the war between Catholics and Protestants, servicemen and civilians. Many people in Britain are now asking if the British Government is justified in spending hundreds of millions of pounds every year and risking soldiers' lives in order to keep the Orange regime in Stormont. In a radio programme last week Paul Johnson, former editor of the *New Statesman*, argued forcefully that we should withdraw and leave the Irish to settle their own problems. He claimed once again that the annual cost of the Border to Britain is £500 million, and there are few who are willing to challenge this contention.

Religion and Ulster Politics

Avro Manhattan, author of *Religious Terror in Ireland* and a former columnist on the Rev Ian Paisley's *Protestant Telegraph*, now disagrees with Paisley's political attitudes. Mr Manhattan told the *Freethinker* that his sympathies are still with the Ulster Protestants, "but in view of changing circumstances they must face the realities of the new situation. A united Ireland is now on the cards—not as an immediate solution, but it is being seriously considered by the British Government which just cannot afford to subsidise Ulster".

Mr Manhattan went on to say that he had been in contact with several leading figures in the Republican movement. He added: "They were anxious for me to try to persuade some of the more vocal Protestants, beginning with Ian Paisley, to come to some form of political compromise. These people gave me the repeated assurance that they had nothing whatever against the Protestants as such, and if tomorrow Ireland should become united as a republic or as part of a federation, the religious and civil liberty of all Protestants would be guaranteed. One of the Republicans even admitted that he admired Ian Paisley because he is a typical Irishman".

It should be realised exactly what British money, lives and prestige are being sacrificed for. Since the Ulster State came into existence just over 50 years ago it has been ruled by a secret society of religious bigots. The Orange Order has kept a firm grip on the province. It could always rely on the support of its strong-arm section, the B Specials (now disbanded, at least officially), and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the most brutal and discredited police force in western Europe with the possible exception of the French.

Although prospective MPs faced the electors as Unionists their chances of being selected as candidates were almost non-existent if they did not have the backing of the Orange Order. Constituency associations are controlled by the Order and one of their leaders recently said that if Brian Faulkner, the Prime Minister, thought he could rule the province without Orange support he would soon realise

that he could not. Mr Faulkner did not need to be reminded by this fact of political life in Ulster. He is a dedicated member of the Orange Order and knows better than anyone that it can, and will, break any politician who refuses to toe the line. Faulkner is desperately trying to live up to his new respectable, liberal image, but in order to even keep his seat at Stormont he must speak the language of his Orange sponsors.

Ulster has produced many citizens who have distinguished themselves in the arts, literature, sport, and even in military spheres. But her politicians are an unimpressive collection, and most of them would be lucky to be elected to a parish council if they lived in England. The reason for this is that even before an Ulster politician faces the first hurdle of his career he must be *persona grata* with the clodhoppers who run the Orange lodges if he is a Protestant, or the blue-eyed boy of the Roman Catholic Church. As the large majority of members of both these institutions consist of intolerant and irrational fundamentalists, it is not surprising that the candidates they select are cast in the same mould.

Shutting the Stable Door

Ulster Protestants were jubilant when internment was announced. They believed, with justification, that it would largely involve IRA suspects and anyone who spoke out against the Stormont regime. It will now be easier for Orange mobs to attack their Catholic neighbours. But internment is bound to fail. It did not come as a surprise to anyone, least of all the IRA, and many of them had already withdrawn south of the Border when the British army made its dawn swoop. Indeed there are probably more members of the IRA in Kilburn and Camden Town than in Belfast and Londonderry. Many of those arrested were released within two days, but their treatment at the hands of the military and the police has won many new friends for the IRA. (A British army spokesman provided us with the sick joke of the month when he advised one of the detainees who had been beaten up to complain to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It was much the same as

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THE FALL OF ROME

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

Readers of Joseph Heller's anti-war novel *Catch 22* will remember the torrid brothel scene where Nately, the young American serviceman, is caught on the hop defending American civilisation against the cynical old man who points out that "Rome was destroyed, Greece was destroyed, Spain was destroyed . . . How much longer do you really think your own country will last? Forever? The frog is almost five hundred million years old. Can you really say that America, with all its strength and prosperity, with its fighting man that is second to none, and with its standard of living that is the highest in the world, will last as long as the frog?"

The rise and fall of civilisation is indeed a fascinating historical topic, and the fall of Rome perhaps the most searching problem of all. Since Oswald Spengler's great book *The Decline of the West*, many have wondered whether our own civilisation is also in decline, and in particular whether the fall of the Roman Empire is relevant to our own times. Moralists frequently assert that it is, as any readers of the Press will confirm. Our so-called 'permissive society' is equated indiscriminately with the moral enormities of Rome, which allegedly weakened the Roman fibre and made it increasingly vulnerable to the onslaught of the barbarians from the second century onwards. From the other side of the fence, many secularists (notably, of course, Gibbon himself) have seen in the rise of Christianity an insidious sapping of the Roman strength leading to decline and eventual dissolution. What truth is there in these conflicting theories?

A Major Success Story

The heyday of the Roman Empire was the period stretching from the accession of Vespasian to the throne in 69 AD to the death of Marcus Aurelius in the year 180. The Empire actually reached its greatest extent in the reign of the brilliant soldier, Trajan, from 98 to 117, when it was undoubtedly the greatest power yet seen in the ancient world. Yet only 70 years after Marcus Aurelius died of the plague in 180, the Empire was in a desperate condition. Racked by overwhelming financial problems, inflation, plague and interminable, senseless civil conflict, Rome was on the point of collapse. The Empire was saved by the vigorous reforms and strong government of Diocletian (284-305) and Constantine (324-337), under whom Christianity finally triumphed over paganism. Fourth-century Rome successfully held off repeated barbarian attack until the decisive military reversals suffered by the Empire at the turn of the century. Thence it was merely a question of time before the Western empire finally disintegrated. The last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed in 476, which marks the end of the "pax Romana" in the west. The eastern Empire, however, was a different proposition, and indeed much of the west was reconquered by Justinian in the sixth century. The Byzantine empire, which can claim to have a distinct historical continuity with the old Roman empire, held out until 1453, when the sacking of Constantinople put an end to nearly 2,000 years of Roman civilisation—although Greco-Roman culture was destined to flourish once more in the renaissance.

The Roman empire was, then, a major success story in the history of world imperialism, and there has, accordingly, been a great deal of speculation about the reasons for its decline. It is tempting to ascribe the fall of Rome to one single cause, or perhaps a group of related causes,

determined by one's political or moral bias. Historians such as Toynbee have looked for a kind of organic weakness in civilisations which leads to their rapid decay once external conditions are right—a species of sub-Marxist explanation which seems inappropriate in the case of Rome. Other approaches to this problem, often those of modern historians, have emphasised the apparently fortuitous aspects of Rome's fall, notably the sheer bad luck of the Romans that the barbarians were driven westwards and southwards by central Asian pressures, from the second century onwards.

Revolt of the Slaves

To dispose of one or two more simple-minded theories. It is true, of course, that ancient Rome was, in many ways, a grossly cruel and immoral society, and this must be set firmly against the outstanding achievements of the empire. Yet it is far from clear that immorality and corruption in Roman society can neatly be correlated with its decline. The zenith of cruelty and barbarism seems to have been reached at a time when the political foundations of the empire were being laid and Rome was vigorously expanding its territory and influence. For example, the Roman variety of slavery was particularly oppressive, and repeated excesses of cruelty brought about the famous Slaves' Revolt under Spartacus in 74-71 BC. Spartacus, who was a Thracian gladiator, assembled a vast slave army of a hundred thousand men that vanquished legion upon legion of the Romans. The revolt was finally put down by Crassus after unbelievable bloodshed culminating in the mass crucifixion of slaves along the Appian Way into Rome. This fierce civil war, which represented the gravest threat to Rome since Hannibal, took place at a time when Roman imperialism was spreading all over the Mediterranean, and major political changes were paving the way for the foundation of the empire. Rarely can graft and corruption in Roman society have been greater than at this time; but whilst they put an end to the Republic, the empire that was to emerge went from strength to strength for the next 200 years.

Both Augustus (31 BC-14 AD) and Vespasian (69-79) founded dynasties which gave Rome strong government and prosperity. This period, incidentally, is disfigured both by the savage persecutions of the emergent Christian church under Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96), and by the appalling carnage of the Jewish revolts (66-70 and 132-135). The accession of the "philosopher emperors", Antoninus Pius (138-161) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180) launched a new period in the history of Rome. Marcus ordered the gladiators to fight with blunted swords, and later emperors were to follow him in deprecating the Roman will to cruelty. Constantine abolished crucifixion on attaining the throne, and gladiatorial combat was gradually phased out during the fourth century. Persecution of the Christians was spasmodic, although violent. More important, slavery was progressively modified as the Roman ideal of the "commonwealth" was put into practice in the later empire. Under the commonwealth, Roman citizenship was gradually extended to provincial subjects under the benevolent aegis of the pax Romana, with the consequent extension of rights and privileges. The official conversion of the empire to Christianity in the reign of Constantine hastened this process: Christian emperors symbolised the unity of the empire as the faith spread throughout Rome's dominions.

But the alleviation of the worst horrors of slavery began

well before the triumph of Christianity. Hadrian (117-138), who was one of the most humane emperors, and Antoninus Pius legislated against cruelty to slaves—admittedly, partly because they well understood that a slave economy required a humanitarian basis. As, however, slavery was endemic in the ancient world, there were no countervailing standards to set against the Roman system; and so the Roman achievement, inadequate by our modern standards, ought not to be under-estimated. Roman jurisprudence of the late second century was indeed to echo the earlier Stoic view that slavery was contrary to natural law. It is also worth noting that the early Christian fathers did not unequivocally condemn slavery, though probably their reason for not doing so stems from the general caution of the early Church in its dealings with Rome.

The Rise of Christianity

Was the rise of Christianity itself a symptom of a weakening of the Roman spirit, a drift to other-worldly concerns and a general softening of the Roman will to resist external attack? Unless one believes that humanitarian societies tend to be the most corrupt, a view to which history does not lend support, it is clear that acceptance of this "eneration" thesis is incompatible with ascribing the fall of Rome to immorality and corruption. There is, however, as little evidence for the one view as for the other. It is true that, starting in the mid-second century, there seems to have occurred a secular decline in the intellectual energy of Rome; and by the third century, the most lively intellects belonged to the Christians. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, for instance, betray a deep pessimism and hostility to the flamboyant values of Rome. Roman literary efforts gradually dried up after his reign, and architectural standards declined. By the end of Marcus' reign, moreover, the empire was on the defensive. Marcus reluctantly spent much of his time in fighting long and difficult wars to safeguard the German frontier, and he was the first emperor to permit barbarian settlements within the borders of the empire. One of the great weaknesses of later Roman society was, indeed, its failure to "Romanise" the many barbarian peoples who were to devastate the western empire in the fifth century. The Republic and early empire had flourished by the policy of setting up client-states on the borders to act as a buffer between Rome and the outside world, but such a policy could work only so long as the buffer states were to remain under the influence of Rome. Yet this failure in Roman foreign policy is attributable more to stupidity and greed—universal human failings—than to a vague "loss of drive" of the kind that certainly infuses the writings of Marcus Aurelius. A typical example of Roman folly in the critical period around the late fourth century was their cynical exploitation of the Visigoths when large-scale encampment of this German people began under the emperor Valens (364-378). The settlement of the Visigoths was initially welcomed by Valens, since they offered to fight for the empire. But the rapacious treatment of the Visigoths by Roman officials who saw in the whole manoeuvre a fine opportunity for graft led to the decisive battle of Adrianople, in the year 378, in which Valens himself was killed and the imperial armies slaughtered. An incursion of the barbarians into Gaul (France) in 406 was never rolled back by the Romans, and the western empire broke up. It was not so much that the Romans lost their will to resist; the legions of the fourth century could fight, and scored many a triumph over their barbarian enemies. What was lacking was integrity in the bureaucracy, a sensible method of supporting the economic burden of the Roman army, which was possibly the greatest the world has ever known, and above all a sane political

system. The conversion of the empire to Christianity did nothing to improve the central weaknesses of the Roman system of government, and whilst the interminable struggle for power proved merely embarrassing in the Republic it was to prove fatal in the later empire.

A New Tradition

The rise to power of Julius Caesar was the death-knell of the Republic. Government of the Republic by the senatorial aristocracy had worked well for the first few hundred years of Rome's existence, but by the first century BC the system was in anarchy. The growth of personal armies commanded by aristocrats such as the infamous Sulla led to a style of politics that was corrupt, chaotic and above all violent. Members of the Senate scrambled for high office in Rome itself or the provinces by every trick of political intrigue or, when that failed, by civil war. Caesar cleaned up the system, and for his pains was assassinated by a group of senators, including Brutus and Cassius, in the name of the Republic. His successor, Augustus, confirmed Caesar's constitutional innovations, and used the extensive powers granted to him by the Senate to launch the "pax Romana" that formed the heart of the Roman commonwealth. But despite his attempt to found a dynasty that would continue to give Rome strong government, Augustus failed to deprive the Senate of all its power, with the result that after the death of Nero in 68 the empire was once more convulsed by civil war. Rival senators used their power as military commanders and provincial governors to claim the imperial throne. Peace was eventually restored by the victory of Vespasian in 69, and for the next hundred years or so the authority of the central government was more or less unchallenged. A new tradition, however, had been born with the declaration of Vespasian as emperor in Palestine in 69: the legions were now able to make, and unmake, emperors. The main problem that the regulation of the succession to the throne was not separate from the control of the army was to lead to incessant civil war in the third century. Repeatedly the armies of the Danube, the Rhine and the East were to do battle with each other over their rival candidates for the throne, precisely at a time when Rome faced grave danger from barbarian attack. Even the progress of the empire towards a commonwealth led to bloodshed. The soldier-emperors of the third century were opposed to the privilege claimed by the old senatorial aristocracy, and took steps to curtail senatorial rights—a move, naturally, that was opposed by the Senate, and was the cause of much loss of life at a time when the empire was gravely weakened by the extravagant taxation required to finance the civil wars and to defend the frontier.

The history of Rome is characterised, then, by all the mistakes and blunders that we have learned to associate with large, unwieldy regimes—compounded, in the Roman case, by an absurd political system which over-indulged the Roman taste for internecine warfare. Yet almost alone in the history of imperialism, ancient Rome attempted to move away from the cruelty and exploitation on which she was founded. And the fall of Rome was followed by a general deterioration in the conditions of life for the mass of the peoples of western Europe, and by a decline in culture in the now barbarian (though still Christian) west. What was best in classical Greek culture was effectively transmitted and preserved by Rome, and subsequently by the Byzantines, and forms the basis of our intellectual heritage. But, overall, it is doubtful whether much insight into the rise and fall of civilisations can be gained by a study of the Roman empire, nor whether the Roman experience is relevant for ourselves.

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Minority Rights Group's latest report—on the Southern Sudan and Eritrea—just out, price 30p from MRG, 36 Craven Street, London, WC2.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, Telephone: 642 8796.

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NEWS

LONDON MEETING CONDEMNS OZ VERDICTS

The British Humanist Association organised a highly successful meeting in London last week in protest against the sentences imposed on the editors of *OZ*. The large audience cheered the speakers who condemned police harassment of the underground Press and publications like *The Little Red Schoolbook*. Perhaps support for the platform was not quite unanimous; in the gloom of Conway Hall gallery sat the lone figure of Lady Birdwood peering down with frosty disapproval, at the assembly of middle-aged liberals and randy young hippies.

Despite legal restrictions Richard Neville made an exuberant and witty speech in which he told of some of his experiences during the long trial and in Wandsworth Prison. He illustrated how the prosecutions, police, crime reporters and even court attendants collaborated in order to make things more difficult for the defendants. The medical and psychiatric examination was a perfunctory affair of a few minutes, justifying the suspicions of those who claimed that the remand in custody was a vindictive and vengeful act.

Dr James Hemming, psychologist and chairman of the BHA, said the outcome of the *OZ* trial was less a verdict and more a declaration of war. It was a war on the young, on those who regard censorship as an impertinent attack on freedom of expression. It was war by those who cringe at dissent and want to suppress it, and by those whose sexual inhibitions make them so terrified of porn that they do not see it will blow itself out—as it is doing in Denmark—once the lure of illegality is removed. It has been said that, behind the verdicts, political attitudes stick out a mile. Those good ratepayers on the jury saw their whole world under threat and rushed to its defence. It was not the defendants, but the Establishment, that was in the dock at the Old Bailey. "And it was the Establishment that lost the case by the violence of its reactions. The happy smirk is beginning to fade from the faces of the prudes as they begin to realise that they have discredited themselves."

Dr Hemming continued: "Let me make my position clear. I don't want human sexuality to be corrupted and depraved. But the most corrupting influences on decent sexuality are bad housing and inadequate education. These are ten thousand times more eroding of human values than whole libraries full of lowest pictures imaginable. Overcrowding is particularly depraving and corrupting. What do the prim, prissy advocates of public morality suppose happens to sex if you are living in squalor, with whole families in single rooms, and one shared loo overflowing on the floor below? It is not sex interest and sex excitement that are depraving, but social depression and sexual despair.

"Why is it that the self-appointed guardians of our morals—and what arrogant check that is—get so worked up about sexy pictures but fail to notice conditions of life that make happy, fulfilling sex impossible? Being a psychologist, I do not have to look far to discover answers to why these Saint Georges find their chief dragon in sex, but I am not going to be so unkind as to enlist them here.

AND NOTES

THE RECKONING IN ULSTER

(Continued from front page)

advising a Jew in Hitler's Germany to complain to the Gestapo.)

One of the basic facts of the Ulster situation which the British media and public are beginning to grasp is that Ian Paisley is supported by the majority of Ulster Protestants. His tirades may nauseate television viewers in this country but they are cheered in Ulster simply because he is defending policies which official Unionist MPs and candidates have advocated for generations. All of them have done so in order to achieve political success; nearly all of them have done so because they genuinely believed such ultra Protestant nonsense. And they still do. The British Government and Opposition must be well aware of this just as they must have known of the discrimination against Catholics long before the civil rights campaign began.

Premier, by the Grace of Paisley

Terence O'Neill was the only Ulster Unionist politician who made the slightest effort to come to terms with the twentieth century. He was toppled. His successor, Major James Chichester-Clark, was compelled by Whitehall to face some political facts of life, and decided it was better to be ankle-deep in manure on his Londonderry farm than to be up to his neck in it at Stormont. Then came Brian Faulkner, described as "Ulster's last chance". For many years he was the hero of the Orange lodges, B Special companies and constituency associations. But his past record will not save him if Paisley decides he must go the way of O'Neill and Chichester-Clark. And, even if his conversion to liberalism is genuine, Whitehall will not be able to save Faulkner from his Protestant friends.

These, then, are the people on whom British money is being squandered and for whom British lives are being lost. They clamour for union with Britain, but the Britain with which they desire union died with Queen Victoria.

The general attitude of these sex-phobic pseudo-moralists can be summed up in one word—hypocrisy. To give them the benefit of the doubt, perhaps they just lack the imagination to understand the needs of others. But I would ask them to examine their own motives. Are they really the lily-white humanitarians they suppose themselves to be?"

Referring to what he described as "the outrageous sentences", Dr Hemming drew attention to report published in *The Listener* which finds that the average sentence for all those found guilty of malicious wounding works out at about 19 days, while that for people found guilty of causing death by dangerous driving works out at just over a month. So Richard Neville's "obscenity" can be rated as the equivalent of 22 malicious wounding or 14 deaths by dangerous driving. The defendants are facing their first conviction; they are first offenders and the traditions of British law are to be lenient to first offenders and to avoid sending them to prison if it is at all possible to do so.

"And this for a very good reason. Whatever may or may not deprave and corrupt, prison certainly does. The best predictor of future criminal behaviour is to have been an inmate of a penal institution. The law is at its wits' end to know what to do because the very method which is supposed to help cure crime in fact produces more crime. Incarceration is known to be a demoralising influence. All the evidence points this way, and yet Judge Argyle, who presumably knows all about this, sentences three young men, who have been found *not guilty* on the major charge of conspiracy, and who are known to be intelligent, courageous, hard-working and creative, to terms of imprisonment varying from nine months to a year and a quarter. In whose name does he perpetrate this enormity?"

Dr Hemming concluded by saying that the obscenity laws went the same way as the laws against homosexuality and abortion. "Such laws manufacture crime. We have enough real crime on our hands without wasting our time on the legal residues of past prudery".

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BOOK

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT 1964-1970: A PERSONAL RECORD by Harold Wilson.
Weidenfeld and Michael Joseph, £4.80.

Harold Wilson is a curious man—infinately hard-working, shrewd, wily, the possessor of a considerable memory and of great dedication to his party. These are the attributes of a successful Prime Minister. But he is also the possessor of certain defects, and those who knew him during this period realised that these defects inhibited him and probably contributed in no small measure to his defeat and ultimate failure. Those defects are a lack of humour and of personal warmth—at any rate to colleagues, a chronic inability to resist the temptation to surround himself in the lower échelons of government—and sometimes at the top—with mediocrities, often for no better reason than that they had openly campaigned against him. He also has a corresponding lack of purpose in getting rid of those same mediocrities even when they had clearly been exposed as either incompetent or dreary. Finally, always and at all times, he displays an inbred inability to use words sparingly. He is often just a bore.

To those of us who worked with him during the period of his Government, this lack of personal warmth to colleagues was frequently painful. Not for Harold, as Prime Minister or as Leader of the Opposition, the warm, friendly remark as he passes by in the corridor. He ambles by, pipe in mouth, pale eyes fixed in front as though he'd never before cast eyes on the back-bencher approaching him. There are colleagues who came in to the House in 1964 who have never received a word from him. Not for Harold—nor for Ted Heath either, to be fair—the casual half-hour spent in the tea room when Members could just sit down and chat informally with him. It is usually only at times of crisis in the Parliamentary Labour Party that he moves through the tea room, accompanied by one or two cronies, and stopping for a brief word with certain selected Members—a very different exercise from sitting down and taking on all comers!

Yet, as Prime Minister, when he was on form, he could be superb. At question time, for example, he made mincemeat of Ted Heath over and over again and we sat and marvelled at his nimble footwork. Ted never got the better of him, except at the polls.

Those of us who know him always know when he is on a sticky wicket. There are certain key phrases and verbal tricks that give the game away. It is the same on television. One of the giveaways is that he talks too much. Sometimes his verbosity stunned one as he rambled on and on, and he does it much more now in opposition. The Tories have cottoned on to this too, and they take the micky pretty cruelly at times. But he is game; he sticks it to the long and bitter end, undaunted.

All this comes through in his book. It is too long, too wordy, too complacent by half, yet for one who has lived through it all, it proved compulsive reading. What would he reveal next? How did this or that crisis look from the viewpoint of the leading actor? What would he reveal about this or that difficult colleague and what would he say about the rebels who revolted at last because of the sheer treachery of it all? Onlookers may well find the book a bore; on the other hand they, too, may succumb to the fascination of being allowed to peep behind the

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scenes for a brief glance into the Cabinet room at Number Ten or to overhear a vital and private conversation with Mr Kosygin at Chequers.

Mr Kosygin came to London on a highly successful visit in early 1967 (he went down even better in Scotland where he went with Willie Ross), but for Harold Wilson it must have been bitterly disappointing. Under great pressure in Parliament to disassociate the Labour Government from the obscenity of the Vietnam war which was dragging on and on, he made a prodigious effort to get the American Government to produce a reasonable formula for the cessation of the bombing, as a preliminary to a peace conference, which could be put to Mr Kosygin for onward transmission to the North Vietnamese Government. All the details of the fateful dinner party at Chequers are there; there too, was Averill Harriman's mouthpiece, Chet Cooper, sent over from Washington by President Johnson, dramatically incarcerated in the "prison room" at Chequers with a bottle of Scotch, Harold's transistor and a hot line to Washington. As the evening advanced, messages were flashed up to the "prisoner" and exchanged with Washington. "Hold Mr Kosygin at all costs until we are ready", came the order from the President. And so Harold nobly engaged his Russian guest in a discussion on a multinational complex to produce chemicals, fertilisers and plastics—a filibuster in which he says: "Mr Kosygin was genuinely interested". I wonder! However, all good parties have to end and even though Chet Cooper held the telephone receiver through the open window so that Washington could hear the Soviet cars starting up, no message came to ease Mr Wilson's anguish. He must have been on early next morning to Claridges to read it to Mr Kosygin. But it really amounted to an ultimatum, with too little time before the deadline to negotiate anything with the North Vietnamese Government. Leaving Claridges at 2 am after this conversation he was off to Gatwick a few hours later to see Mr Kosygin off. Meanwhile he had wrung another six hours out of President Johnson but all to no avail. The President did not want an agreement at that time, and Mr Wilson was really taken for a ride. He must have hated the White House and all its works then. No wonder he thought of Rasputin!

There is plenty of information about other crises that rocked the Government. The entire Rhodesian confrontation is described in minute detail. The Prices and Incomes catastrophe is gone over in several chapters. Crowded, grave weeks, with extra Cabinet meetings, dramatic dashes to Downing Street to cope with rail strikes, seamen's strikes, and real or imaginary threats of resignation from George Brown, are all there. We get the impression of a man of extraordinary energy directing affairs single-handed; a man with his finger on the pulse of government, a man who knew exactly what was going on in every Ministry as well as, if not better than, the Minister himself. Energy, drive, push and pressure—and no time to think, no time to plan ahead, and no time to wonder what it was this Labour Government with its huge majority was trying to achieve.

Students of the burning issue of today, entry into the Common Market, will find plenty of material, and those who constantly chide Harold Wilson for changing his mind

REVIEWS

because of party unity and political expediency can be shot down with his own words. During the election campaign in 1966 he made it absolutely clear what the Labour Government's stance was: "We shall go in if the conditions are right. Negotiations, yes. Unconditional acceptance of whatever terms we are offered? No." He went on to reject any idea of a supranational body controlling foreign affairs and defence, and still more vehemently he rejected any idea of a European nuclear deterrent as part of the price of entry (an idea floated and supported by Tories and Right-wing Labour Members alike).

It clearly emerges that in his discussions with heads of Common Market countries, Harold Wilson emphasised repeatedly the major problems that would face Britain if she entered. It is also clear that while listing these, he also made it known that there would be other equally important problems. George Brown, who accompanied him on these visits, also underlined Britain's problems and made clear his reservations, notably on the CAP, the Commonwealth and the cost to our balance of payments. He discloses that George Brown took issue with Signor Fanfani, especially on the latter's estimate of the cost to our balance of payments of the CAP £200 millions was "totally unrealistic", and "unless changes were made, the burden imposed upon Britain as a new member would be so unfair as to be politically unacceptable". Reading this, it seems unbelievable that Brown should now be saying that he would have recommended acceptance of these terms. It seems equally clear that a large proportion of the Cabinet would not have accepted them if he had, and that a good proportion of the Parliamentary Labour Party would not have accepted them and that neither would the Trade Union movement.

His trials and tribulations with the Parliamentary Labour Party over Vietnam, prices and income policy, the defence estimates and cuts in government spending at the insistence of Roy Jenkins come through, if somewhat obliquely. He was surprised with the result of the Defence White Paper debate in 1967 when the Government's large majority was cut to 32, with 62 abstentions. This led to a bitter party meeting when he made his speech about the renewal of dog licences that caused so much offence. It was at this time that we were losing by-elections and seeing a swing to nationalist candidates in Wales and Scotland. Nowhere does Mr Wilson consider a change of direction. And so it went on until devaluation and those detested cuts in 1968 when the raising of the school leaving age was postponed, the elimination of free milk in secondary schools, the raising of prescription charges to half-a-crown each item, the increase in dental charges, cuts in local authority housing, passenger transport and other savings, proved to be hostages to fortune with a vengeance for all have been repeated by this Tory Government who pray in aid the example set by the Wilson Government! And Labour "shadows" perform feats of considerable agility in attacking what they once defended and recommended, thus adding to the cynicism and despair of the Socialists on the back benches who realised long ago that new ideas are desperately needed if anything worthwhile is to be achieved by a Labour Government in the future.

With deepening misgivings, the Government staggered on until Harold Wilson, against the advice of many of his

Parliamentary colleagues, decided to go to the country. Of course the Whips did a bit of sounding among back-benchers, but it was often highly selective sounding. The result proved what many of us feared, the swing back was not yet far enough advanced, the constituency parties were in no shape to fight a general election, and the chasm that had appeared between unions and party was as wide as ever. We could not win and we did not. Harold's next book will tell us what he himself felt about all that and how he took his defeat.

The future? Who knows? Harold certainly does not. It is not true, as some reviewers of this book have said, that he never acknowledges that he was wrong. He does, on several occasions. He admits he was wrong to allow the civil servants in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to get away with their sabotage of the Ministry of Land and Planning; he admits he had underestimated the power of speculators to undermine a Labour Government, that he hung on to the east of Suez role too long, that he toned down the effect of devaluation and in describing one of the rumours of a plot against him after devaluation. He admits that he had imposed heavy strains on the loyalty of the Left! We never knew he cared but apparently he did! What would he do if he became Prime Minister again? Has he learned his lesson as the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party seem to have learned their's? Is he now prepared to align himself with the Socialists instead of the revisionists in the party and so rally trade union support once more? If the bonds between the unions, the party and the people can be strengthened, if Socialist solutions can be adopted and above all, explained carefully and rationally to our people then there is still hope for Socialism in Britain. If not, and if the next Labour Government intends to take up more or less where the last one left off, with a bit more welfare here and better family allowances and pensions when we can afford it, and the usual cuts when we get into the same kind of mess the Tories have been in since the last election, then there is no hope.

A LABOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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LETTERS

Obscenity Proceedings: A Point of Law

The procedure adopted for the OZ trial again confirms my contention that proceedings brought under the 1959 and 1964 Obscene Publications Acts are not being carried out in accordance with the Statutory provisions of those Acts. Section 4 of the 1959 Act says that the opinions of experts may be admitted to establish a defence that an article "even if found obscene" shall not be forfeited and the publisher shall not be convicted if it is proved that the publication of that article has some special justification as being for the public good.

The important words to note are "even if found obscene". Yet orders, convictions and sentences are passed upon the findings of magistrates and juries with regard to the fact of obscenity.

In all the cases of which I have personal knowledge—and have read about—the opinions of the experts have been heard *before* the finding of obscenity, the judge usually directing the jury to ignore those expert opinions and to form their own opinions. If this procedure is correct for a finding of legal (or factual) obscenity, it is quite clear that it is not in accordance with a correct interpretation of section 4 to disregard the opinions of the experts *after* obscenity has been found. The opinions are not expected to negate the obscenity: they are intended to justify and permit it.

This is the wording of the Act:

4(1) A person shall not be convicted of an offence against section 2 of this Act, and an order for forfeiture shall not be made under the foregoing section, if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern.

(2) It is hereby declared that the opinion of experts as to the literary, artistic, scientific or other merit of an article may be admitted in any proceedings under the Act either to establish or to negate the said ground.

It is clear from these provisions that the opinions of experts are to be used to stop forfeiture or conviction *after* and *only after*, the court has found that an offence has been committed. In practice it is always taken that the finding of a verdict of "guilty" means that a forfeiture order or a conviction shall follow. This is how the courts are eviscerating the defence provisions of the 1959 Act. The existing procedure implies a conspiracy to perpetuate the pre-1959 rules and makes nonsense of the Statutory defence allowed.

In my opinion the court procedure should be as follows:

1. The magistrate or jury decide whether or not the article is obscene without hearing the opinions of experts. (They are at present ignored anyway.) This is a finding of "fact".

2. If, and only if, it is found that an offence has been committed, then experts may be called to prove that even if the article is legally obscene that its publication is for the public good—that is, for the good of *some* members of the public.

The defence provisions are clearly written into the law to ensure that the fact of obscenity shall not be the deciding factor in the imposition of penalties. It is my opinion that magistrates and judges are misdirecting themselves on this point and that a point of Law has to be made to put them right.

JEAN STRAKER.

Critic Criticised

I have always been under the impression that an essential requirement for any secularist or freethinker was an open mind. Apparently R. J. Condon disagrees with me. In his review of Milbourne Christopher's *Seers, Psychics and ESP* not only does he refuse to accept that there has ever been any evidence in favour of the paranormal, he also quite dogmatically assures us that there never will be! Here indeed is a first class example of the closed mind.

Mr Condon uses his review as a vehicle for his own prejudices. It is rife with sneering references to the tricks of mediums and cheating of those involved in psychical research. Surely it is quite obvious that in a field where there is so much easy money to be made from the gullible there are bound to be rogues and confidence tricksters? The famous "mediums" who have been exposed were all people who made a handsome living from their trickery. Yet no matter how many are exposed this can never in itself prove that the paranormal does not exist. Let me here make it quite clear that I am no believer in spiritualism; nevertheless there is such a wealth of experience in this field (whether genuine or not) that I believe in retaining an open mind to the possibility of future evi-

dence. ESP is already a valid field of scientific research amongst those who, unlike Mr Condon, believe in investigation of evidence *before* establishing conclusions. From my own reading on the subject it seems to me quite reasonable that ESP *may* be one day proved fact, and therefore I am happy to retain an open mind.

R. J. Condon is suspicious, quite rightly, of too great an eagerness to believe. For myself I am also suspicious of those who are so eager to disbelieve. Unlike religionists, secularists should be able to accept that man is lamentably ignorant about what life is all about, and not be quite so keen on rejecting any new ideas which disturb our cosy little picture of a sane and rational universe in which we already know all the answers. It is just possible that secularists may one day have to admit that their world-view was as inadequate as the Christian cosmology. If that happens those who have managed somehow to cling to an open mind may be able to adapt without too much gnashing of teeth!

MICHAEL GRAY.

The Open Society

I read David Tribe's article *The Open Society and its Friends* with great interest. The subject is a complicated one, but I myself have always thought of the term "Open Society" in terms somewhat less complicated.

At present there is no such thing as an Open Society; such a society would depend on the entire lack of dogma and could only be possible after a very slow process of Thought-evolution. This itself depends on freedom of education and the possibility of Homo Sapiens becoming Homo Sapientissimus. Education, however, is itself surrounded by dogma as is intelligentsia, both because of the prime fear of losing status. An Open Society could never be self-contained in any one part of this world, large or small, because it itself would require the dogma of having to defend its institutions against the balance of the populated world. Homo Sapientissimus may not, indeed never can, be possible because a class of rulers would, in the first instance, need to acquire dogmas leading to some kind of unproved eugenics at both ends of the Life-scale. We have certainly legalised abortion at one end of that scale but it is in no way concerned with eugenics except in a very minor way; indeed that law itself was based on a kind of dogma which, in turn, has led to hitherto unforeseen dogmas.

We appoint our rulers on dogmatic systems; they in turn employ their own dogmas to pass laws which lead to other unforeseen dogmas: and so on, and so on. Can Thought-evolution evolve before Man himself becomes extinct? I doubt it.

I could have extended the above by the use of Roget. There are perhaps better words and phrases which could be used for "dogma", "Thought-evolution", "Homo Sapientissimus", etc.

D. MOLYNEAUX.

I agree with David Tribe that humanists and secularists should not water down their beliefs in their anxiety to create common ground with the churches. As he points out, a good example of this tendency is humanist participation on the Social Morality Council—which many other humanists regard as an attempt by the churches to rehabilitate religious indoctrination in State schools, under the guise of moral education.

The concept of a plural society of equally balanced interest groups and organisations seems to me to be a myth, and to ignore the bias of society. At present the State institutions are biased towards the churches and against the humanist/atheist outlook. The churches have several built-in advantages. They are wealthy, they often have a monopoly of community centres and meeting places, they have a privileged position in education and in the mass media.

It is up to humanists to shift the bias by attacking the privileges of the churches, pressing for truly secular education, and making people aware of the intellectual poverty of religious attitudes. It should not be our function to establish rapport with the churches or to defend their position.

PATRICIA KNIGHT.

Croydon Humanist Society.

Anyone saddened by recent signs of what would seem to be a progressive obscurantism within the humanist movement, will surely be gladdened by David Tribe's article *The Open Society and its Friends* (*Freethinker*, 7 August). No doubt the pragmatism in Mr Tribe's article will be received with some enmity by those humanists enjoying their flirtations with vacuous concepts and versatile clerics. Indeed, it is to be hoped that producers of intelligence tests will not soon be offering the synonymy: "god" is to religion as "the open society" is to humanism.

CHARLES BYASS.