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FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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SHAKE-UP IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS*

For those interested in the politics of our time, there is much to be learned from a drama now unfolding in Australia, as all three political parties and almost the entire press join forces in a frenzied attack on a populist public affairs study group called the Australian League of Rights.

In response to a joint demand by these parties the federal government decided to set up a parliamentary commission to investigate the League, unleashing a media campaign of unprecedented violence against the League and its national director, Eric Butler.

The politicians complain bitterly: "The activity and influence of the League has spread so rapidly in the past 18 months, it is now a matter of grave concern to all mainstream political parties. . . . All political parties have been frightened by the sudden surge in the League's activity . . . This burgeoning alliance of extreme rightwing Christian 'fellow-travellers' as the new voices in the electorate is what concerns and confounds the Labour, Liberal and National parties."

The Age, one of Australia's leading national newspapers got into the act with a vituperative article spread across the top of the page with a cartoon showing Mr Butler sitting in stocks pelted with garbage.

What is happening in Australia could hardly have been better illustrated than at a recent state parliament by-election at Kingaroy in Queensland, where the National Party, hitherto undefeated in this constituency, put up a candidate as usual to fill the vacancy caused by the retiral of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the former state premier.

Local voters, awake at last to the fact that their opinions and attitudes on important issues — immigration, for example — had been totally ignored by their rulers, set up an electors' council and nominated a candidate of their own, one Trevor Perrett. All they asked of Mr Perrett was that if elected he would campaign for the introduction of certain provisions of the Swiss system which gives an electorate the power to demand a referendum on issues it regards as important; he was also required to sign an undated resignation form which the electors' council could use if he failed to keep his promise. The result was one of the biggest upsets in Australian parliamentary history, a 35% swing against the National Party and an easy victory for the independent.

The only part the Australian League of Rights played in this exercise was to make its expertise available in helping to bring to the electorate of Kingaroy the political education it needed — most of it information drawn from a book by Professor Geoffrey Walker, head of the law department of Queensland University. †

In this book, a bestseller in Australia, Professor Walker explains in detail how and why the parliamentary system is breaking down in the West; he also explains how the frustration of the parliamentary system has been prevented in Switzerland by a constitution which gives voters an entrenched right to call a referendum on issues they regard

as important and, with it, even the power to get rid of an unsatisfactory member of parliament.

Following these developments, new voters' groups are being formed all over Australia, and there has been agonised heart-searching among members of parliament who have always prided themselves as being "conservative". Indeed, some party representatives are already saying that unless they help to promote the Swiss system they are liable to be eliminated at the next election by independents who *are* willing to do so.

The concept has now been endorsed by the powerful Australian Returned Servicemen's League, which is calling for a referendum on immigration. Opinion polls in Australia show at least 80% opposition to an immigration policy which is bringing in increasing numbers of non-Europeans. Australia's best-known historian, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, has also warned of the appalling consequences to be expected from an immigration policy that undermines the country's cultural homogeneity and historical continuity.

The influential Small Business Association has likewise endorsed the Swiss system. Even opponents of the Swiss system concede that it will now be a major and perhaps decisive issue at the next Australian federal election.

Complained Queensland Senator Ron Boswell, a leading opponent of the League of Rights: "Politicians are undoubtedly concerned about the possible effects of the League on their jobs. People who listen to much League propaganda will lose all respect for their elected representatives and the parliamentary institution and all confidence in the parliamentary system of party politics."

Senator Boswell deserves full marks for the frankness and truthfulness of that remark. All over the Western world there is a rising tide of anger against politicians who persist, by devious and mostly secret means, to implement policies which they know to be contrary to the will and perceived interests of the communities they were elected to serve.

As Professor Walker puts it: "One of the strongest currents one can observe in Australian life today is the disillusionment with which people everywhere seem to view the Australian political scene. The people are disenchanted with parties that are elected to office on one platform but reverse themselves the day after the election and adopt entirely different policies."

What maddens the Australian politicians is that the League and the many other grassroots groups associated with it cannot be answered. For what is under attack is not honestly held ideas, which can always be defended, but an exercise of illegitimate power, a frustration of the principles

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† *Initiative and Referenda: the People's Law* by Professor Geoffrey Walker.

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A LIGHT HORSE

“There is nothing more dangerous than personal initiative: if it has genius behind it, such initiative can do more than can be done by millions of people among whom we have sown discord.”

We give prominence on our front page to a report of current developments in Australian politics of potentially wider significance. So far as we can ascertain, they have to date rated little or no Press coverage elsewhere.

What is clearly at issue in Australia is control over the political agenda. As the report recounts, Australian voters are becoming increasingly distrustful of all the political parties who have failed to live up to the promises on which they were elected to office. Although this backlash has been triggered by the Australian League of Rights, an independent non-party body, its spread is clearly indicative of spontaneous initiative by many disillusioned voters. What they are seeking to do is to assert their right to decide what issues should take priority and how they should be decided. The Swiss-style referendum, which in that country can be activated by a minority of voters, either locally or nationally, provides a well-established mechanism for doing that. As described in the report, this concept has now been given a higher profile and added validity by an eminent legal authority.

There are issues in the U.K., and indeed elsewhere, which cut across party political lines and which, given this mechanism, could be susceptible to democratic decision outside the normal party political process. Constitutional reform, for example, has once again become a live issue in Scotland where recent polls have shown growing support for some degree of “home rule”. Attitudes to this question range from total opposition (by Tory Unionists) to acceptance of a Scottish Assembly within the U.K. (by the centre parties and, lately and tentatively, by the Labour party) and to “total independence within Europe” (by the Scottish Nationalist party, but who are themselves now split over participation in the Constitutional Convention).

The Constitutional Convention was set up to hammer out a package of options to be put to the electorate. It was intended to be representative of all parties (other than the

Unionists, of course) together with a broad cross-section of opinion from business, trade unions and the churches — hence essentially an anti-Tory consensus. But the S.N.P., claiming independence to be the only escape route from continuing U.K. government by Tories in a small minority in Scotland, have now withdrawn. Electors understandably have mixed reactions, but mostly of frustration at the tortuous manoeuvrings of party politicians seeking power, and the loss of opportunity to express their views effectively.

Another major issue of our times is the extent to which the national sovereignty of the U.K. should be yielded to the European Community, if indeed it should be yielded at all.

Here again, the arguments divide all parties and embrace the whole spectrum of opinion from full participation in an eventual “United States of Europe” to total withdrawal. The referendum mechanism was ignored as a means of testing public opinion about Britain’s proposed entry to the European Economic Community. It could, and many think it should, be invoked to determine Britain’s continued membership of it.

We are not here primarily concerned with the pros and cons of such issues but with the political mechanism by which they may be resolved in accordance with the will of the majority of those affected by them. Arguments for and against particular policies are in no way muted by the exercise of a referendum. The crucial differences it makes are that electors themselves, through their own appointees, can exert the right to frame the questions and can express their will on specific issues without being trapped thereby into giving a spurious “mandate” to a raft of other issues not of their choosing, as happens in a general election. That is a step towards restoring power to the electorate and giving them a sanction over their elected representatives. That is why it is resisted by professional party politicians.

We shall certainly watch further developments in Australia with great interest. Perhaps such a challenge stands a better chance of success in the more vigorous and independent political climate of Australia than in the older party system of the U.K. It is worth remembering, however, that even the seemingly most powerful parties consist only of a small minority of the electorate.

Shake-up in Australian Politics *(continued from page 1)*

of genuine democracy, which must, therefore, always shun public debate.

“Populism”

The establishment politicians enjoy vastly superior means of reaching the public with explanations of their policies and actions, but are now scared out of their wits by a citizen organisation which depends almost entirely on the voluntary services and small monetary contributions of its grassroots supporters.

Therefore — like populist groups everywhere in the West, including movements in the United States, Canada, and national parties in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and Norway — the League of Rights is made the target of poisonous defamatory attacks, with an endless reiteration of fright words drawn from the armoury of modern psychological warfare, like “neo-Nazi”, “racist”, “extremist”, “antisemitic”, etc.

A guilty power has no other means of defence.

“THE MEANING OF HISTORY”*

“History is crystallized policy” — C. H. Douglas

The author writes: The terms “History” and “Past Time” are not synonymous. . . . Of the recorded events the greater part are trivial or irrelevant, and it is the historian’s task and art to sift from these the SIGNIFICANT events from which may be constructed an over-view of the patterns of life, political, social and economic, which shaped the past and by which the present may be understood. . . .

“Capitalism” is an example of a word which has acquired new meanings. The term “Capitalist” came into common usage in the 19th century, for example in the newspaper description of the financial backer of Brunel’s “Great Eastern” project as “The well known capitalist”. However prior to Marx no one thought of “Capitalism” as a self conscious SYSTEM. This does not invalidate, as an historical observation, the discernment of a common mode of operation and an awareness of mutual interest on the part of the capitalists. . . .

A. Marwick (*The Nature of History*, Macmillan, London) proposes that the basic concerns of the historian are: “1. MAN IN SOCIETY; 2. CHANGE THROUGH TIME; 3. THE PARTICULAR AND THE UNIQUE.” To which some historians would add “Continuity through time”. As these concerns became clarified so has the art of the historian developed away from that of the chronicler and annalist. The weakness of the history written before the 19th century was its all but exclusive and uncritical reliance upon secondary sources, often combined with the utmost credulity. . . .

Gibbon, who might be taken as epitomising the Enlightenment, its cast of mind, its diction, its self-assurance and its values, brought to the writing of history the quality and methods of literary narrative; a tradition of historical writing continued by Trevelyan and Belloc. He relied entirely however upon secondary sources, constructing a vast scenario, a literary tour-de-force, from the works of earlier writers. He also prostituted his scintillating prose to the prejudices of the Enlightenment. It is not so much his subjectivity for which he is to be criticised. History, as we are attempting to define it, as an interpretive study of change and continuity through time, cannot but be subjective; but Gibbon did not acknowledge any such subjectivity in himself. He took his Enlightenment prejudices to be the objective norm. The true criticism of Gibbon is that he was unhistorical in that he remained unaware of change through time as an essential concern of history. . . . As a result he failed to estimate correctly what was particular and unique in the Carolingian Renaissance, and, more surprisingly, the major Anglo-Saxon contribution to it. Adrian, to take but one example, was as learned in Greek and Latin as any Cambridge Whig. The same defects as an historian mar the work of Voltaire.

Disciplines

Credit for the initiation of History as a discipline, with exact criteria, belongs to the German historian, Ranke. Ranke demonstrated his methodology in *The History of the*

German and Latin Nations from 1494-1514. . . . the work covers a remarkable short period, in contrast to the attempted grand sweeps of Lingard and Gibbon. It was based entirely on primary sources, whilst a second volume described the method used. The period chosen was one of crucial change and the use of primary sources ensured attention to what was particular and unique. For the first time a period was judged on its own terms and not contemporary ones. From Ranke dates the German “Historismus” which emphasised the uniqueness of all historical phenomena, rejected the generalisations of sociology and insisted that a period should be interpreted in terms of its own ideas and not those of the historian’s own time.

Ranke and his students sought to present History as a science in the sense of having, in common with the physical sciences, meticulous methods of observation and objective conclusion, so as to determine, in Ranke’s words “WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED”. Its concentration on unique events and its honest attempt at total objectivity led to the presentation of history as disjointed episodes without any unifying pattern. C. H. Douglas has described the historical approach this has given rise to as “The Episodic School of History” — the view that events “just happen” without cause, or, in the case of repeatedly unsatisfactory outcomes, “The Village Idiot School of History” — results are unsatisfactory because men are either stupid or venal. The method of “Historicism” also resulted in a theory of inevitable progress in History, which led, ironically, to the term being applied by Karl Popper to a diametrically opposite approach; the belief in large-scale laws of historical development, and this is the sense in which the word is used today. . . .

Popper’s insistence upon the origin of all collective phenomena in individual initiative is remarkably parallel to Douglas’s insistence that the SOCIAL CREDIT is an INCREMENT OF ASSOCIATION generated by individual initiatives, each affective in its own way. It is not known if Popper is familiar with Douglas, and particularly with the Douglas monograph “THE BIG IDEA” but his views on the “Unrealistic blueprints for total change” of the Planners show a similarity of viewpoint. . . .

We began by saying that History was not PAST TIME but the determination of SIGNIFICANT events. Consistent human activity which acts as the CAUSE of SIGNIFICANT events is POLICY.

Belloc as Historian

Hilaire Belloc sought the causes of history in human motive, and his method anticipated Sir Lewis Namier’s “multiple biography” technique, shifting to and fro between biographical history and vividly sketched vignette. His two chief fields of interest were England and France, and within those fields two particular eras — the Reformation and Civil War in England and the Revolution and Empire in France. . . .

Belloc’s history is criticised by the academic establishment as not being “scholarly”. This is not, as it happens, as damning a criticism as may be supposed. A great deal of sound history is not scholarly history. It needs perhaps to be

* Extracted from Obelisk Two, “The Meaning of History” from “Social Credit — Obelisks” by Anthony Cooney, published by The Guild of St George, 17 Hadassah Grove, Liverpool, L17 8XH; £3.00 nett.

emphasised here that “scholarly history” is a particular and specialised KIND of history: its infallibility is not guaranteed by its scholarly apparatus. . . .

It is necessary to distinguish between the Rankean method qua method and the Hegelian ideology of progress to which it became attached. Belloc did not disparage the method as a necessary tool of the historian, but he did dispute its assumptions of what constituted evidence. He was always prepared to balance a living tradition . . . against a written record. . . .

Time has justified Belloc. As Marwick has pointed out, the rigid distinction between “History” and “Pre-history” is no longer maintained; it belongs to the period when written records were considered the only form of evidence. The modern historian has primary sources other than in the written record provided by archaeology and even by chemistry and radiology.

One of the tasks Belloc set himself, ahead of Popper, was the demolition of Historicism (in the Popperian sense) as unhistorical. His particular target was the Hegelian-Liberal postulate of “Progress” as the cause of History. “Progress” is an abstraction. It cannot be a CAUSE of history because it has no being in the past to propel events into the future, nor any existence in the future to determine what shall happen in the present. The myth of “Progress” was the kernel of the great debate between Wells and Belloc, centred in the former’s “OUTLINE OF HISTORY”. Belloc not only denied “Progress” as a CAUSE of history, but disputed it as a phenomenon of history. He called the present before the bar of history and found it wanting. . . .

It is ironic that a charge of Historicism is brought against Belloc. His statement “EUROPE IS THE FAITH, THE FAITH IS EUROPE”, is cited in support of the accusation of postulating a supra-natural cause of history.

We may remark that the “Culture-Spirits” and “Zeitgeists” of the Weltanschauung historians are, if not supra-natural, then certainly metaphysical postulates, but the accusation misses the point. . . .

(Anthony Cooney poses the question): A SOCIAL CREDIT HISTORY?

In this endeavour to determine the meaning of History we have distinguished it from the notion of “Past Time” and therefore from chronicles and annals. It has been argued that the theories of meta-history, linear or cyclical, are unhistoric because they do not consider the unique and particular. It has further been argued that literary histories, epitomised by Gibbon, are unhistorical because they take no account of change through time. Finally Rankean history, whilst identifying the unique and particular, ignores the motives of Man in Society, does not concern itself with causes and continuity, and is therefore episodic. Geographic-history identifies the physical forces which act upon man and which men seek to control so that they may gather the INCREASE OF NATURE. Geographic-history proposes physical causes for long term events and change through time. Popperian criticism proposes human motives and initiatives as the causes of the phenomenon of the INCREMENT OF ASSOCIATION which accrues to Man in Society. It has been necessary to argue at some length to establish the repute of Belloc as historian and of the Bellocian thesis. Belloc’s postulate that HISTORY MUST BE EFFICIENTLY CAUSED avoids both the Episodic

view of History as purely unique and particular events and the Holist view that change through time is determined by unalterable laws.

Belloc’s emphasis upon human initiative and policy as the cause of History is put succinctly by Douglas: “History is the crystallisation of Policy”. The intuition of those causes originates in the metaphysical Reality of Christendom, which nevertheless occupies a place and is subject to geographic forces. Wholeness and integration in the Real Thing depends upon a rooting in its past, which is “History from Within”, or as Douglas has put it: “Society is primarily metaphysical and must have regard to the organic relationship of its prototype.”

C. H. Douglas was an engineer. He is sometimes described as economist, though usually so that that label may be ripped from him. It would perhaps be appropriate to describe him as a moral theologian, but more accurate to describe him as a prophet. The Douglas analysis of the price and monetary system and the criticisms which are concomitant with that analysis identifies the MECHANISM of one of the dominant policies of history since the break up of Christendom. His definition of the just relationship of the individual to the group as “The Social Credit” enables us to consider Change and Continuity in terms of the social increments and decrements they produce. The integration of the Bellocian thesis and the Douglas analysis makes possible a Social Credit History which is neither episodic nor holistic, but which concerns itself with the human causes of events, the accumulation of which is POLICY; for both originate in, and in turn provide, the essential but intangible element of History, which is Insight.

THE KEY

I think the events which will grow out of this event (the Korean War) will prove to be mainly concerned with a different territory, the one known to Biblical prophecy as Armageddon.

Already tomorrow’s events are taking place there. “If the war should spread” (wrote a Zionist newspaper) “the Middle East is seen as a potential danger zone . . .”.

Why is that particular piece of the globe held so vital by those who, quite transparently, today control the acts of great government? I think the answer is contained in some words spoken in 1950 to a Zionist audience by the World Zionist leader Dr Nahum Goldman. . . . He said of Israel. “The state has been established in one of the most difficult geographical positions in the world. It is very hard to find an explanation, but it is a unique geographical position. In the days when we were trying to get a Jewish state with the consent of the British Government and at one of the private talks I had with Mr Bevin he said ‘Do you know what you are asking me to do? You are asking me to deliver the key to one of the most vital and strategic areas in the world.’ And I said ‘It is not written in either the New or Old Testaments that Great Britain must have this key’.

That applies to any other country in the world today, not alone Great Britain. . . .”

— Douglas Reed, “Far and Wide”, Part 2, “Behind the Scene”, 1951.