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FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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The Church, The State and Lord Acton

by VISCOUNT HAILSHAM.

Following is the text of the address broadcast in the Third programme on August 28 and September 3 last, to which reference was made at the time in THE SOCIAL CREDITER. We are indebted to Lord Hailsham for his kindness in permitting us to publish it. The address has not been published elsewhere in printed form.

Lord Acton's reputation is something of a paradox and this is hardly surprising. For the greater part of his life, he wrote little or nothing and in the little he did write, he used the technical language of the professional historian and the scholar, an idiom unfamiliar to the majority. To the few who did understand it, it was, of its nature, necessarily ephemeral in an age when historical studies had reached the most rapid development they have ever achieved.

The man himself is also a paradox. He stood at the precise point of intersection of a multitude of divergent intellectual highways, and yet, although never short of company, he was, and remains, almost devoid of companions. He was a Roman Catholic, who believed in toleration; the pupil and friend of Dollinger who yet did not follow his master out of the Roman Catholic communion. He was an Englishman who was also a continental; a professor of history who had also been a Member of Parliament; a Liberal who did not believe in Liberalism but founded his political philosophy on the traditional teaching of the Church. He was a Whig who was yet not an Erastian; a scholar who was also a journalist, a scientific historian whose researches confirmed a natural piety. Acton was all of these, and thus one of the few men who could conscientiously claim to have been consistently misunderstood. An apostle of freedom, who proved the sincerity of his politics by his message, and of his religion by an enforced and frustrated silence, Acton was at once a characteristic product of his century, and the lonely apostle of a perennial philosophy.

His message was not simply obscure; when understood, and for those by whom it was intended to be understood, it was also unpopular. For to both parties in two crucial nineteenth century disputes Acton preached a message which was not only unpalatable but opposed to the spirit of the age.

The era which succeeded the fall of Napoleon was the battlefield of two major intellectual conflicts, the struggle between religion and science, and the struggle between Liberalism and the traditional European society. In both of these crucial discussions Acton presented an individual message. The essays on Ultramontanism and the Munich conference mainly deal with the former of these conflicts

as they presented themselves to Acton in the terms of a struggle between religion and scientific history. The remaining essays perhaps more interesting and more easily understood are concerned primarily with the latter.

Acton's association with the Liberal party in politics, and his passionate belief in freedom, have often caused him to be mistaken for a Liberal; in truth he was nothing of the kind. He believed that not only the Absolutism of the past, but the Liberalism of his own day were the victims of a common error, the belief that political authority once correctly defined, whether as proceeding from the divine right of Kings or the natural right of a people, was absolute and untrammelled in its character. Again and again, we find him recurring to this central theme, that the tyranny of a majority is every bit as evil and far more dangerous than the tyranny of a class or of an individual. This conviction undoubtedly led him to many often extremely questionable conclusions which are the reverse of liberal, for instance his support of the slave-owning South against the federalising North in the American Civil War, and his belief in aristocracy. "Aristocracy," he wrote, "is the product of inequality, as inequality is the product of liberty. The security for the continuity of law and the stability of political institutions is the permanence of influential families. Influence can only be made permanent by property, and property by primogeniture Laws which express the will of the people for the time being are written on water. The people as well as the King requires a check in the exercise of sovereign power lest it become despotic. The check on monarchy is representation. The check on democracy is primogeniture."

These views are, of course, highly controversial but whether exceptionable or not, they proceed from a view of the nature of political authority at once consistent and profound. According to Acton, the origin of all political authority is divine, and the limitation on all authority royal, aristocratic or popular, is constituted by the moral law. "The fate of every democracy" he wrote "of every Government based on the sovereignty of the people depends on the choice it makes between these opposite principles—absolute power on the one hand and on the other the restraints of legality, and the authority of tradition. It must stand or

fall according to its choice whether to give the supremacy to the law or to the will of the people; whether to constitute a moral association maintained by duty, or "a physical one, kept together by force. Republics offer in this respect a strict analogy with monarchies, which are also either absolute or organic, either governed by law, and therefore constitutional, or by a will which, being the source, cannot be the object of laws, and, is, therefore, despotic." It was for this reason that he wrote in 1860 with rare prescience:

"State absolutism is the modern danger against which neither representative government nor democracy can defend us . . . If we do not bear this in mind we shall be led constantly astray by forms to overlook the substance, to think that right is safer against majorities than against tyrants."

So far Acton saw clearly. The true political philosophy is that which the Church inherited from Judaism, that the King himself, whether he be King Charles or King Demos, is subject to the law of God. He believed and believed correctly, that, in this at least, the traditional Constitution of England and the philosophy of the eighteenth century Whig Burke more nearly represented the Christian teaching of the mediæval Church than the Roman Catholic Monarchies and publicists of the continent in his own day.

It is beyond this point, however, that Acton's thinking if it remains profound, becomes, to say the least of it, a little misty. If King Demos not less than King Charles, requires the restraint of the moral law, what is the theoretical and what the practical means whereby this restraint is to be exercised? And, assuming that these questions can be satisfactorily answered, what is the relationship between positive law and moral obligation?

To none of these questions does Acton propound a consistent or satisfactory answer, and he is able to avoid the issue precisely because he allowed the disapproval of his coreligionists to prevent him from publishing a comprehensive or systematic work. A series of essays or reviews is not an adequate vehicle for a comprehensive philosophy, nor as a matter of fact is historical exposition always a satisfactory medium for abstract thought, however valuable particular historical examples may be as illustrations of a general idea.

Acton was far too subtle a thinker to accept the widely held Protestant view that the individual conscience is an adequate restraint either for King Charles or King Demos. Moreover, to propound such an attitude would be directly contrary to the somewhat pessimistic view of human nature embodied in the dictum that all power tends to corrupt, and absolute power to corrupt absolutely. To place conscience on the throne in political affairs presents no practical obstacle whatever to the development of a dictatorship whether of a person, a party or an anonymous majority.

One popular Roman Catholic solution then as now was to assert that the true restraint on sovereignty lies in the interpretation of the moral law by the ecclesiastic authority of the Pope. But this is a view which Acton expressly, and, in my view, rightly, rejects, partly on the ground that such a conclusion would place the Papacy in a position of infallibility in temporal as well as spiritual affairs and partly because such a position, once obtained, would be completely disastrous to the Church. Acton clearly saw that

the use by the Church of temporal weapons inevitably resulted in a loss of spiritual power, more complete and more demoralising in exact proportion as it proved popular. So much appears from his analysis of the consequences of the Inquisition. "It was always" he wrote "a popular institution." But "the control exercised over theological and historical literature would have made it impossible to meet Protestantism in open combat and controversy . . . The recent history of Spain, as of Italy (he would now have added France) makes it doubtful whether it is greatly to the advantage of a Catholic nation that it escaped the ordeal of the Reformation; whether to prevent a crisis is not to make the action of the poison more prolonged and more insidious, to convert an acute into a chronic disease, and make it impossible to overcome and cast out the danger . . . The means taken to resist Protestantism opened the way for infidelity."

Acton's view of the temporal position of the Church, was not that she should prove sovereign in temporal affairs but that she should in fact be independent. "The old position of things has been reversed, and it has been found that it is the State which stands in need of the Church, and that the strength of the Church is her independence . . . A free Church implies a free nation. The absolutism of the State recovers all its oppressiveness where the vast domains of religion are not protected from its control by a Church in which there is no room and no excuse for arbitrary power."

Thus Acton rejected both conscience and Church as a means of restraining absolutism. His own view, apparently, is that this restraint can only be practically achieved by a system of positive law. But this must necessarily depend on the nature of the system. Obviously a system of checks and balances affords the best guarantee to prevent a nation from degenerating into anarchy, and this in turn presumes that the system represents an abstract justice in which the conscience and will of the people can rest easy. Acton was blind to this, and the result was a certain warping of historical judgment. For example, granted that the use of the federal power by the Northern States both before and after the American Civil War was a cynical and selfish business, the insistence on States rights by the South, in order to preserve slavery, and the earlier opposition to a tariff in order to promote the cotton trade with England were, at bottom, equally cynical and equally selfish. However Acton was clearly wrong, not merely in principle but in particular, in supposing that the victory of the North really left the American Constitution so mutilated as to open the way to absolutism. The suggestion I've already mentioned that primogeniture as an institution can act as a practical restraint on democracy can only be described as absurd.

It is strange that, having reached the position which he did, Acton deliberately rejected a far more attractive and in many ways more subtle solution. Erskine May is still remembered as the author of the Standard Work on the law of Parliament. During the period to which Acton's Essays relate, May pointed out that the real restraint on democratic absolutism lies in the two party system—and that this system, as much as any theoretical or formal merit of the British Constitution, was the foundation of the ordered liberty which Acton so much admired.

"The parties" wrote Erskine May "in which English-

men have associated have represented cardinal principles of Government—authority on the one side, popular rights and privileges on the other.” Acton recoiled violently from this view. Perhaps, after all, he was too good a party man to recognise the essential role played by the party to which he did not belong. “In a country where freedom is not of recent growth,” he wrote, “there can be but one constitutional party. Our political system is founded on definite principles, not on compact or compromise. . . . The constitution stands by its own strength, not by the equal strain of opposite forces”. . . . and (with more truth) “parties have been the ruin of constitutional life in France, in Belgium, in Russia, and in Switzerland.”

Nevertheless, Erskine May was nearer the truth when he wrote “We find that Government without party is absolutism, that rulers without opposition may be despots.” Acton’s theory of only one constitutional party leads in the end to Communism or Fascism, the very end which he would himself have most abhorred.

Acton regarded his views on the relationship of Church and State as part of the (then contemporary) Gothic revival. This revival he thought of as a second, and healthier, Renaissance, similar to the first because it sought inspiration in an idealised past, healthier, because, in Acton’s view, its distinctive achievement was “not antiquarian but historical” in as much as its study was of “life not death.” In this past, the Church, headed by the Papacy, was not dominated by the State. According to Acton, not only the Protestant Churches of his own day, but, if only to a lesser degree, the Roman Catholic establishments of Spain, Austria and France amongst others were so dominated. This is why, to him, the revival of mediævalism was, by a kind of paradox, a truer sort of Ultramontaniam, by which Acton meant a liberation of the Church alike from secular and obscurantist elements.

Acton was not blind to the strict relation between the growth of absolutism internally and the breakdown of the international order between states. In his view, secular sovereigns required to acknowledge a wider loyalty, with a universal, and therefore, a spiritual inspiration. Such an inspiration, he thought, could be supplied by a Church headed by a Pope independent of but not temporarily superior to the secular sovereign.

It is easy to criticise this opinion as Utopian. The Papacy never was (as Acton perhaps knew) and so far as one can see, never will be, prepared to accept the role which Acton’s piety desired for it, and thought he could discern within it. But this Utopianism in fact prevented Acton from discerning that the ultimate problem of modern society is less resistance to absolutism (which is an evil) than the prevention of international anarchy which is the evil that produces absolutism as surely as rats breed plague. He noticed with approval the “Project de Paix Perpetuelle,” published in 1713 by the Abbé de S. Pierre, and correctly saw in it a foreshadowing of the idea, which in 1870 he regarded as “now so widely spread,” of “a European confederation with an arbitration tribunal.” But he failed to observe that the practical urge which drives men to accept absolutism as a form of government, whether under a democratic or a dictatorial mask, is precisely the desire, explicit or concealed, to commit some breach of international law on others, or the fear that others may commit an act

of aggression against themselves. Against this danger neither conscience nor international law, nor party nor purified Papacy nor mediæval Church can prevail. It is a problem primarily political and requiring political techniques and institutions not yet discovered.

It does not, however, follow that, were the problems of international order solved, all the difficulties in the relationship of Church and State would immediately disappear. This is because the last of the questions left unanswered by Acton is not merely unanswered but intrinsically unanswerable.

Acton did not regard the State as an end in itself; indeed he drew a distinction between the State and Society, to the disadvantage of the State. “Society,” he writes, “is an organism; the State is a mere machine; not fitted to Society like a glove but rather compressing it like a thumb-screw; not growing out of society like its skin but put upon it from without like a mould into which society is forced to pour itself.” But what he fails to state—oddly, in a pious man and a theologian—is that in the practice of law and the theory of politics and government there remains in the last analysis an intrinsically irrational streak. The one Christian doctrine which is empirically verifiable—at least by the historian—is the fact of original sin. The state, law, punishment, the great professions, the armed Services, the Church itself would never exist but for the fact that man has the property of generating his own misfortunes in any society or state of affairs where he continues to exist. This property is at once irrational and unpredictable, and the various institutions of mankind designed by reason to counteract the effects of this property share inevitably in part in its irrational nature. It is impossible to reduce evil to sense; it is impossible to deny its existence, and nothing, even good, in its contact with evil, is capable wholly of a rational exposition.

There was too much of the rationalist in Acton to be content with this confession of failure which every philosophy is doomed in the end to make.

PARLIAMENT

House of Commons: August 1, 1952.

American-Style Comics

[*The Debate continued: The Joint-Undersecretary of State for the Home Department (Sir Hugh Lucas-Tooth) is speaking.*]

I think that I should say something about the legal position in England and Wales. Obscenity is a common law offence which is punishable as a misdemeanour. There is no statutory offence of obscenity. There is the Obscene Publications Act of 1957, but that merely provides a special statutory remedy enabling the police to seize and destroy obscene matter with the consent of the court. The court would have to be satisfied that the matter was obscene within the common law meaning of the word.

If a document is obscene there is no difficulty about taking appropriate action to suppress it. So-called American comics have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecution.

(continued on page 6.)

THE SOCIAL CREDITER

This journal expresses and supports the policy of the Social Credit Secretariat, which is a non-party, non-class organisation neither connected with nor supporting any political party, Social Credit or otherwise.

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Saturday, October 18, 1952.

From Week to Week

Correspondents have suggested during recent weeks (or is it months?) that *The Tablet* contemplated further reference to Social Credit following what we deemed to be the indiscretions of Mr. Dandy which found place in its pages. It seems as though time has provided our interesting and important contemporary with opportunity to vary the editorial intention. However that may be, the issue for October 11 carries an article by Paul Derrick, occupying nearly a page and a half, entitled "The Late Major Douglas: His Contribution to Economic Thinking." The article is sufficiently different in tone and possibly in intention from most articles written by opponents of Social Credit about Social Credit to lead us to believe there may be some point in answering it carefully and soberly. For this reason we have sought the permission of editor and author to transcribe the work for literal transportation to the pages of *The Social Crediter*, and if this is given we propose to annotate those passages which seem to us to raise question.

• • •

The association between a just and workable system of land tenure and political and economic freedom must have been grasped long ago by those curious people who wanted (and still want, if it becomes necessary) to tax it so hard that it must bear the whole burden of taxation—which anyhow is robbery. What angel, and of what colour, is guardian to the University of Oxford in these degenerate days we do not know; but it is evident that someone is becoming aware of the distressing consequences of past neglect.

*Where childlike learning sits,
 Remote from wordly cares,
 And leaves to skilled financiers its
 Pecuniary affairs.*

The colleges have got "wound in" and 'mixed feelings' have been expressed on direct state aid to them. Their endowments, even when reinvested in securities other than those permitted by the Trustee Act, "have not had time to react to changes in the value of money." As the little verse suggests, Oxford can translate *timeo Danaos* without being able to apply it to its condition very effectually. There is no freedom without economic freedom.

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The Press and Social Credit

Following the publication in the *Daily Telegraph* on October 6, of a letter insufficiently adjusting previous announcements, the following was addressed to *The Times*, wherein it has not, so far as we know, been published:—

THE SOCIAL CREDIT SECRETARIAT.

Advisory Chairman: C. H. DOUGLAS.

Deputy Chairman: TUDOR JONES.

(Business) 7, VICTORIA STREET,
 LIVERPOOL, 2.
 (Editorial) 49, PRINCE ALFRED ROAD,
 LIVERPOOL, 15.

The Editor,
 The Times,
 London, E.C.4.

Sir,

SOCIAL CREDIT

The special quality of *The Times* among British newspapers leads me to seek the courtesy of its columns to say:—

(1) The late Major C. H. Douglas, since 1918 when he first published the essentials of his economic and political views, has been actively associated with *one* organisation only, the Social Credit Secretariat, which he founded in September, 1933. As Chairman or Advisory Chairman, he was continuously associated with it until his death last week.

(2) Continuous publicity has been given to the fact that The Social Credit Secretariat is "a non-party, non-class organisation neither connected with nor supporting any political party, Social Credit or otherwise."

I enclose for your information a copy of a comprehensive statement of the Constitution of the Secretariat, which has been very widely distributed.

Yours faithfully,
 Tudor Jones, Chairman.

"Afraid of the Law"

To The Editor of *The Social Crediter*.

Sir,—Our people are becoming increasingly afraid of the Law that used to be and ought to be their shield against and remedy for injustice. Our courts once thronged with those seeking Justice are now almost deserted. One fear is of what lawyers themselves term "an arranged trial." Only wealthy corporations can afford the costs, delays, and uncertainties of obtaining Justice.

Verdicts constantly given to Most Money would be like a nightmare typewriter printing "M" whatever key is struck and making Justice read MMMMMMMM.

Justice is the bedrock base of civilization and the source of liberty. Where Justice weakens civilization sinks into barbarism and freedom into slavery. Weakening Justice here could send England the way of Babylon and Tyre. Who will make Justice more free and swift and sure?

Yours faithfully,
 London, October 11. Geoffrey Bowles.

The British Association

(Belfast, September, 1952)

By NORMAN F. WEBB.

Professor Hill, this year's President of the Association, chose for his inaugural address the subject of what he called "The Dilemma of Science." And he put it this way:—"If ethical principles deny one the right to do evil that good may come, are we justified in doing good where the foreseeable consequence is evil?" Now the impression made on me by that statement, both in its meaning and in its phraseology, is one of very serious and un-scientific confusion of thought. I say that out of very strong feeling. The confusion I complain of arises, I believe, from the attempt to combine the assumed requirements of human morality which, however essential it is, nevertheless is only a temporary and provisional code of behaviour, with the demands of Science, or factual knowledge, in one complete dialectical statement, which unavoidably includes the assumption that we know for certain what is ethically "good" and what "bad."

It might be argued that such a consideration is above the heads and above the practical interests of the general public, in other words, that it is academic. I cannot agree with that view. I maintain that this attempted blending of moral speculation and assumption with Science or the search for facts, has this unfortunate result, among many others, that it tends to present all the major problems of society in what, from the point of view of the man in the street, is an almost insolvable form, or at least one that makes their correct solution as difficult as it can be made. And what is almost worse, gives them such a formidable and complicated appearance, that individual action is made to look hopeless and government interference, which means increased bureaucracy and centralisation of control and power, inevitable; while a fully-armed World State,—variously christened the League of Nations, U.N.O., N.A.T.O., and what-have-you,—is made to appear as the only hope of society, and a rapidly receding one at that.

Professor Hill himself posed several of these problems in this form; facing them courageously and without any unnecessary trimmings. "... if men breed like rabbits, they must be allowed to die like rabbits" is a good example. "Had it been possible to see the enormous success of applied science, would humane people have agreed that it would have been better held up?" His opinion was that it was impossible even to contemplate the idea of suppressing research and invention; with which opinion I agree. The late Lord Stamp (Sir Josiah), once suggested the appointment of something like a committee to strangle inventions, if not inventors, at birth; but he abandoned the idea and resorted to the less crude, and no doubt just as effective, method of raising the discount rate of the Bank of England. Inventors persist in getting born, and every day, almost, brings a new invention. "To help to guide its use aright is not a scientific dilemma," concluded Professor Hill, "but the honoured and compelling duty of the good citizen." With that I agree.

It is surely beyond question that what political use is made of the application of the fruits of his labours is no concern of the scientist, as such. But though he can

not have meant anything of the sort, the impression could easily have been got from what Professor Hill said, that in his opinion the scientist had no obligations at all. Of course he has; the strictest and most pressing ones. And it was in the fulfilment of these that I got the uncomfortable feeling that Professor Hill's inaugural address failed, with the results that I have mentioned as inevitable; that every social problem was presented in the form of an insolvable dilemma. The one inescapable obligation of Science, as see it, is that its exponents preserve the single eye, and follow the light it gives without fear or prejudice, question or preference. Morality, itself, is in the nature of a preconception, or prejudgment, and therefore prejudices a clear view of the road ahead, and this ambiguity seemed to me to be over the whole week's deliberations of the Association. As address followed address, problem after problem was seen to raise its unmanageable head, demanding priority attention, and then to drop hopelessly back, presumably on top of the Good Citizen.

Is it really asking too much of a Scientific Association that, without being able to produce "all the answers," it should be capable of radiating an air of confidence and faith, at least in its own inductive method? Instead, we had agitated, and agitating, concern with soil erosion, and shrinking food supplies, and expanding populations *etc., etc.*, all of them problems all right, and taken as a whole representing what might be quite legitimately called a dilemma, but as Professor Hill had already pointed out, not the dilemma of Science or, presumably, of scientists in assembly.

It is perhaps an over-statement to say that the general impression of the Meeting as a whole seemed to suggest that Science—if those whose voices were heard were speaking as scientists and not merely as technologists—has no certainty to give, either for itself or society in general. And by certainty, I suppose I mean Faith, of which, I maintain, it must have some—I don't care how little-seeming—to justify its title to the name of Science. It must be certain of *something*; at least, like Pippa in Robert Browning's poem, that "God's in His heaven . . ." To one listener-in at least, it would appear that in Belfast in September, 1952, Science had tentative thoughts about almost everything, but no certainty about anything; a reflection merely of the prevailing psychological condition of society today.

I have dealt primarily with Professor Hill's address because of its presidential significance, although my own specific study being economics, I should by rights have concerned myself with the addresses of Professor Meredith, and Professor Jack. Perhaps apologia would be a better description of what Professor Meredith had to say, which seemed to combine wit with despair, with surprising success. I share Professor Meredith's dislike of the increasing complexity of economic study, which again is only a reflection of the growing complexity of society in general. But I do not share his doubts of our ever achieving the simplification for which he craves. All I have said regarding Professor Hill's "Dilemma of Science," applies exactly to the dilemma of Economics, or rather, the confusion which so baffles Professor Meredith, and which rises from the fact that the economic problem, like so many others, is posed for solution in a wrong, insolvable form, as though the end to be achieved was an endorsement of a foregone moral

conclusion, instead of the discovery of the true facts, whatever they may prove to be, regardless of all moral assumptions or vested interests.

Whether Professor Meredith would be prepared to follow my analogy or not, I cannot say; or endorse my firm conviction that there is a simple, scientific solution to be found to every conceivable practical problem, granted the problem is expressed correctly. In the case of economics, however, we happen to know that one actually exists in a simple and easily applied form. All the necessary preliminaries have been gone through in the correct way to arrive at the true facts, without prejudgments, or suppositions of any kind. And all that awaits is a desire on the part of the public to receive the truth and to act on it. If orthodox economics was a true branch of Science—which emphatically it is not—its exponents, being scientists, would expend all their energies in endeavouring to clear up this crippling confusion between means and ends, and would be creating order in the verbal and technical confusion brought about by the activities of well-meaning, but interested parties. Then Economics would not be, as it is today, a subject equally of despair and ribald jokes, like the first model of the Ford car.

If the perpetuation and increase of centralised control and discipline of the individual by means of our monetary system is the end demanded—as apparently it is by those who influence economic research; in other words, if that is the form in which all economic problems are to be posed for consideration,—then it is obvious we have substituted social control as the desired moral end, in advance of any investigation, and *in place of the true facts*, and cannot complain of the results no matter how unpalatable and unpleasant. And since it has been agreed, at some level, that the ends are to be compulsion, and we, the public, have apparently acquiesced, they are bound to be unpleasant, in the pattern of the Soviet State and/or our own fantastic rate of income tax backed, as it is, by the threat of the Law. I have a red notice by me on my desk as I write, and I have come to regard the Inland Revenue Authority as by far my best correspondent.

Referring to this question of complexity, Professor Meredith mentions “a plea of 25 years ago for simpler economics addressed by Edwin Cannan to the Royal Economic Society. But” he is quoted as saying, “it had not stayed the march of complexity.” How could it? If a train is running on the line to Edinburgh, no amount of pleading addressed to one’s fellow-passengers, or even to the engine driver himself, will get you to London in it. A plea is simply a moral exhortation. But Professor Meredith cannot have forgotten an even earlier proposition for simpler, more scientific economics, put forward over thirty years ago by Major Douglas. Where these proposals, which are known as Social Credit, differ from all others of the kind is in the fact that they are based on an investigation of the Financial System carried out with no reference whatsoever to any moral or prejudged issue involving the government, or control, of society. They were carried out, in fact, as all scientific investigation deserving the name is carried out, with the single aim of getting at the true facts. What you subsequently do with the facts is, as Professor Hill rightly says, not the investigator’s business.

It might be objected that Major Douglas, no more than Edwin Cannan, has stayed the growth of complexity, and it has to be admitted that so far he has not. But that is because society—the Good Citizen to whom Professor Hill deferred—decided on the advice of its Economic experts, to prefer what apparently seemed to it and them a moral necessity, *i.e.*, centralised government control, to the Truth, presumably as being safer, a decision with which on principle I have never been able to agree, and nothing I see going forward today encourages me to change my mind.

It seemed to me that Professor Meredith’s expressed outlook on things in general, which was not encouraging, only differed from that of most of the speakers in being more outspoken. All of them seemed to reflect the somewhat despondent mood of a society that is slowly contracting towards a condition of totalitarianism, in which, as in modern Russia, everything—art, literature, films, education, scientific research, and finally Truth itself—is approached from the moral and prejudged angle that to me, at least, appears so essentially un-Christian. “It will be a long time,” he fears, “before we feel like St. Paul that a new discipline has begotten a new and larger liberty.” But here again, I feel Professor Meredith still has in mind the *old moral discipline*; while what St. Paul specifically mentions is the New Discipline; something that comes far nearer to the discipline of simple, single, scientific thought and approach epitomized in the inductive method of research.

If Science stands for the facts *before* we decide what is the moral necessity, and that is all I am suggesting, and if that attitude is to be popularised, as I believe it must be, where more natural and fitting than that it should begin at the deliberations of the British Association? And who more proper to give that lead and example than Scientists as such, whose function it is to help to establish what Francis Bacon called “a just relationship between the mind and things?” The sort of discipline of mind and thought that should make it verbally impossible to pose such a question as Professor Hill’s, when he asks “. . . are we justified in doing good when the foreseeable result is evil?” which is equivalent to asking, Are we justified in getting into the train marked Edinburgh when we want to go to London? The answer to that is emphatically, No; not if we are scientists, and can read the signs of the times and, presumably, the labels on railway carriages.

PARLIAMENT—

(continued from page 3.)

cutions on a number of occasions and he has always firmly advised that they could not form the basis of a successful prosecution. They are not obscene within the meaning of the law. It has been suggested that it might be desirable to amend the definition of the word “obscene” and to extend it in some way to cover these publications.

I want to say a few words about the difficulty involved there. The hon. Member for Coventry, North referred to them as American comics—

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Hopkin Morris): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is approaching the sphere of legislation.

Sir H. Lucas-Tooth: I do not propose to suggest legislation. I am merely stating the law on this subject and the

difficulties which arise because of the law. I do not think that I shall step over the boundary Mr. Deputy-Speaker.

Lieut.-Colonel Marcus Lipton (Brixton): Perhaps it would help the hon. Gentleman if he made it clear that legislation on this subject is virtually impossible and that, therefore, his comments would come within the rules of order on Adjournment debates.

Sir H. Lucas-Tooth: The hon. and gallant Gentleman has anticipated what was in my mind.

The very phrase used—"American comics"—shows how impossible it is to define this type of publication. They are not American, as everyone agrees, and they certainly are not comics in any sense of the word.

Mr. Edelman: I think the actual term is "American-style comics."

Sir H. Lucas-Tooth: Even so, I think the expression "American-style comics" is quite inapt to describe these particular magazines.

It is true, of course, that attempts have been made in other countries—and the hon. Member for Coventry, North mentioned it in a Question the other day—to deal with this matter by Statute. In particular there is a Canadian Statute which bans

"Any magazine, periodical or book which exclusively or substantially comprises matter depicting pictorially the commission of crime, real or fictitious." Presumably, that is the best definition that the Canadian Legislature has been able to devise to deal with this subject.

I think it will be immediately obvious to hon. Members that, if there was such an Act on the Statute Book here, it would be quite inapplicable to deal with what we are now considering. If I remember rightly,

"Tom, Tom, the Piper's son,
Stole a pig and away he ran,"

and any child's book which had a picture of Tom and the pig would, by Statute, be obscene if we tried to implement such an Act here. Conversely, of course, a large number of the comics deal with matters which are not, in any sense, crimes. They contain loathsome pictures of warfare and violence, but not necessarily of criminal matters. If we tried to deal with that matter by legislation, we should only exclude a certain number of subjects and the others would appear just as before.

There have been other attempts made, but I can assure the House that they do not appear to be any more satisfactory, and I think it is fair to say that it is virtually impossible by statute to seek to define what it is that we want to control in this context.

Mr. Edelman: I wonder if the hon. Gentleman will give the House the benefit of his knowledge on the experience of Sweden, which, I believe, also banned the publication of this type of literature.

Sir H. Lucas-Tooth: I have made inquiries about that. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get the exact terms of the Swedish Act, but I am advised that it is in such terms, that, if it were on the Statute Book here, it would be treated as unenforceable by our courts. They have a different system of justice on the Continent of Europe and their interpretation of laws is generally of a less strict character than ours here, and it may be that what is possible

in Sweden in that respect is impossible here. I have not the exact words with me, but I am advised that the wording there would be quite inapt for our purpose here.

The other method by which Government action might be taken is to set up something in the nature of a censorship. Hon. Members opposite said very firmly that they were entirely against the censorship, and I was glad to hear it. I am certain that that would be the almost unanimous view of this House.

When it comes to making definite suggestions, a good deal of what they have suggested came very nearly to something like a censorship, and an analogy was made, I think by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. King), with the film censorship. He asked why we could not have something like that. May I say, in the first place, that the censorship of films, of course, only classifies films. There are the U, A and X films—Universal, Adults Only and Horrific. Of course, it might be possible with a very large staff to classify magazines and other literature of that sort in this country, but that would not get us very far.

The real essence of the film censorship is the ultimate power to forbid children or others to go into a cinema. It is quite easy to forbid a person to go into a building, whether it be a cinema or a public-house, but it is entirely different to forbid the sale of particular articles. I think that hon. Members will see on reflection that if one once starts to forbid the sale of particular articles as classified, one would at once have to have something like a licensing system for newsvendors and bookshops which would mean being two-thirds of the way on the road towards a general censorship of literature.

Therefore, the suggestions which have been made—and I have no doubt made in perfectly good faith—really imply that there would have to be something like a censorship set up. I believe, as the hon. Member for Coventry, North rightly said, that all censorships are either oppressive or ridiculous, or both, and that anything remotely approaching a censorship would be anathema to this House.

I beg the House to keep a sense of proportion with regard to this problem. At the risk of being charged with complacency, I think there has been some exaggeration of this matter. Take the case of Alan Poole, the Borstal absconder who shot a policeman and was himself then killed resisting arrest. In that case it was reported in the Press that he had a library of 50 of these comics. Indeed, a social worker said that he had a collection of over 300.

The Home Office were extremely interested in this matter. They did not take it for granted. We asked the police if we could have these publications so that we could see and try and trace the connection. But, in spite of all that publicity, we found that this particular lad had one "Western" in his possession, and that not a very alarming one. That was the position.

To demonstrate the misunderstanding, may I say that since I answered some Questions in this House on the subject I have had a considerable "fan mail" saying, "Stop these publications coming in." I think the hon. Member for Coventry, North would agree that the one thing I made perfectly plain in my answer was that we had stopped them. That shows that there is some misunderstanding and some exaggeration. It is easy to lay the blame for the present

quantity of juvenile crime on these publications, but I think it is evident from this debate that no real evidence of a direct connection has been brought forward. One can make assumptions, but we have no evidence.

I shall be glad to receive any evidence which any hon. Member can bring forward, and it will certainly receive the closest attention in the Home Office. I reiterate that the changing social and economic conditions of the country have thrown, and are throwing, a greater responsibility upon the Government in matters affecting moral welfare. Nevertheless, responsibility for the moral welfare of a child must primarily rest with its parents and teachers. There is a limit, and a proper limit, to what the law or a Government Department can do in this field. I have tried to indicate that that limit is a fairly narrow one. I believe it lies within the power of parents and of teachers to see that this undoubtedly unpleasant form of literature does little or no harm to our children.

Agriculture (Smallholdings)

Mr. Mitchison asked the Minister of Agriculture in what parishes the Northamptonshire County Council has acquired land for smallholdings under Part IV of the Agriculture Act, 1947; what acreage has been so acquired in each parish; what steps have been taken by the council towards providing smallholdings under Part IV; and how many smallholdings under part-time and full-time, have been provided in each parish and of what average acreage.

Sir T. Dugdale: Since Part IV of the Agriculture Act, 1947, came into operation the Northamptonshire County Council has purchased for smallholdings 171 acres of land previously held on lease, all within the Parish of Silverstone. When re-organised this land should provide four full-time holdings.

Proposals for the Council for the acquisition of land for smallholdings in the Parishes of Tansor, Southwick and Pattishall were not approved owing to the very high rate of loss involved or for other reasons. The Council has also submitted four proposals for improving existing holdings and a proposal to acquire five acres to add to an existing smallholding.

On 31st March, 1951, the Council had 34 full-time smallholdings on 2,469 acres and 55 part-time holdings on 1,048 acres. My Department has no information showing the distribution of these holdings by parishes.

Mr. Mitchison asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he will state, county by county, the acreage and number of smallholdings acquired and provided under Part IV of the Agriculture Act, 1947, during the first year after it came into force, and subsequently to the latest convenient date; and in each case what part of such acreage and number consists of part-time holdings.

Sir T. Dugdale: The First Annual Report on Smallholdings under the Agriculture Act, 1947, recently presented to Parliament, a copy of which I have sent to the hon. Member shows, county by county, the acreage acquired for smallholdings during the period from 1st October, 1949, to 31st March, 1951. In all 1,929 acres, of which 1,855 were purchased and the remainder hired, were acquired during the period and, in addition, 579 acres previously held

on lease were purchased.

The Report also shows the total number of smallholdings on 31st March, 1951. It is not possible to say how many of the holdings included in that number were actually provided on land acquired under the 1947 Act, since several schemes approved under the Act have not yet been completed, but when all the schemes approved during the period are completed some 91 new smallholdings should be provided. Other full-time smallholdings of the standards envisaged by the Smallholdings Advisory Council in their First Report have been provided by re-organising and equipping existing smallholdings properties, but information about these is not available.

Until statistics for the period 1st April, 1951, to 31st March, 1952, are available it is not possible to give the acreage and numbers of smallholdings acquired after 31st March, 1951. Since that date, and up to 30th June, 1952, schemes have been approved which, when completed, should provide 63 new full-time smallholdings on 2,832 acres.

No schemes for creating new part-time holdings have been approved.

Mr. Mitchison asked the Minister of Agriculture whether he will state, as regards each scheme submitted under Section 50 of the Agriculture Act, 1947, since it came into force, the name of the smallholdings authority, the dates of submission and approval and the total estimated cost of the proposals, respectively.

Sir T. Dugdale: The detailed information asked for is not readily available. From 1st October, 1949, when Part IV of the Agriculture Act, 1947, came into operation, to 30th June last, 589 schemes for providing new smallholdings or improving existing smallholdings have been approved under Section 50 of the Act. The total estimated cost of carrying out these schemes is £2,077,664. These figures exclude any schemes, costing less than £500 each, which smallholdings authorities have carried out without Exchequer grant.

Mr. Mitchison asked the Minister of Agriculture how many unsatisfied applicants for smallholdings there are in Northamptonshire.

Sir T. Dugdale: The latest number of applicants for county council smallholdings in Northamptonshire is 148. Of these 108 were considered suitable for interview. 58 have been interviewed so far, and 45 of these have been classified for preference in accordance with the Selection of Tenants Regulations.

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