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POWER, POPULATION AND PROGRESS

—TECHNOPOLIS OR TRAGEDY?

The Victorians' belief in progress in political and social terms was almost as strong as their piety and earnestness in other spheres; the founder of this paper even ran a monthly called *Progress*. Progress, it was thought, was more or less inevitable so long as everybody contributed a fair share to the commonweal, and the term was loosely understood to mean an overall increase in living standards and the quality of life, coupled with an increasing liberalism, justice and efficiency in administration. A century later, after two world wars, and in an age when the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' is widening rather than contracting, we have reason to be more cautious, indeed puzzled, about what progress means, if still a realistic concept, in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Short-term and long-term prosperity

There has been general rejoicing, for example, at the finding of vast oil deposits in the North Sea which will mean Britain's virtual self-sufficiency in oil and perhaps natural gas. These will provide cheap sources of power for the public, and a considerable rise in living standards for some of the small Scottish coastal towns where the crude oil will be brought ashore and refined. The discovery will bring immediate material prosperity, but whether it will, in the long term, bring progress is not so certain.

Whilst these, and other coal and oil-fields, are vast, their resources are finite. Further, our ever-growing, world-wide technological society has an appetite for hydrocarbon fuels which has been multiplying every few decades. If present trends continue it is conceivable that in the not-too-distant future demand may be such that even massive supplies are threatened with exhaustion.

There is a further problem: as the world's oil reservoirs are exploited, millions of tons of fossil hydrocarbons are being burned with atmospheric oxygen to produce water vapour and carbon dioxide. The water vapour constitutes no problem, but the vast consumption of atmospheric oxygen, and equally vast production of carbon dioxide, may do. It is possible, of course, that a slight increase in carbon dioxide may be taken care of by world-wide plant photosynthesis—a gigantic greenhouse effect. But what if this does not occur? The vast Amazon rain forests, for example, said to provide ten per cent or more of the world's oxygen, are now directly threatened by the construction of the Trans-Amazonia Highway, which will doubtless also be the kiss of death to Amazonia's 'primitive' Indian tribes . . . Progress?

An ecological slum?

It is possible, though by no means proven, that short-term 'progress' may be turning the world into an ecological slum. One bright remedy that has not as yet found a vociferous lobby is that we should change our fuel system from carbon-hydrogen to plain hydrogen. Hydrogen can easily be obtained by the electrolysis of water, using solar or hydro-electric power for the purpose; this also releases

free oxygen and at the same time does not interfere with our planet's carbon balance.

The other, and more obvious, corrective is that old rationalist chestnut, population control. The more people there are on this planet, the greater the demand will be for food, power, and raw materials. The distribution of these is already appalling, and should be remedied, but if gross numbers for ever increase in an uncontrolled fashion, it will be impossible to do anything. We must stabilise our numbers and put aside the arrogant myth that man can 'conquer' nature: he can either live in harmony with nature—or perish, horribly.

For this reason humanists should welcome the proposed new Ministry of Population. Equally, we should reject, as constituting a premature admission of failure, counter-productive and illiberal measures, such as financial sanctions against people with three or more children, being advocated by authoritarian trendies—who were probably denouncing birth control as loudly ten years ago.

The Lord will not provide

Equally, we must oppose the old obscurantists who, more than any others, threaten the peace and happiness of the world: the superstitious fools who say, "Do nothing, the Lord will provide"; or people like the Pope who say that contraception is depriving unborn guests from attending the banquet of life, forgetting, of course, that the banquet is fast becoming a global soup-kitchen with only thin, contaminated soup.

If this movement does nothing else for the next fifty years years it must do two things: it must advocate and promote humane, sensible and voluntary methods of population control; equally it must keep countering the philosophical basis of those who advocate overbreeding: that basis is largely religious! Clobbering religion is not some luxury intellectual bloodsport in the twentieth century; it is as much our moral obligation today as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and however unfashionable or tiresome it may seem to the unconcerned, it is this movement's supreme duty to soldier on, to "fight theology always."

N.S.

THE FREETHINKER

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

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Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Moutat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

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.

Havering Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 29 August, 7.45 p.m.: Mr. K. Barnes, "ROSLA: Half Our Future Now."

Public Action Committee for Broadmoor. St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London. Saturday, 26 August, 1.30 p.m.: public meeting and deputation to Downing Street.

Sutton Humanist Group. 88 Benhill Wood Road, Sutton. Monday, 28 August, 3 p.m.: garden party c/o Mr. & Mrs. Vernon (for details ring Erica Haslam, 01-397 4110).

NEWS

OBITUARY

Albert Langford

We regret to announce that Mr. Albert Langford died on 3 August last at the age of 84.

Mr. Langford was a lifelong reader of *The Freethinker* and was for more than fifty years a member of the National Secular Society (Birmingham Branch). His secular funeral was conducted by Mr. William Miller at the Yardley Crematorium on 6 August.

We offer our sincere condolences to Mr. Langford's family and friends, particularly to Mrs. Langford, his widow.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

We are asked to announce that Mr. Guy Aldred, who was sentenced to a term of imprisonment under the war legislation is now at liberty, and we have received an appeal for financial help to clear up the outstanding liabilities of the trial.

—From *The Freethinker*, 27 August 1922.

Readers are reminded that two of the late Guy Aldred's publications are still available from G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd. They are *Richard Carlile: Agitator* by Guy Aldred (25p plus 8p postage) and *Richard Carlile's Jail Journal*, edited by Aldred (15p plus 4p postage).

MASSACRE ANNIVERSARY

This week marks the 400th anniversary of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre which took place in France on 24/25 August 1572. The estimated number of Huguenots killed by French royal troops and Catholic mobs varies from 20,000 to 50,000. All part of the 'glorious Christian heritage' of Western Europe!

N.S.S. SUPPORTS OATHS ABOLITION

The National Secular Society has welcomed the Criminal Law Revision Committee's recommendation that swearing oaths in court should be abolished altogether. "Oath-taking is now little more than routine," says the N.S.S., "but refusal to do so may result in prejudice by those concerned with the administration of justice and the law."

The right of non-religious people to affirm in all cases where an oath was required was finally won by the 1888 Oaths Amendment Act, brought in by Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., founder of the National Secular Society. Whilst this was a significant reforming measure in its day, it has now outlived its usefulness, says the N.S.S.

"In the interests of honesty, justice and convenience, the recommendations of the Criminal Law Revision Committee should be accepted, and universal affirmation should be introduced. Immigrants, representing most of the world's major religions, have settled in Britain, and it is absurd to expect ushers to be familiar with a wide range of religious customs. More seriously, the parading of religious differences in court may reinforce the racial prejudice which is already widespread."

The N.S.S. considers that the abolition of oath-taking "will put an end to the present hypocrisy, and prevent future chaos in our courts."

S AND NOTES

THE MARCH OF "BLASPHEMY"

Certain radio bulletins, *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror* have given some people the impression that the secular movement is opposed on principle to the musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. They must be confusing us with the Christian evangelical fundamentalists who are complaining that the show is "blasphemous". In fact we prefer to judge it on its merits like any other artistic production. Nobody can deny, however, that the show's basic story and presentation would be 'blasphemous' by the standards of the people who, less than a century ago, sentenced the founder of this paper to a year's imprisonment for just that 'crime'. That *Superstar* can be openly staged in Britain in 1972, with the apparent support of with-it clergymen, is cast-iron evidence of the long and humiliating retreat that Christian bigotry has been forced to undertake since the 1880s. We hope this will continue.

PARDON ME WHILE I PUKE...

A rock-and-dance service was held in Utrecht on 14 August for the central committee of the World Council of Churches. It was led by the "Children of Jesus" who skipped and stomped around a white cross on top of a white-draped altar, with some of the clerical delegates joining in.

Faith Dietrich, American founder of the "Children," led the singing with such modern, constructive, and relevant titles as "You've got to be our baby to go to heaven," and (no, we are not making this up as we go along!), "I dig the truth of the Bible, it turns me on!"

Down on your knees, gentle reader, and in the manner of that wise Pharisee, thank the good Lord that he made you a nasty, negative, old-fashioned rationalist!

CHRISTIAN COMMUNISM ?

The former dockers' leader, Mr. Jack Dash (described by the Church of England Information Office as a "life-long Communist and agnostic") is putting on an exhibition of his pictures at St. John the Baptist's church, Outwood, Surrey, to be opened on 1 September by the Bishop of Stepney—a leading member of the Festival of Light! Mr. Dash's canvases include a political cartoon, entitled, "Christ, the first Socialist."

This cliché, we are informed, represents not just Mr. Dash's view but that of the British Communist Party, though it is hardly new. The embryo Labour Party, which once supported secular education, adopted the same twaddle in 1912 to placate its Catholic and right-wing members. We always suspected that the C.P. was marching backwards—especially when its Russian Michurinist brigade under Academician Lysenko reached the Middle Ages thirty-five years ago!

The Communist Party's opportunistic backtracking and collaboration with the churches is not new either. After the 1917 Revolution the Soviet authorities arranged an unwritten concordat with the Vatican in the hope of eliminating the Russian Orthodox Church, but because of their mutual greed and jealousy this unholy *entente* broke up in 1922. The present attitude can be contrasted with the *Ten Commandments of Communism* put out by Komsomol twenty-five years ago: "... the clergy are the bitterest foes

of the Communist State; remember that Stalin . . . is the head of the 'Godless', not only in the Soviet Union, but all over the world; wherever you can fight religious elements . . . ; beware of spies . . ." and so on. Today, the British Communists can hob-nob with ecumenical Bishops while their Russian equivalents are bullying Jews, evangelical Protestants, Lithuanian Catholics and dissident writers, while the Russian Orthodox Church, lickspittle and still standing, watches, and says nothing!

Christianity and Communism have this in common: they are both fundamentally opposed to real freethought and free inquiry, and to the scientific concept of "objectivity;" and both have opposed birth control when it suited them. One of the better features of modern Britain is that authoritarian ideologies, which once fought each other for their human "market," now feel the draught and a need to hang together before they hang separately. We wonder when the National Front and the fascists will be asked to join the tea-parties? At any rate, atheism and liberty will look the better for their being excluded.

FROM ASTRONAUT TO EVANGELIST

So astronaut James Irwin, pilot of last year's Apollo 15 moon-shot, is dropping out of the United States' space programme to give his "total attention" to God's work. "My goal," he said, "will be to tell men everywhere of my faith in Jesus Christ and to tell them that God was there on the moon." This testimony is, however, at variance with that of the late Yuri Gagarin, who found the Lord sadly lacking on his space orbits. Mind you, Gagarin did not get as far as the moon.

Mr. Irwin doubtless imagines that his spectacular travels will help to sell Christianity. We should, perhaps, warn him that he is in for a nasty disillusionment if he tries proselytising in Morocco! According to *The Guardian* (3 August) a recent poll of six Moroccan villages revealed that 63 per cent of the people there thought the American lunar landings were either doubtful or a Hollywood hoax. One young man (a secondary school graduate) commented: "I'm sure it's scientifically possible to go there and the Koran does not forbid it, but the Koran does warn you against believing things which are not of this world which you have not seen with your own eyes."

OUR MODERN PERMISSIVE SOCIETY ?

The West Midlands 'bus authorities have banned an advertisement from the Birmingham Brook Advisory Committee because of a regulation forbidding "Controversial, political, religious or obscene advertisements."

The rejected advertisement read: "A contraceptive service for you at Brook."

So Mrs. Grundy and Lord Humbug did not die with Queen Victoria, after all!

FACT AND FAITH

The rector was preaching a sermon on the relationship between 'fact' and 'faith.'

"That you are sitting in front of me in church is a fact," he said. "That I am speaking to you from the pulpit is a fact. But it is only faith that makes me believe that any of you are listening."

—From *Worcester Diocesan News* (Church Information Office).

FORM-CRITICISM AND THE GOSPELS

G. A. WELLS

Critics who treat the books of the New Testament as historical documents must accept some criterion of credibility. They must try to determine *when* the books were written, for what *purpose*, and by *whom*. When they have ascertained these facts they can judge what knowledge the writer would be likely to have, how far he might be able to distinguish true from false reports, and how far he would be influenced by religious preconceptions or dogmatic purposes.

The form-critics give a theoretical answer to each of these questions. One of the best-known exponents is the late Professor Martin Dibelius, the Heidelberg theologian who died in 1948. He believed that the gospels were written towards the end of the first century; that their purpose was edification and their authors mere compilers who pieced together the statements of apostles and missionaries. Their evidence is therefore at best secondhand. In fact he seems to suppose that the statements on which the evangelists relied were seldom, if ever, derived from the original disciples of Jesus, but belonged to a tradition handed on from preacher to preacher. As a result of this mode of transmission the data which reached the compilers of the gospels possessed two characteristics: they were reduced to stereotyped formulae, and they were confined to points deemed of fundamental doctrinal importance. It must have been when the disciples who had known Jesus were all dead, and when their followers carried on their work, that the phraseology began to be stereotyped, since the new generation of teachers had to rely on what the first disciples had told them, and could not supplement it with recollections of their own.

The preachers would, according to Dibelius, be primarily concerned to convince their audience of the following broad facts: Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of David, having been appointed by God the promised Messiah who should judge the world and bring salvation to the righteous, had been crucified under Pontius Pilate at the instigation of the Jews. His *bona fides* was established by his "mighty works," in particular by his resurrection, which was vouched for by numerous persons. Dibelius gives evidence that these points, reduced to stereotyped formulae, are to be found in the discourses of Peter and Paul in Acts; and that some of them are contained in the epistles of Paul.

The evangelists as editors

Dibelius further argues that the purpose of the missionary preacher would not lead him to refer to the biographical details of Jesus' earthly career, and for that reason one would not expect him to record the miracles and discourses which form such an important part of the gospels. Such events were no longer of any importance in comparison with the great fact of Jesus' death and resurrection. If the preacher mentioned miracles and discourses at all, it would be by way of illustration, and usually without any attention to time and place. The evangelists, in editing the material provided by these preachers, might try to arrange these few facts and fit them into a plausible biographical sequence. As they had little but their own imagination to go on, it is not surprising that they did not all arrange them in the same way. Only when they come to the doctrinally important death and resurrection do they show any considerable degree of harmony.

By means, then, of this theory, Dibelius undertakes to explain the numerous discrepancies in the gospels, the lack

of allusion in the epistles to the teaching and wonder-working of Jesus and the very limited references to these in Acts, and also the lack of coherence in the gospel discourses, where Jesus passes with apparent arbitrariness from one topic to another (a good example is Mark 9 : 35-50). It is hard to see that their theory provides the student with a very reliable criterion. Dibelius admits that the preachers may have adapted their recollections to fit their sermons, and that the compilers may have modified and embellished the tradition they derived from the preachers. And he does not say what reason there is to trust the memory or the intelligence or the candour of the preachers. Furthermore, it would seem that one of the best attested facts in the life of Jesus is the resurrection! For this, together with the Passion, is one of the few details which the preachers always mentioned, and with considerable agreement as to the essentials.

Yet in spite of these obvious weaknesses, form-criticism is today widely regarded as having definitely established that Jesus really existed. Even so sceptical a writer as J. Kahl declares that the supposition that he did not "cannot be made to harmonise with the guaranteed results of form-criticism."¹ It would on the contrary be truer to say that the form-critics' theory has been made the basis of a powerful argument to the effect that the very sections of the gospels which used to be regarded as most likely to be a true historical record can no longer be accepted as such.

Unfulfilled prophecies

This can be illustrated from the speech Jesus delivers to the twelve when he sends them out to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out devils" (Matthew 10 : 8). He warns them that they will be persecuted during their mission, and that "ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come" (verse 23). The "Son of man" is a Messianic figure who was to come down from the clouds at the end of time to judge mankind (Mark 13 : 24-28). At the beginning of this century Albert Schweitzer pointed out that Jesus' prophecy was not fulfilled: the Son of man did not bring the world to an end while the disciples were on their way casting out devils. Nor were they persecuted, but returned to him unharmed.² Schweitzer's point was that, since Matthew himself shows that Jesus' prophecies were erroneous, the whole speech in which they occur must have been actually delivered by Jesus; for no evangelist would invent a speech full of prophecies and then go on to provide the evidence that they were bogus.

Since Schweitzer wrote, form-critics have replied that Matthew 10 : 5 ff., so far from representing a real discourse, is "an artificial composition by Matthew."³ It is a compilation of rulings on matters of importance to Christian missionaries at the end of the first century. The instructions concern the founding of Christian communities (as is clear from Matthew 10 : 11 ff.) in missionary activity spread over a long period, and are not intelligible as directives given to disciples who soon return to the speaker (as the twelve are represented as doing). It is, for instance, stipulated that when they are persecuted, the missionaries are not to court martyrdom, but to flee to another town and work there. The need for a ruling on such a practical problem naturally led to the conviction that the Lord had laid down what was to be done, and hence to the concoction of a Jesuine utterance. As for the coming of the Son

of man, Matthew (writing at least fifty years after the supposed date of Jesus' speech) knew quite well that this had not yet occurred. It is not plausible to assume that an evangelist who manipulates his material as freely as Matthew does would faithfully record Jesuine doctrines he regarded as mistaken. Traditions which stamped Jesus as deluded would not have been uncritically preserved by evangelists who treat him with such deference that they do not allow even his enemies to reproach him directly.⁴ It is, then, more reasonable to assume that Matthew understood the pronouncement concerning the Son of man not as a Jesuine delusion, but as something acceptable. As Professor Haenchen has noted,⁵ this will be the case if we assume that he meant the speech where he placed it to include Jesus' instructions not only for the particular mission of the twelve which forms its context, but also for all future missions of his Church.

Rulings attributed to Jesus

Another such composition which gives rulings on matters of concern to the Christians of the evangelist's day can be seen in Matthew's supplement (18:15-17) to a string of Jesuine instructions taken from Mark 9:33-50. The supplement provides rules for dealing with dissensions within the Christian ecclesia (which did not even exist at the time when Jesus is supposed to have spoken!), and it is obvious that the evangelist is here writing in the belief that practices of the Christian community of his own day were ordained by Jesus. The same is true of Mark 10:12, where Jesus rules that if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Such an utterance would have been meaningless in Palestine, where only men could obtain divorce,⁶ and was therefore never made by Jesus. It is a ruling for the gentle Christians readers of Mark which the evangelist put into Jesus' mouth. This tendency to anchor later customs and institutions to Jesus' supposed life-time played a considerable rôle in the building up of his biography. It was, for instance, responsible for the idea that he was accompanied on earth by twelve apostles. But that is another story.

Finally, the form-critics' theory that Jesus' sayings originally circulated independently of any connected narrative gained support from the discovery, early this century, of three papyri at Oxyrhynchus in the Nile valley, containing a few sayings of Jesus in Greek. Then in 1945 the gospel of Thomas was found near Nag Hamadi in Upper Egypt. It consists of about 114 sayings of Jesus (including those that had been found at Oxyrhynchus), with no indication of where or under what circumstances they were pronounced. Many of Jesus' sayings which in the canonical gospels appear in a definite situation are here simply stated without it. Although some scholars have argued that the gospel of Thomas is dependent on canonical gospels, the contrary view—that it is neither compiled from them, nor constitutes one of their sources, but is an ancient independent tradition—is also strongly held, and has been reaffirmed by T. Schramm in a book of 1971.

NOTES

¹ KAHL, J. 1971. *The Misery of Christianity*: p. 102.

² cf. Mk. 6:30.

³ HARVEY, A. E. 1970. *Companion to the New Testament of the New English Bible*: p. 50.

⁴ His opponents criticise his disciples when speaking to him, and complain about him when speaking to his disciples or to each other, but they do not call him to account directly (see Mk. 2:17 and 24; Lk. 5:30).

⁵ HAENCHEN, Ernst. 1966. *Der Weg Jesu* (Berlin).

⁶ HARVEY, *op. cit.*: p. 163.

Sunday, 3 September 1972

A DAY IN THE CHILTERNS

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BOOKS

THE FIFTH MONARCHY MEN: A Study in seventeenth century English Millenarianism, by B. S. Capp.

Faber & Faber, £5.25.

To a great extent Fifth Monarchism is still brushed aside by scholarly analysis as at worst the product of insanity, and at best ludicrous or picturesque. H. N. Brailsford and Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper have been amongst the most prominent historians who have chosen such a view. This trend in historical analysis has been somewhat arrested by a more recent flow of books which have tended to view the movement as something of its time, and Dr. Capp's lucidly written, informative and scholarly work must surely find its place amongst the very best of them.

The English Revolution of 1640 had many entwined strands, secular and religious, and they found their targets in the tyranny and idolatry of the Stuart reign. This was not, however, a purely negative response for from it grew a radicalism which eventually repelled its erstwhile supporters in the Parliamentary party. For these radicals saw the death of Charles I as the beginning of the Second Coming, the divine kingdom established by the saints, and ruled by the Mosaic code.

It was a movement far from being other-worldly. Finding its support mainly amongst the urban artisans, apprentices and labourers, as well as having supporters in the gentry and the army, it was feared for what was supposed to be its approach. To its opponents Fifth Monarchism appeared to be revolutionary violence in saints' clothing. Cromwell, himself a fellow-traveller until 1653, said of its adherents that "they had tongues of Angels, but had cloven feet."

But if the Levellers and the Diggers ceased the political initiative in the 1650s in some ways, the Fifth Monarchists were still very much a part of the mainstream of political life. As Dr. Capp points out, they were unique in that millenarianism formed the core of their doctrines. And while they were but one of many groups who looked to Biblical prophecy to justify the establishment of a single world state, they were again unique in believing that it would arise from the efforts of common soldiers and humble citizens. Dr. Capp treats the reader to a most thorough analysis of the political, economic and social aspects of the projected millenium. Despite its revolutionary pretensions it was élitist rather than egalitarian, and its militant foreign policy, he suggests, was shaped by the twin desires of exporting the revolution and strengthening world trade. Theirs, indeed, was a rare practical idealism!

As the author so convincingly shows, they were far from being irrational or insane. Dr. William Lamont, in his recent volume, *Godly Rule*, wrote that "millenarianism meant not alienation from the spirit of the age but a total involvement with it." It was respectable enough for Archbishop Laud and James I to subscribe to it. It was, after all, an age that had a preoccupation with witchcraft, divine intervention, astrology, miraculous healing, and prophesying. And at a time when auguries of impending disasters seemed but common matters, a Europe divided by the Reformation and blighted by ensuing wars and strife seemed, perhaps, to signal universal dissolution and the passing away of all else. Fifth Monarchy men were named as being in all places: at different times the King of Spain

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was named as the universal monarch, Jesuits as Fifth Monarchists, while Sweden, and, at another time, "reformed parts of Christendom" were thought to be establishing themselves as Fifth Monarchies.

Dr. Capp's is the first comprehensive study of the movement and places it within the mainstream of the rise of millenarian thought from the Reformation and its rapid journey in England during the Civil War. His book will prove a readable and enjoyable reference work which it is to be hoped will trigger off a study of a movement derided and neglected for too long.

TERRY PHILPOT

MUTUAL AID, A Factor of Evolution by Peter Kropotkin. Edited by Paul Avrigh. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, £3.50.

THE CONQUEST OF BREAD by Peter Kropotkin. Edited by Paul Avrigh. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, £3.

When I first read *Mutual Aid* in a Penguin paperback bought secondhand but originally priced at 6d., I was neither struck by its scientific theorising nor by its political and philosophical aspects. Looking up my old edition I found that contrary to my normal practice with books I had written on the last page "pious waffle." Having read this new edition I see no reason to alter this conclusion. Since I first read the book I have been engaged in a considerable amount of research among terrestrial molluscs and certain groups of insects; this work has brought home to me just how weak certain of Kropotkin's basic ideas are, and just how shallow was some of his research.

Mutual Aid would perhaps have been a good buy had the publisher included the original essays by T. H. Huxley to which it was a reply. Having also re-read the Huxley essay I found myself wondering if Kropotkin really grasped what he was driving at, and the same impression was obtained from Avrigh's introduction. In fact in the case of Professor Avrigh I felt that he had managed to get Huxley mixed up with Herbert Spencer, which brought home to me once more the all too frequently noted fact that some modern writers seem more to rely on secondary sources than on a reading of the original text.

The Conquest of Bread is far more politically oriented than *Mutual Aid*, it flows well and is consequently easy to read, but it is a good example of how not to write a political work. Time and time again one finds Kropotkin failing to give an analysis of the issue he is commenting upon and so after reading about the sins of society and the need for radical change it dawns upon the reader that the author has failed to define his basic terms. This is brought out with startling clarity if we contrast his views, say, on the state, with those of Marx, an obvious comparison.

Only on one issue does Kropotkin stand out, and this is his stress on the importance of the individual. With so many features of modern life tending to infringe upon the privacy of the individual and an increasing trend towards

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centralisation (a trend Kropotkin thought would not happen), Kropotkin's comments are timely. However, having noted this one cannot say that either of these books have anything more than curiosity value. Kropotkin's ideas for a new society have been made obsolete by political and economic changes, and it was the predictions of Marx not Kropotkin that have come to pass. Attractive as some of Kropotkin's ideas might have been they are now dated far more than many of his admirers are at present willing to admit.

R. W. MORRELL

THEATRE

THE FINEST FAMILY IN THE LAND by Henry Livings.

Theatre Workshop.

Those who think that Theatre Workshop has for a long time been committed to certain myths about the working classes—cheerfulness, incorruptibility, loyalty—will not be prepared for its new production. For *The Finest Family in the Land* does for the proletariat what the best drawing-room comedies have long done for the bourgeoisie: affectionately mocking life-styles and prejudices while ostensibly concerned with individual eccentricities and goings-on. Beneath their façade of respectability and frankness, such as might win an award at any Blackpool guest-house or holiday camp, the Harris family (Dad, Mum and deaf son Enoch) are really self-obsessed, hypocritical, blustering, sexually ambivalent and not averse to seeing one another humiliated. It is a tribute to Henry Living's writing and the acting that they remain sympathetic and even likeable—no less important for the heroes of comedies than for those of tragedies. Most of the action takes place on the landing of their council flat, where they are joined by their illicit lodger and the young man she had cadged a meal off—an ambitious purser's clerk with a taste for purple prose and poncing. Unlike most satirical farces the piece is more concerned with repartee and psychological analysis than with action, though it would, I think, be improved by slicing off about twenty minutes and truncating some of the stage business of the lift and Mum's hand getting caught in Dad's pocket looking for the key.

Lancashire accents are sustained with varying success, but the actors are otherwise well cast and most capable. As the parents, Eileen Kennally and Brian Murphy expertly produce most of the laughs, while Maxwell Shaw (the ponce), Clare Sutcliffe (the lodger) and Griffith Davies (Enoch) are effective in somewhat more difficult rôles.

DAVID TRIBE

Normally it is not the policy of this paper to publish reviews of plays unless complimentary tickets are received for that purpose. However, in view of the widespread interest, and its topicality, we are prepared (albeit at the risk of G. W. Foote's turning in his grave!) to make an exception in this instance. . . (Ed.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Palace Theatre.

So many reviews are likely to be written about *Jesus Christ Superstar* in this heavy-laden season of Jesus-phenomena

that one wonders if yet another will serve any purpose. But since it is so obviously the talk of the theatrical year I will add another feather to its cap by stating that I think this is a piece of work that not only appeals to a vast public at present, but stands a good chance of going down in history as a work of considerable merit in a way unlike most of its contemporary rock musicals which are of a passing nature.

This is an opera, or, more precisely, an oratorio with a bit of costuming and coloured lighting thrown in for heightened effect—but the true strength lies in the music, and the words that are sung to that music, for here lies all the searching and the thoughts that the composer/writer team have produced in their attempt to look objectively at the strange story of a man called Jesus. *Superstar* is a moving, exciting and thought-provoking event. As a production it is highly emotive; it is certain that many in the audience were shedding a few tears by the end, including myself, a fact which not only speaks for the production, but also indicates the kind of emotional hysteria which probably surrounded the critical events of 2,000 years ago: the fickleness of the mob, the temperamental personality of Jesus, the effects of adulation upon him, arousing grandiose illusions about his own mortality, and the consequent problem confronting Judas who saw the dangers of these illusions on the good that had been done, driving him to betrayal of Jesus as the only method of redressing the balance.

Levelling criticism at the London production is easily done, and one must remember the static nature of the basic construction. There is virtually no action; the events of the last week of Jesus' life are simply mapped out in chronological order and consist of a great many entrances and exits which surround and accommodate each piece of music. In that sense it lacks drama, there is no suspense, but since the work was not conceived in these terms this is not altogether relevant, and in no way diminishes the show; it has alternative qualities. The success of *Superstar* arises from the new ideas presented, from the sharply-defined, stark, modern translation, acting as an illumination of a new kind. It had never occurred to me, for instance, that the reason the disciples slept in Gethsemane that night might have been because they had got pretty drunk at the last supper.

Fortunately the scenery, props and costumes are a good accompaniment to the amplification of the heavy beat music—with the dubious exception of the massed cast routine that precedes the crucifixion when those white tents edged with blood that drape the dancers seem a little gruesome. I liked the perspex pyramid in which Pilate washes his hands of Jesus; and Herod *avec harem* of giggling dollies who bounce in on a colossal transparent pouffe presents a delightful piece of comic diversion that is not altogether without point if you listen carefully to what he sings.

In fact, listen carefully to the words of all the songs, for that is where the insight lies. Ignore if you can the undignified passing of microphones and tangles of flexes. Sophisticated music and bright imagination triumph over such hurdles.

LINDSEY HARRIS

LETTERS

Groucho or Karl?

The seemingly endless controversy over Marx in your otherwise excellent columns prompts me to wonder whether I am alone in preferring to read about Groucho rather than Karl.

ANDREW BLEWITT.

Marxism, History and Ethics

"Marxists persist in describing history as a record of dialectical development," says Philip Hinchliff (letters, 12 August). Why not? He can, if he cares, describe it as a chapter of accidents, or as a set of unconnected achievements of great men like Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Kubla Khan, William the Conqueror, Hitler or Churchill. However, the great man theory was tried on me at school and it did not help much: Wallace, Bruce and Bonnie Prince Charlie somehow did not fit in with God Save the Queen—of the House of Hanover!

A Marxist says that thinking is in terms of imagery drawn from nature. If Philip Hinchliff denies this and imagines there is some absolute kind of reasoning, independent of experience and history, he is a mystic. In saying this I am giving him the key to the rôle of imagination in literature, art and science; and to the making of history.

Marxists see the mental model we use to analyse history not as something complete, once and for all; but as something fashioned and being fashioned by the physical world around. Science and experiment deal only with a part of this in the first place. In science, history is *made and repeated* in the laboratory, and for Philip Hinchliff to keep reiterating that he wants the ordinary tests of scientific method to be applied to social history is to show an ignorance of the difference between a "controlled" laboratory experiment (which is also history) and an uncontrolled one; or between inert, and conscious living matter.

Finally, he tells us that the whole basis of Marxist ethics is that anything which furthers the revolution is morally good. Now there is a vast literature on ethics and Marxism which I suppose Philip Hinchliff has studied; I have written on the subject, but I confess I am ignorant of this so-called basis. How do I decide whether stealing a rose from my neighbour's garden will further the revolution?—I suggest that someone has been pulling Philip Hinchliff's leg.

HYMAN LEVY.

Historical Validity of Marxism

I well remember how in 1946 non-Marxist friends tried to prove to me how Marx's theories had failed, pointing to the then newly-elected Labour government, full employment, the National Health Service; and all without a revolution.

I told them to wait and see before being so sure of this golden age. After all, it was the Marxist, Lenin, who said that the (Labour) Social Democrats would, when the crunch came, betray the workers. How right he was! Prices of controlled goods went up and there was a two-year wage freeze resulting in the British worker being one of the lowest paid in Europe.

How can Philip Hinchliff say that the class struggle has been disproved (letters, 12 August) when the workers have responded so magnificently to the Tory government's Industrial Relations Act by staging strikes, very often against the wishes of rightist trades union and Labour leaders?

I agree with Pat Sloan (12 August): 1½ million unemployed proves that Karl Marx was fundamentally right, for in spite of advanced techniques capitalists cannot stop either unemployment or war; socialism alone can do that.

J. H. MORLEN.

The Dialectical Process of Nature

Pat Sloan's long letter of 12 August is the best of his writing I have read. There may not be a stock exchange in Russia for individual investors in private property, but those Russians who have the money to buy Soviet State Bonds will be paid a dividend of, I believe, seven per cent, which is higher than they would receive from investment in British government bonds.

Regarding Mr. Sloan's excellent illustration of the dialectical chicken/egg, I was reminded of another analogy from the pen of Leon Trotsky. "British pigeon fanciers," said Trotsky, "by means of an artificial selection, achieve special varieties with a continually shortening beak. But there comes a moment when the beak of a new stock is so short that the poor creature is unequal to breaking

the egg-shell, and the young pigeon perishes, a sacrifice to compulsory restraint from revolutionary activities, and a stop is put to the further progress of varieties of shortbills."

—An example of the frustration of the law of quantitative development determining the point of sudden qualitative change in the dialectical process of nature.

R. STUART MONTAGUE.

Scoffing and Sneering at Martyrdom

I am not at all pleased with the N.S.S. for publishing a document called *Jesus Christ Supersham*. Frankly, I am shocked. Individuals have been, and are, crucified by society, and this is a disgusting feature of mob rule which humanists abhor. Humanists detest the idea of someone taunted and driven to death, whatever his or her name might be.

Martyrs, whether real or mythological, serve to remind one of the dangers and baseness inherent in fascism of any kind, from the street-corner mob to fervent religious, political or nationalistic identity.

While "Superstar" is a vilely frivolous misnomer for any wretched victim of society, "Supersham" is equally ignominious. The Supershams are not only those who believe in drinking the blood and eating the body of a martyr but those who scoff and sneer at the martyrdom.

Somebody will be writing to tell me I am a Christian in disguise. I am an individual and think for myself.

DORIS WARDLE.

We should not, perhaps, forget that the Nazis, too, had their 'martyrs' (Ed.)

Call for Broadmoor Inquiry

Your readers are no doubt aware of the numerous allegations of physical and mental cruelty which have been made recently by patients at Broadmoor Hospital. They may also be aware of the present investigation which is being conducted within the Department of Health and Social Security into some of these allegations.

Our Committee is calling for the immediate holding of a full, Public Inquiry (under the auspices of Parliament) into the allegations. Furthermore, we want to see a permanent body set up (consisting of M.P.s, representatives of our Committee and of other bodies concerned with mental health, and of representatives of the D.H.S.S.) which will have the power to appoint independent investigators with unlimited powers of studying the treatment and conditions of Broadmoor patients.

At present the Official Secrets Act applies to every staff member at Broadmoor and this prevents staff from publicly testifying to what they have witnessed. *Yet Broadmoor is a hospital administered by the D.H.S.S.—it is not a prison.*

Broadmoor patients lack the most elementary civil liberties. The psychiatrists there have the power of life and death over them since they have sole jurisdiction over treatment given. Complaints of ill-treatment made to the Department of Health and Social Security fall on deaf ears as the officials who deal with the complaints are professionally connected with the senior Broadmoor staff. No internal investigation by the D.H.S.S. can be expected to establish the truth of the situation at Broadmoor.

N. MORRIS,

Secretary, Public Action Committee for Broadmoor.

18 Park Parade, London, NW10.

Fact or Phantasy?

If I were a reader in some remote part of the world I would have considerable difficulty in coping with your 19 August issue. Therefore:

(1) Is there in Britain a "People's Revolutionary Atheist Daily, *The Episcopophagist*," or is this simply the invention of a facetious editor? (2) How am I to know, if it is an editorial invention, that the Salvation Army and *Warcry* are not also editorial phantasy?

(3) Did Richard Moss write and Unity Theatre perform *A Matter of Conscience* or *A Matter of Convenience*? (4) Is David Tribe, or are you, joking when it is stated that "Loo Reigns" was "director" and not "a lavatory attendant"?

PAT SLOAN.

The facetious editor replies:

(1) Do not take my word for it; ask any apologetic agnostic or 'religious' ecumenical humanist—but have some smelling salts handy!

(2) A loaded question . . . but ask any young lady in a poke bonnet.

(3) The correct title (as mentioned in the text of the review) is *A Matter of Convenience*—our apologies to Richard Moss and Unity!

(4) David Tribe's typescript reads: ". . . Loo Reigns as director . . ."; I have no idea if he was joking or no.