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Lessons of People's Temple

It is less important to wallow in the horrible and bizarre details of People's Temple than to draw lessons from the terrible event for ourselves and for the future.

Lesson No. 1. Shun as the plague all cults and gurus; if you find yourself getting drawn into one, run, don't walk, to the nearest exit. It is unfortunately not enough to claim that libertarians, with their devotion to the independence of the individual, are immune from the temptations of cults. Inconsistent it may be, but we all know better. While our most rabid cult died a decade ago, libertarians are still too often prone to cultic seizures.

How do you know if the group you're in is a cult? Much has been written of this subject since the charnel-house at Jonestown, but a few of the symptoms are particularly important:

(a) Beware of any group that places one man—or woman—on a pedestal, so that this person becomes the ultimate decider of all questions, and loyalty to him or her becomes the highest good. Loyalty to one person must never be allowed to supersede an individual's independent judgment. In short, shun the Cult of Personality.

(b) Beware of any group that tries to mould and dictate every aspect of each member's life and personality. That is, shun totalitarianism—the total commitment and subordination of one's being to any group.

(c) Watch out for any group that uses degradation of the individual to recruit and maintain his or her membership. Invasion of privacy, dictation, insults, "punishments", assuming control of a member's life—any use of such tactics should be enough to hurry one out the door, and pronto.

In short, you don't have to be the State to be a totalitarian monster, although, of course, it helps.

Lesson No. 2. The washing of hands, the haste to justify their at best criminally negligent actions, makes the responses of many of our left-liberal politicians even more repellent than usual. For the Rev. Jones was quite the darling of left-liberalism in San Francisco and elsewhere. Even after the People's Temple in California was exposed in a prescient and courageous article by Marshall Kilduff and Phil Tracy in New West in July 1977, such liberal Democratic politicians as California Assembly Speaker Agnos and Lt. Gov. Mervyn Dymally angrily defended the People's Temple from the article's charges. The defense that these politicians didn't know any better just won't wash. Certainly after the charges and even before, it was the responsibility of these politicos to investigate the People's Temple a bit before leaping to its defense.

One thing everyone should surely learn from this episode: pay no attention to the fulsome encomiums that one politician lavishes on another. We now find that all of this is just routine.

Lesson No. 2 also demonstrates how to acquire influence over left-liberal politicians: sound nice and bring out the troops in campaigns. The blend of "altruism" and self-interest becomes irresistible.

Lesson No. 3 can emerge by examining two pro-Jonesian lines that have emerged on the liberal-left to try to justify their previous support to the Rev. Jones and People's Temple.

One variant we might call the naive pro-Jonesian line. The naive pro-Jonesians sigh that Jones created a beautiful "paradise" in the jungle by "helping" people, building "community", etc., until, tragically and suddenly—maybe due to drugs or fever—the Rev. Jones "went mad." But this fable simply won't wash. All the lineaments of the cult—the physical beatings, the tortures, the totalitarian control, the sexual oppression—had been going on for years, and ex-victims had been trying to warn the authorities in vain.

More significant is the sophisticated pro-Jonesian line: that the Jones cult always had two schizoid sides: "the beautiful side" in which Jones helped people, fed the poor, constructed farms, etc., and the "dark side" in which he exercised brutal power and control over his subjects. The fatal flaw in this view is that it ignores the inextricable linkage: for both are two sides to the same monstrous coin. The "beautiful help" was the means by which Jones achieved total power over his deluded subjects. It was the bait to lure the suckers.

Moreover, if we examine the "help", we find that it too was phony. For the upshot of the free lunches and the rest was that the cult members were induced to strip themsleves bare to donate their life's savings and assets to the Rev. Jones. We must never forget that Jones not only amassed total power over his cultists; he also piled up millions from their contributions to his welfare.

That's another point about cults that one must always watch out for: the flow of funds (as well as labor services). Invariably, the flow goes rapidly upward: from the deluded member up to the guru and his minions.

Jones, his wife, and their crew, by the way, all sounded like walking villains straight out of the **Fountainhead.** Old friends and acquaintances of Jim and Marcelline, even back to childhood, kept saying about them after the carnage: "All Jim (or Marcelline) wanted to do was to help others." The kind of "help," of course, which led inexorably to the mass murder-suicide at Jonestown.

Let us take the opportunity to examine Jones's alleged "madness." Let us skip over for a moment the paranoid fantasies which, very much like the Weathermen at the end of the 1960's, saw American society and the American public as so hopelessly evil that drastic measures had to be taken to remove the cult from American society—and eventually from the world itself. Let us instead consider that Jonesian cult structure before the final cataclysm. Was Jones's totalitarian behavior truly "mad"? But Jones was getting out of all this huge amounts of three of mankind's deepest and most pervasive goals: money, sex, and power. However repellent he was, Jones was getting it all, and it seems to me that he was in fact crazy like a fox. The people, the motivations that I

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can't understand are Jones's followers—the suckers who were contributing money, sex, and power to Jones and who were so obedient to their guru that most of them were willing to commit suicide at his command.

Oh, I've heard the explanations: fear of freedom, search for community, wish to make someone else responsible for one's choices, and all the rest. But even if these are correct, I regard them as descriptions and not causal explanations for the behavior of the cult members. To me their psyche remains as inexplicable as that of some Martian or of members of the giant multi-organism that "took over" people in the **Invasion of the Body Snatchers.**

Lesson No. 4 can be summed up in the black humorous note of a friend of ours: "The blend of Christianity and Marxism leads to insanity." And Jones was both; in fact, he claimed to be the living reincarnations of both Jesus and Lenin.

But socialism has a lot to answer for, and there is evidence that the Christianity and mysticism were a shuck to cover the Rev. Jones's Marxist aims. In a profound sense, Jonestown was socialism in microcosm: the "helping", communal living, and racial integration as a cover for elitism, brutality, totalitarian control, and economic exploitation of the masses by the ruling elite.

For their part, most socialists have been quick to disown the Rev. Jones, as they have tried to disown brutal socialist societies in the past and present as "not really" socialism. They have claimed that the Rev. Jones was not a genuine socialist because, instead of trying to achieve power in the U.S., he moved out of America altogether into a retreatist utopian community.

Of all the socialists, we have to hail the weekly **In These Times** for being honorable enough to avoid this easy way out. In a soul-searching article from Guyana, David Moberg mournfully admits that the Rev. Jones "did bring his agricultural colony in Jonestown, Guyana, close to—perhaps several steps beyond in some ways—the most die-hard anti-communist vision of a socialist future." (David Moberg, " 'Revolutionary Suicide', 1978", **In These Times**, Dec. 6-12, 1978, p. 3). Moberg admits that it is easy to dismiss Jonestown as lunatic or as an example of religious cultism, but that "the dark side of Jonestown was a perverted product of the left as well."

Moberg adds:

> "Jim Jones spun out paranoid fantasies of CIA machinations. He caught himself up in the dilemma of secretly being a socialist while publicly appearing a religious crusader. He exaggerated the political oppressiveness of American society to the point that he saw no hope for change. He justified ruthless authoritatianism as 'proletarian dictatorship.'
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> He wrote off the majority of Americans as inevitably reactionary and believed anything was legitimate to pursue his goal of socialism. These political tendencies were not incidental to the deaths at Jonestown; they were directly connected with them.
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> 'I heard Jim Jones say so many times, "The end justifies the means" ', said Harold Cordell, 42, follower of Jones from Indianapolis for the past 24 years . . . "You can imprison large numbers of people. You could kill thousands to make things better for others.' "

Jones, Moberg explains, was influenced by the bizarre concept of "revolutionary suicide", a contribution to social thought provided by Black Panther leader Huey Newton. The author concedes that Jones was a socialist from his early days, and that "to the very end, he maintained his support of the Soviet Union as the vanguard of world revolution." One of his aides explained that socialism in American has limited appeal, whereas "as a preacher you could get a large audience." Let Moberg tell the story of the cult structure:

> "Jones focused all attention on himself. He tried to maintain distrust among followers, even while he encouraged general communal warmth. He doled out secret information among various loyal associates, on a 'need to know' basis. He discouraged close family ties . . .
>
> He tried to separate members from anyone on the outside of the People's Temple . . . His paranoia and megalomania set upon each other in a deadly spiral. Having elevated himself so high, having shown the hubris to challenge the gods and claim perfection, Jones could tolerate no deviation from his desires, and apparently came to see the whole world revolving around him. Thus, every disagreement, every infraction of a rule, every question from outside, became part of a conspiracy to bring him down. No criticism was ever permitted.
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> His closed services . . . began to include more discipline, more embarassment, more punishment. He picked up from Synanon and other groups ideas about 'confrontation therapy.' . . . But as the effort to solidify the community under his control increased, so did the threat that came with anyone's departure."

In a second, follow-up article, Moberg analyzes the meaning of Jonestown, an encampment that various prominent California leftists referred to as "paradise" or "the future." (Moberg, "Prison Camp of the Mind," **In These Times**, Dec. 13-19, 1978, pp. 11 ff.) To this "prison camp of the mind", Jones had attracted disciples with talk of community, love and security, and yet "his practices were designed to destroy them as individuals and to eradicate their sense of judgment, independent confirmation of reality, personal needs and self-esteem. He dictated a new reality that concentrated all power in his hands. . . . He turned the desire for collectivity into the service of tyranny. He turned the desire for a humane moral order into an amoral terrorism."

An "extreme ideology of service and sacrifice" was used by Jones to "make members feel guilty about satisfying any needs of their own" (a weapon that did not apply, of course, to Jones himself.) If the inhabitants of Jonestown suffered from "the sin of being 'ruled by food' "—that is, if they wanted a decent meal—they were hit by the oldest ploy in the world: How dare you! Think of the starving blacks in South Africa!

Any sense of individual identity or self-esteem among the members was rooted out by Jones as evil "elitism", selfishness, and "capitalism." Anyone who balked to the slightest degree at the totalitarian "structure" of the People's Temple was called a "selfish, inconsiderate capitalist", and—worst of all, an "anarchist." As one former inmate of Jonestown reported, "Being called an anarchist was the worst thing that could happen."

Moberg cites an authority on cults as summing up the tactics used to cement cult control: "creation of a group identity that supercedes and eliminates individual identity, isolation from family and friends . . ., exhaustion, repetition of extreme and pervasive threats and the humiliation and shaming of members."

In a sober and searching editorial, **In These Times** (Dec. 13-19) engages in exemplary "self-criticism" of socialism itself:

> "Too often those of us on the socialist left will support movements, such as the People's Temple, and overlook their undemocratic behavior, because we feel 'they are on our side'. . . . But in so doing, we abandon our principles of democracy and our view of the social relations we believe a socialist movement should be seeking to develop, for the sake of short-term advantages. . . .
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> A democratic society requires strong individuality, exercises in people's freedom of association and thought. Or, as Lewis Mumford once put it, a strong community requires strong egos. A 'community' of conformist, unthinking people is what Marx referred to as a **false community**. . . .
>
> Leftist support for authoritatian or cult-like tendencies . . . reflects and nourishes the all too frequent adoption of authoritarian values and cult-like habits within socialist organizations."

The ITT editorial then goes on to detail the disturbing parallels between the cults and socialist groups past and present. One is "fascination with

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organizational technique (structure) at the sacrifice of clearly stated and publicly debated principles." Another is "deification of a doctrine as an eternal canon, to which the 'sinful' world must adjust or be damned, and reducing thought to sloganeering and static formulas, cutting it off from studying the historical world." A third is "segregation of members from the 'outside' world, instilling fear and distrust of 'outsiders'." A fourth is "idealization and exclusive identification with imagined 'allies' external to one's own people (the Third World", China, the Soviet Union, Cuba, etc.)"

A fourth is "perversion of 'collectivism' and 'self-criticism' from true collegiality based on the honest exchange of views and the encouragement of diversity in gaining greater knowledge, into a bludgeon for smothering the individual's critical judgment . . . and for enforcing conformity and a blind faith in a leader (or leaders.)" And the final "perversion of our virtues" (the title to the editorial): "perversion of the idea that 'the personal is the political' from a reasonable observation of the social character of personality, into an authoritarian weapon against privacy, dissent, variability, personal judgment, and critical thought."

The ITT editorial concludes that all these characteristics are to be found among socialists, that socialists must therefore hold their "virtues" up "continually to critical judgment." For if they don't: "if we don't grasp the implications of the People's Temple horror as signifying the need to quicken those critical efforts, we may consign ourselves to the treadmill of 'keeping up with the Joneses'," and Guyana's jungle may be closer than we think to the streets of America."

To these noble sentiments we would simply plead that thoughtful socialists examine the view that the "perversions" of the socialist ideal are inherent in the implications of those ideals themselves; that the "personal as political" inevitably leads to totalitarianism and that a collectivized community will necessarily lead to the horrors which **In These Times** so eloquently rejects. The very fact that everyone of the socialist models—from Stalin to Hitler to Cambodia to Jonestown—has done so should particularly give democratic socialists considerable pause.

Lesson 5. It is difficult to end a grisly topic of this sort on a humorous note, but oddly enough Jonestown has coughed up a bizarre example. I refer, of course, to the incredible role of the egregious Mark Lane. Jonestown, in fact, seems to have stripped many people and institutions to their bare essence. Socialism and cultism appeared, at last, naked in their full totalitarian horror. And Mark Lane, too, became a sort of quintessential Lane: leaping from one strongly held position to another in a matter of days and hours; jumping from one paranoid thesis to another contradictory one; but always, manically hogging the spotlight. Lane did courageous and important work as first Kennedy Assassination revisionist. But he can't hope to rest in the public esteem on that one act. One particular deed, shortly after the massacre was uncovered, strikes one as perhaps the most tasteless and exhibitionistic of Lane's performances: expounding at length and with some gusto on TV on the details of the Rev. Jones' sexual peccadilloes. It seems to me that whatever remaining shreds of good taste remain in American culture require that we all resolve to tune out Mark Lane from now on. If we can't solve the major problems of our time very quickly, we can at least get rid of this minor irritant. □

Bring Back Belloc

by Tom Palmer

Review of **The Servile State** by Hilaire Belloc, Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1977, 201 pages, $8.00 for hb, $2.00 for pb.

It is often true that social commentators, while proceeding from a fundamentally non-libertarian foundation, manage to make important contributions to libertarian analysis. Such is the case, for instance, in various Marxist critiques of slavery in the Old South, in works like Gabriel Kolko's **Triumph of Conservatism**, and in many studies of the Welfare/Warfare State and its supporters, e.g., the Council on Foreign Relations and the Tri-lateral Commission, emanating from the New Left socialist writers. Unfortunately, such is not the case with Hilaire Belloc, whose major political tome, **The Servile State**, has just been re-issued by Liberty Classics Press.

Belloc states the central thesis of his book thus: "The capitalist state breeds a collectivist theory which in action produces something utterly different from collectivism (that is "pure" collectivism): to wit, the servile state." Belloc defines the servile state as "that arrangement of society in which so considerable a number of families and individuals are constrained by positive law to labor for the advantage of other families and individuals as to stamp the whole community with the mark of such labor." The insight that the impact of socialist ideology over the past few hundred years has been to entranch the rule of "state captialism" is certainly neither brilliant nor new, though, to be fair, it may have been somewhat more novel when advanced by Belloc in 1912.

Belloc begins with a rather pedantic series of definitions which manage to set the tone for the whole book. While rigor is always appreciated, there is a certain attitude toward it which narrows the work by so defining matters as to leave out many important questions; lamentably, this is the attitude which Belloc demonstrates throughout.

After establishing definitions, Belloc begins the substance of his work with the assertion, correct in my view, that the roots of western politics lie in the servile state. Belloc focuses on the institution of chattel slavery in the Roman agricultural villa which preceded the feudalism of the dark ages; this is, he maintains, the basic productive/organization of ancient society. His treatment of this subject is brief and fails to address the underlying basis of slavery in classical antiquity. DeCoulange's classic **The Ancient City**, whose depth is nowhere approached by Belloc, creates a much more complete picture of the roots of western society, but it is not my purpose to harp on such a shortcoming in so short a book as **The Servile State**. Also, Belloc does not take account of the fact that the Roman villa did not survive in England through the Saxon invasion, and hence his historical analysis does not apply in this case.

Belloc then proceeds to outline the change in the status of the chattel slave through the Dark Ages and the Medieval period into that of the serf and eventually to peasantry and what he calls the "distributive system" of small freeholders and "cooperative associations." He lays this change at the door of the Catholic Church and Christian dogma. Nowhere does he support this important claim, which he reiterates at the end of the book. He claims that a change in the status of the slave came about after 1,000 years or so of church dominance, but the reader is left to himself to supply a **post hoc ergo propter hoc** line of reasoning to account for the change: the change came about during the rise of the church; therefore it came about **because** of the church. Belloc's unsupported assertions are in sharp contrast to those in **The History of Freedom in Christianity** by Catholic Liberal Lord Acton, which eloquently makes the case that, by establishing a transcendental standard of right, Christianity placed a severe limit upon the actions of rulers of until the Reformation. In any case, Belloc offers no reasons to support this vital cliam.

Belloc characterizes the conditions of Tudor England as the peak of western freedom. In this society, he claims, property was widely dispersed over a large segment of the population and labor and capital "cooperated" through restrictive guilds, common lands, and such institutions. Upon Henry VIII's seizure of church property (some 30% of English land) and subsequent loss of it to the privileged aristocracy came, Belloc asserts, the decline of the "distributive state" and western freedom. Later in the book he treats this setback for the **organized church** as though it were solely a **spiritual** decline among Englishmen which then led to those evils he maintains are inherent in industrial capitalism. His thesis regarding the role of the church is muddy and poorly defended, here as earlier.

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This concentration of land in the hands of the aristocracy led to the further dispossession of the small landowner (the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, etc.) and, coupled with the mass production of the Industrial Revolution, led to the creation of a large and permanently propertyless proletariat. He dimisses the Industrial Revolution as simply a coincidental series of inventions which were seized upon by the wealthy aristocracy as a means to advance their own profit. Further, and this seems to me one of the main blunders of the book, he claims, "It was in England that the industrial system arose. It was in England that all its tradition and habits were formed; and because the England in which it arose was already a capitalistic England (that is, in Belloc's terms, most of the property was in the hands of a few), modern industrialism, wherever you see it at work today, having spread from England, has proceeded upon the capitalist model." That is, an arrangement of society which arises independently in many different nations is necessarily influenced, not by local conditions, but by the conditions of the first place where it arises. Hence, the industrialism of America, though arising in a society where feudalism had never taken root (outside of the non-industrial south), was necessarily determined in form by the decaying feudal conditions of England. This seems to me, to quote Belloc's own critique of the views of this opponents, "not only unintelligent, but false."

Once the capitalist system is established, being based on the distinction between a small propertied class and a large unpropertied class it is beset by numerous crises which necessitate a fundamental change. This unstable system cries out for a replacement, which must be either the servile state, in which, in exchange for security, the proletariet submits to compulsory labor; the collectivist state, in which all property is seized by the state and operated "for the benefit of the community"; or a return to the "distributivist state," whose virtues Belloc extols. The often repeated claim that the captialism of 1912 was "in crises" is nowhere explained, save by cavalier statements to the effect that its dilapidated state is obvious to all and by stale and absurd socialist cliches that under such a system the entire proletariat starves to death, leaving no one to run the machinery. This is another case of shallow argumentation and further distracts from the book's slight value.

In any case, Belloc claims that, in order to obtain security from starvation for the proletarian mass, certain measures are taken by the state, under the pressure of socialist reformers, to institute minimum wages, compulsory state-run insurance, state welfare program-, and all the other trappings of the oppressive welfare state. In so claiming, Belloc fails to take any great account of the individual motivations that lead state captialists to adopt such programs. His dialogues between imaginary socialist reformers, proletarians, and capitalists are highly improbable and most unconvincing.

Laying aside these objections, however, we may proceed to Belloc's establishment of the truly servile state. With such supposed benefits being ladled out to the proletariet, in reality paid for out of their own toil, though Belloc seems to think otherwise, come various positive requirements imposed by the state. These begin, of course, with such "minor" invasions of privacy as registration of workers, required reporting of one's whereabouts, licensing (in fact, a return to the restrictive guild socialism which Belloc so highly praises), state/inspections, regulation of living habits and the like. He who pays the piper, Belloc affirms, calls the tune. While the ultimate source of funds is the proletarian qua exploited taxpayer, the immediate distributor is the state, and it is the state which calls the tune. This is strikingly evident in so-called welfare reforms," wherein a close watch is kept on welfare recipients and numerous strings are attached to the receipt of state funds. The call by Reaganites and others for compulsory work on state labor farms by welfare recipients would of course, if implemented, be one such major step toward the servile state.

The conclusion, that the impact of socialist ideology on state captialism simply leads to more extrenched statism in the interests of the ruling class, is sound. The process by which Belloc arrives at this notion, however, is as wrong-headed as can be. Belloc bases his entire theory of exploitation, so central to his argument, on the labor theory of value, wherein surplus values are expropriated by non-productive capitalists who lie (as it were) by a kind of economic vampirism. This fallacy has been dealt with so many times that it is tiresome to rehash the matter. A brief treatment, however, is in order.

Each party to a voluntary exchange clearly expects to benefit, else he (or she) would not have embarked on the exchange in the first place. That is, each party expects to end up after the exchange in a more highly valued position then if he had not made the exchange. Further, the value of a good is determined, not by the "amount of labor" extended to produce it, but by the valuer and his goals; no good will have precisely the same value to all men, because men differ in one respect or another. Specifically, the exchange of valued goods between a capitalist and a laborer in a market economy (that is, in a situation wherein neither violence nor fraud resorted to by either party) leaves both in a more highly valued condition. In such a competitve market, the worker tends to earn his marginal value product (or contribution to the finished good) discounted by the rate of interest, that is, by the fact that he is paid money by the capitalist in advance of the scale of the good and the realization of income by the capitalist. Both parties benefit, unless the state intervenes to subsidize selected interests, as in the modern corporate state.

The support given to Belloc's thesis by a theory of exploitation would have been greater had he based it on the previleged position under statism enjoyed by state-capitalists (and their associates in the powerful established unions), but nowhere does he make this narrower claim; instead, he rests his case on the spurious wider doctrine of surplus value. In short, his important thesis remains, to a large extent, in the unenviable position of resting on a mass of hackneyed socialist cliches and misconceptions which fall to the first rational analysis.

Among the other shortcomings of Belloc's work are his defense of a near-feudal condition of society, in which one's social position is determined at birth, namely, the closed society of guild socialism; his defense of lands held "in common," a system in which an individual owner is unable to capture the full captial value of his assets and hence overutiltizes or mismanages it; and his constant maintenance of a methodological collectivism (he states, "society can do anything to itself;" hence, I suppose, "society" could kill off half of "itself" and be morally justified as an individual can morally justify causing physical damage to himself in pursuit of a higher end). Further, Belloc treats the case for collectivism or complete socialism in a most respectful manner, failing to recognize that socialist states, like all states, have rulers too, who will seek to maintain their rule at the expense of the productive classes.

To conclude, Belloc has presented an idea, neither new nor overly brilliant, which he manages to rest on a foundation as solid as that underlying phrenology. Socialist or "anti-business" ideologues, often supported by business interests, serve only to entrench the rule of state capitalism (through outright subsidies and socialization of entrepreneurial cost and risk). They do this providing an intellectual cover for the rulers and beneficiaries of the state. One tragi-comic historical example of this process is that of the pathetic self-styled "progressives" and anti-trusters who prattled on about the evils of the trusts while they pushed for the very laws which created and nurtured monopolies by shielding them from the rigors of competition and guaranteeing a profitable return. Still worse, these deluded crusaders were powerful all the while being subsidized by financial interests. That such ideologues think that they will ever reign in the seats of power (something which most of them wish for, at least secretly) is one of the greatest jokes of all time. They are dupes, not, as the fever-swamp right-wingers would have it, of the "communists," but of the beneficiaries and rulers of the corporate-state, the state-capitalists. The born-again socialist, the true believer, remains, however, completely impervious to any such criticism. His thick armor of closed dialectic or muddle-headedness or both protects him from reason while he seeks his goal of a society characterized by magical production, wherein, with the capitalists "exploiters" gone (whether of the state-capitalist or market-capitalist variety, a distinction most socialists are unable to make), the worker will be blissfully cared for by a benevolent state. Such a scenario is never actualized, of course, and in its place his beloved new super-state will exploit him to an extent never before imagined, for the benefit of the state, which is often comprised of the former state-capitalists. The conflicts of state capitalism are resolved not by the statism and slavery of socialism, nor by Belloc's restrictive feudalism with its society of status, but by the peaceful operation of the stateless free market. □

Shall the State Educate the People?

by Thomas Hodgskin

(Ed. Note—Thomas Hodgskin was a fascinating personality and a brilliant political philosopher and writer of early and mid-nineteenth century England. A radical Lockean and individualist anarchist, Hodgskin has unfortunately been enshrined in histories of economic thought as a "Ricardian socialist." For several years in the late 1840's, Hodgskin was an associate editor of **The Economist** (London), then a dedicated laissez-faire journal. During those years he took in hand a promising young assistant on **The Economist** staff, and converted him to laissez-faire and quasi-anarchism. The young neophyte was Herbert Spencer, and out of that conversion came the path-breaking and magnificent **Social Statics.** The following piece—abridged by us—was an unsigned editorial that Hodgskin wrote for **The Economist,** attacking the idea of State education. (The editorial appeared in the issue of April 3, 1847. England at that time did not have compulsory attendance or an extensive system of government schooling, but agitation for such a system had already begun. We are indebted for the article to George H. Smith.)

There are two questions, on which there is a universal concurrence of opinion; one is, that our present parochial and common schools are as bad as can be; the other is, education ought to be extended and improved. We fully share these opinions. We differ, however, from our contemporaries as to the best means of educating the people; and our present purpose is to explain our reasons for objecting to that being undertaken by the State.

To form a correct opinion, we must look at what the State has already effected. That the protectionist party, irreclaimably given up to the delusion that the State can regulate wages, settle profits, and increase production, still smarting from their overthrow in one of their strongest positions (the Corn Laws—ed.), and threatened in others, should seek to extend their principles in another direction and, essay to control, by education, that knowledge which is so adverse to their doctrines, seems quite natural. We give them credit for much sagacity in the undertaking. We have long seen that their present devotion to social improvement is the offspring of apprehension. The case is different with the free trade party. They have just practically established the great doctrine that the State cannot beneficially control wages, profits, or production, and invariably does mischief by meddling with them. That those who embrace the principles of free trade should all at once, as to education, adopt the protectionist principle, and claim the interference of the State with education, does not convert us to their creed, but makes us infer that they do not fully appreciate the principles on which they have been induced to act. Before they can with with propriety ask the State to extend its interference with education, they ought to prove that its interference with trade has been beneficial. But they know, and therefore it is not necessary for us to illustrate the point at great length, that the State never has interfered with trade but to derange, paralyse, and destroy it.

The State has, for example, at various times undertaken, with the best intention, to promote the manufacture of linen, the catching and curing of fish, the increase of shipping, the extension of agriculture, and it has, to attain these ends, given bounties, established monopolies, and devised elaborate schemes of navigation and corn laws. But every one of these schemes has in the end turned out failures. No man can point out, either in this or any other country, a single branch of trade or industry, born of state regulations, and nourished by them into healthy, profitable, and vigorous existence, Not only has the State everywhere failed to promote, by its regulations, the material wealth of the people—failed to encourage fisheries by bounties, and trade by monopolies—failed to beget abundance of ships and corn, but it has been continually compelled, in order to make room for the advancing wealth of society, and not further to damage the public welfare, to put down bounties, abolish monopolies, gradually to relax, and finally to suspend, because they could not be sustained, the navigation and corn laws. The natural progress of population, carrying with it extended knowledge, new arts, a further and further division of labour, and more and more rapid communication, has obliged our Legislature, after withstanding the progress, after shirking its demands, and stopping it or shoving it aside by one pretext and one inquiry after another, as long as possible, to give up as erroneous, a great party of its most elaborate and best devised schemes for increasing the national wealth. If ever we could deduce a law of nature from many successive facts, the necessary and continual abolition, in modern times, under all parties, before as well as since Parliament was reformed, of the most highly prized regulations for the encouragement of trade have clearly established the existence of a law of nature which is hostile to the State regulating the trade and the industry of the people. That law of nature is the law of free trade, and being thorough free traders, we believe that law is as applicable to education as to the manufacture of cotton cloth or the supply of corn.

If the State, meaning well, have been unable to advance, by its regulations, the material wealth of the people, is it likely that it can advance their mental power or immaterial wealth? The mode of increasing the quantity of corn is far better known than the mode of increasing useful knowledge. It is easier successfully to cultivate the ground than the mind. All the means of increasing material wealth are tangible; they almost fall within common arithmetic. The means of increasing knowledge, exciting proper motives, and regulating the mind, are not visible nor tangible; and, at the very least, the State is more likely to mistake the means of advancing the moral than the material improvement of the people. From the failure of the State, therefore, in its attempts to augment wealth, we infer the certain failure of its present schemes to improve education, and therefore we object to its attempting to educate the people.

We regard its past exertions in that direction as failures. By its means and its power the two universities (Oxford and Cambridge) are endowed and maintained; and there is no doubt that their revenues might be much more beneficially applied to the promotion of useful education than at present. Were those revenues, and the other funds set apart by the piety of our ancestors for the religious and moral education of the people, now properly applied, no further calls for this purpose would be requisite on the public purse. But the State sanctions and ordains the present improper application of those funds, and what reason have we to suppose that it will not also, after a short time, sanction some improper application of the funds now proposed to be applied to education? The application of the funds for education to purposes hostile to useful education, leads to the erection of an erroneous standard of scholastic acquirements. Education is neglected or perverted throughout the country, and generally ill understood, because it has long been misapplied and perverted at Oxford and Cambridge. To the men educated there, who have long been the general teachers, the present condition of education in England is mainly to be attributed. They have fastened upon us forms for substance—false grammar for good sense—and heathen ignorance for modern science. The funds intended for the teachers of Latin, Greek, and Theology, a completely false appreciation has got abroad of the money-value of scholastic acquirements; and while schoolmasters on the Continent are at once highly respectable, zealous teachers, and very moderately paid, here they are, in the main, greedy after great emoluments, comparatively uninformed, and zealous chiefly to rival in outward splendour the Master of Westminster, the Provost of Eton, or the Heads of Houses.

Our contemporiaries justly condemn our common schools. But surely there is no nation in Europe where the State has devoted larger funds for the education of the people. Most carefully has it preserved all the old institution to that end. Very much, too, has it increased their endowments. During the last thirty years it has never ceased to foster education, and the result is, according to the **Times,** that "The children

(Continued On Page 6)

TRUTH

The unwelcome landlord
Who arrives
To demand the rent
From a politician

* * * *

—Agustin De Mello

State Educate — (Continued From Page 5)

came out of school as incapable, as giftless, as mere parrots as they went in." The bulk of this system of education has been in the hands, and under the control of men educated at the two national universities, which are preserved in all their rich endowments by the State. The State has meddled with them only to protect them from needful reform. The people are now, in fact, State educated; and what the **Times** describes is State education; and from that we conclude that the State is quite as incapable of promoting good education as profitable trade. If these be not conclusive arguments against the State meddling further with education, as least they inculcate great caution, and warrant great mistrust.

One of our correspondents asks us, whether the State should not educate the people, in order to prevent the crimes which it is obliged to punish. That leads us to reply, that the State has been equally unsuccessful in preventing crime and in promoting trade. Within a short time it has had to avow that its scheme of transportation is a failure. The other schemes of silent and solitary punishments, its hulks, its goals, have all been failures. The gibbet, in spite of the State, has almost been abolished, because it was a failure. From these facts, and many similar facts, we cannot do otherwise than suspect that the State is quite as incapable by its acts—except as it may protect property and person, its proper and its only functions—of promoting the mental as the material improvements of the people. At the same time, every one of its acts involves considerable cost—some restriction—some additional paid officers—some more visits of the tax-gatherer; and being the zealous advocates of laissez-faire, of trusting to the people, we object to every system of which the good, like that of the State education, is doubtful, while the cost is certain.

We have another objection on principle, and we state our opinions freely, because we know that they are extensively canvassed, and not very gently criticised. Whether for good or for evil, they do not fall on barren ground. Education is of less importance to the community than subsistence. Without subsistence there will be no people to educate. Vain, too, will be the best education to prevent or repress crime unless subsistence be abundant. If it be the duty of the State to provide education for the people, it must **a fortiori** be its duty to provide them with plenty of food. If it be the duty of the State, as proposed by the minute of Privy Council, to rear good schoolmasters and pension them, it must **a fortiori** be its duty to perform the more important part of rearing good cultivators of the soil, and securing them a proper payment. It has attempted that, but egregiously failed. If it undertake to pay schoolmasters, it must undertake to pay farmers and all other useful labourers. It must, as it is now by some persons required to do, feed the people, and it must in spite of the laws of nature, in seasons of dearth or famine like the present, secure, as well as at every other time, to every man in the community, as well as to the schoolmaster, a fair day's wages for his work. But, as all reasonable men admit the utter impossibility of the State undertaking the major and more important duties which are implied in its undertaking the minor, we conclude, on principle, contrary we know to the present set of the popular current, that it ought not to undertake to teach the people, and has no business to rear, and pension, and reward schoolmasters.

We are at the same time perfectly convinced that our present system of school education is as bad as possible. But we are also convinced that our system of cookery is far from good in England. It is extremely wasteful. The people generally speaking are ignorant of the chemical properties of food, and ignorant of the art of making it at once tasteful and nutritive. We are of opinion, too, in common we believe with many other persons, that the means of subsistence are unfairly distributed. We are sensible of the existence of many evils in other parts of society as in education, but as we do not conclude that the Government should equalise the means of subsistence, and reform the national cookery; neither can we agree with those who affirm that it should provide education for the people. We reprobate its interference with education, because we do not see how it can then object to equalising the means of subsistence and reforming our cookery. Now, we are convinced, that from calling on the State to educate the people, to calling on it to equalise property, the stages are few and short.

We value education too highly not to be anxious that it should not be brought into discredit. The State certainly has the art of contaminating that which it touches. The numerous prohibitions against importing and exporting various commodities, carry with them a conviction that the thing prohibited is essentially advantageous, and smuggling is stimulated both by that and the desire of profit. The converse of the rule equally holds good; and when the State undertakes to promote any object, by bounties and encouragements, it implies that there are difficulties to be overcome or pain to be endured. The schemes of education involve compulsory taxation. Our Government, from administering and controlling which a large part of the people is excluded, is necessarily unpopular, and for the State to meddle with education, is to bring education somewhate into discredit. In many cases it now happens that the people, instead of regarding school education as beneficial to them, regard it as the contrary, and reluctantly send their children to school, as a favour to their masters and employers.

We are not surprised at such a result. Education is, with much parade, provided by one class for another; after many years of schooling, the children have learnt little more than their catechism, and, perhaps, some little contempt for their less-instructed parents. After leaving school, it is a chance whether they ever find any use or adavantage from what they have been taught. Were education left untouched by the State, its own beauties and inherent advantages are so great that the people would be as naturally attracted to its as they are to high wages, and would be as eager to obtain it as they are to get plenty of fine clothing and wholesome food. We advocate **laissez-faire** in education, therefore, as in trade, because our firm conviction is, that it is the best, and, indeed, the only means of ensuring that improved and extended education which we all desire.

We must take leave to say, that we doubt the frankness and sincerity of many of those who now advocate State education. Individuals of both parties appear to us to entertain an ulterior and unavowed purpose. The hidden thought of the lower classes is, "Let us get knowledge, and we shall know how to use it. Let the Government, or the State, or the middle classes, teach us and our children—let us get from them all we can—and then we shall be able to help ourselves in opposition to them." The unavowed thought of State, or the upper classes is, "The people are getting intelligence for themselves—they are becoming powerful through their acquirements as well as by their numbers—and if we do not direct their progress, they will escape altogether from our control." Some promote education, then, with a view to preserve power; others, in towns at least, willingly accept it as the means of destroying the superiority of the class which promotes education. We see clearly that this mode of proceeding must increase the expectations and power of both parties to do mischief, till it ends not in the gradual subversion of what is false, but in a hostile collision. Were the people left to educate themselves, real knowledge—not theories and systematised errors—would continually be evolved in both classes, and both would gradually learn to get rid of false expections, and abate reciprocal pretensions. □

Newsletters of Libertarian Interest

From time to time, we like to recommend reading materials of libertarian interest which have come to our attention, but for one reason or another are not well-known generally. The following fall into that category:

1. **Growing Without Schooling**: 308 Boylston Street, Boston, Ma. 02116. $10 for six issues. Editor, John Holt, performs a vital service in bringing together ideas, information and personal witnessing for the hardy but small band of deschoolers-parents who have totally withdrawn their children from both public and private schools, and are struggling to educate children in the home. Includes such valuable features as a directory of names, tips on books and teaching aids, Holt's own advice on methodology; battle reports from the legal firing lines, letters from parent-teachers. A sample copy costs $.50. 8 pages. A unique contribution to radical alternatives in education. Issue number six has just been published.
2. **Private School Monitor**: Center for Research on Private Education, University of San Francisco, Ca. 94117. Editor, Prof. Donald A. Erickson. The first issue, Spring 1978, is intended as a journal of abstracts of articles appearing in scholarly journals focused on private education, normally ignored in the public school-oriented professional journals. A valuable tool for all who wish to keep abreast of the current research in the field, statistical data and trends. 10 pages. Write for a copy.
3. **Inform**: Center for Independent Education, 1177 University Drive, Menlo Park, Ca. 94025. Editor, William Johnson. Six issues annually. Free on request. 4 pages. News of scholarly research, conferences, fellowships, publications, events in the field of private or non-public education. Lively and useful for those who wish to be kept up to date on the work of CIE and of scholars working in research on private schooling.
4. **The Private Elementary and Secondary School Outlook**: Council for American Private Education, 1625 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006. Editor, Barbara Blaes. Free on request. Four page monthly report largely reflecting current trends in legislative and administrative policies which will have an impact on private schooling. Excellent watchdog over the courts, the department of HEW, trends in organizing support for private school interests. Unfortunately, it reveals a tendency for private schools to want a slice of the tax payer's money, and even stronger aggressiveness of private school lobbying in Washington and the state legislatures.
5. **Liberty**: 6840 Eastern Avenue NW, Washington D.C. 20012. Six issues a year. $3.75. Published by the Religious Liberty Association, this fine 34 page magazine reports on national and international events and issues impinging on the right of freedom of religion. It is firmly anti-statist on this issue, though reflecting a largely sympathetic Judeo-Christian perspective. Libertarians will find most articles informed and exceptionally useful and scholarly in content, though directed at a non-scholarly audience. A recent issue on "Civil Disobedience" had a triple color portrait on Grandhi, Thoreau and King.
6. **Galatians Seven**. Edited by Lee Shubert. 10 Harwich Rd. Morristown, N.J. 07960. Free on request. A four page newsletter of a fellowship of Christians who are members of the Libertarian Party. Its object is to alert the libertarian movement to matters of concern in the field of Church-State relations and to bear witness to the compatibility of Christian belief and libertarian philosophy. Hopefully, the libertarian movement will not repeat the folly of the 19th century liberals whose anti-clericalism doomed them to minority status in continental, Christian Europe, or of the libertarians who identified their libertarianism with militant atheism, and thus severely restricted their political growth and impact.

—J.R.P.

□

Towards Freedom of Choice in Education

by Joseph R. Peden

For libertarians, the breaking down of the public school monopoly has a very high priority in our strategy of destatizing American society. Education was one of the first major areas of our economy to be socialized. Public schools, along with the post office, now show themselves to be the most unpopular government enterprise among the general public, and the most likely to succumb to a determined libertarian assault.

But the question remains. How can we undermine this enormous bureaucratic Leviathan which employs directly and indirectly millions of people, and feeds a host of other corporations, universities, unions and other socio-economic institutions and interests? Apart from a constitutional prohibition of State activity in the field of education—a strategy suggested by Prof. Stephen Arons' analysis in his essay **The Separation of School and State: Pierce Reconsidered** (Institute for Humane Studies, Menlo Park, Ca. 1977)—two other approaches offer some hope of amelioration of the present statist monopoly: the voucher system and tuition tax credits.

The voucher system is increasingly popular with a wide range of the public, and even among some public school educators. While several plans have been offered differing in detail, by Milton Friedman, by E.G. West, and most recently by John E. Coons and Stephen Sugarman in **Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control** (Berkeley 1978), many libertarians are not convinced that the voucher system would be a real step forward. Several serious objections come to mind: first, it is very unlikely that the courts would approve a voucher for religious schools for constitutional reasons. But the most widespread complaint of parents about public education is its inability to provide an education which strengthens the religious values of the child and family. Nor do courses in "values clarification" or "moral education" appear an adequate substitute. On the contrary, such government sponsored "moral education" is perceived as even more dangerous than no formal moral education at all! Secondly, the voucher system opens the door to an increasing amount of state supervision and regulation over those private schools licensed to receive voucher funds. The situation in England, where acceptance of state aid by private schools has undermined thoroughly their freedom from government interference, suggests that bureaucratic dynamism would shortly assert itself against the autonomy of the private school management. Efforts presented underway by the IRS to impose "affirmative action" policies on private and religious schools through the threat of lifting their tax-exempt status indicate the lengths to which the state bureaucracy will go to impose its will. If the private schools were already heavily dependent on state financing through the voucher system, can anyone doubt their inability to resist any state directives?

Libertarian doubts about the efficacy of the voucher system in advancing freedom of choice are well founded. The voucher fails to deter the opportunity for state control, and excludes aid to parents preferring religious school.

Tuition tax credits have recently gained strong support. Unlike the voucher, the tax credit scheme offers no problem for those who wish to make use of church-related schools. The principle of tax exemptions for contributions to churches and religious foundations is well-established in law and custom, and has not the likelihood of attracting serious constitutional challenge. Thus a major constituency of support is guaranteed for such a program: all those who favor religious education, and oppose the present discrimination in the tax law against parents choosing such alternative schooling. (The so-called double tax argument). Another point in its favor is that, as the money never leaves the hands of the taxpayer, unlike the voucher system, there is virtually no extra cost to its use, no bureaucratic process beyond that already established for other tax credits in the internal revenue procedures. HEW would be virtually excluded from glutting its maw with new bureaus, inspectorates, auditing and dispersing bureaucracies.

But a question remains? What about the poor? The taxpayer who is so underpaid or has so many other exemptions that he pays no net taxes on

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Freedom of Choice —

(Continued From Page 7)

income? Will the children of the poor be left destitute of an education through lack of family earnings? This presents a major problem for any scheme built around the system of family tax credits.

In a remarkable policy statement issued October 13, 1978 by Ed Clark, Libertarian candidate for Governor of California, I think we may find a breakthrough on the problem of the parent with too little tax liability to allow for a meaningful tax credit for educating his children. Clark proposes instituting a direct, dollar-for-dollar tax credit of up to $800 per student for parents who choose to send their children to private schools. To care for those without sufficient resources, or net tax liability, he proposes to give the $800 tax credit to any taxpayer for tuition paid by him for a student not related to him by parental ties. In effect, allowing anyone to transfer title to their tax payments from the state to a needy student! Further he would allow California corporations to take tax credits against their tax liability for tuition paid by them for students (up to $800 per student or 25% of the corporations tax liability). Clark estimates these corporate grants would finance as many as 750,000 students per year!

While the details require further study and research, Clark's plan marks a significant improvement over the voucher and earlier tuition tax credit schemes limited to parent taxpayers. It is to be hoped that the plan will not die with the particular election which gave it birth. Between now and the next Libertarian Party convention, the plan should be thoroughly researched and discussed in preparation for its possible adoption by the National Party convention next year. But more importantly, this plan is extremely attractive to a wide audience of citizens seeking some way out from under the dead hand of state schooling. It should appeal to the rich, as a painless extension of their philanthropy, and to the middle class and the poor who will win a freedom of choice in education that is meaningful. Here is not charade in which such choice is made free of financial penalty, but in which the bureaucratic power of the state is enhanced rather than annihilated.

The Clark plan needs to be refined, "packaged" for public consideration, and a national drive instituted to press for its adoption. Also, the implications of Clark's approach ought to be explored. What he had proposed is that the **tax payer select the recipient of his tax obligation directly**, rather than through the mediation of the legislator or bureaucrat! It is direct democracy of a special kind seldom seen before. While all taxation is theft, it would certainly be a less bitter experience if the one robbed could select the robber or beneficiary of the theft. □

Rub-a-dub-dub Three Men in a Tub

by Sheldon Richman

Advocates of the non-agression ethic seem capable of coming up with infinite variation of the lifeboat situation. Newcomers to the libertarian philosophy especially spend a great deal of time wondering who has the right to do what in a sinking raft or on an island of shipwreck victims.

To the extent that these long and often tedious arguments are for the purpose of probing the perimeters of natural law, they may be fruitful. But this can go too far. Indeed, one clue to when that point is reached is when we are so busy sorting out "raft rights" we perhaps forget that it is the state that is responsible for most of the common disasters—war, unemployment, depression.

Persons becoming interested in the liberty ethic often insist on a simple, quick response to what could be called "rub-a-dub-dub three men in a tub" situations. It is as if an unsatisfactory answer topples the entire ethical and social structure built up from the non-agression foundation. Clearly, this is not the case.

First of all, no **other** ethical system has anything to contribute to such debates.

The utilitarian would have to maintain that the three men in the tub (where only one can survive) must decide whose survival would be of maximum utility to society. Assuming utilities could be measured and computed, which of course they cannot, by the time the calculations were completed, all three would have perished in the foamy brine.

The altruist ethic is no more helpful, since all three would have to jump overboard while insisting that one of the others stay. (Which one would be a hopeless dilemma.)

Even hedonism, taking note of the need for consistency, fails to lead us out of the wilderness.

That such situations produce, at best, fuzzy and only partially satisfactory resolutions shouldn't be any surprise. Rights are derived from man's nature as a rational and social being. Because of that nature, his interests and ends can potentially be brought into harmony with those of his fellows. The market is the result. But by assumption, the ends and interests of three men in a tub CANNOT be brought into harmony. If all of life was a sinking, overcrowded lifeboat the subjects of rights and liberty would not arise, just as the solitary Robinson Crusoe need not be concerned with the non-agression ethic.

Fortunately, life is not as these situations describe.

Ethical principles must be derived from and judged by the normal conditions of man's existence. Emergencies, by definition, are abnormal.

Curiosity about this is understandable and admirable. But it might be more fruitful to devote more time to probing the ethical value of free exchange and the ethical monstrosity of the state. □

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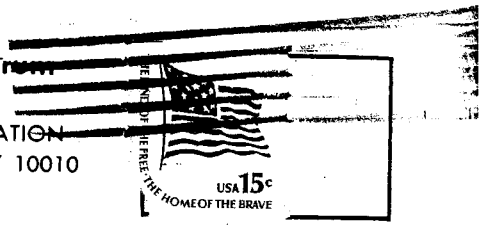

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