



Review and Reflection

BY
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TAT TVAM ASI—it is you,” is an old Hindu saying, and refers to the sense of one’s identity with all else in the universe, so strong in the lore of India. We might ponder this a little in trying to understand the behaviour of some people in the world who bewilder and antagonise us.

A terrible deed is committed. We are shocked, and demand punishment. But when the full story is unravelled, we begin to understand. So it has been with the unfolding of Sirhan Sirhan’s story during his trial for the murder of Robert F. Kennedy. Sirhan’s background and experiences show that he was reacting above all as a human being. He is still guilty, but something has rubbed off and whispered to us disconcertingly “it is you.”

Recently an interesting article appeared in the press by John Braine, author of *Room at the Top*, explaining why he had switched from a belief in socialism to belief in conservatism. He revolted against what *seems* to be the “it is you” philosophy in socialism, that is, “the Left article of faith to be summed up in the phrase, ‘We are all guilty.’” The Pennine Moor murder case, says Braine, rid him forever of this belief. “When I was told, in one article, that those who wished to hang Myra Hindley and Ian Brady were guilty in exactly the same way, then something snapped inside my brain . . . I could only be held guilty for actions which either I had personally committed or which I had given my authority for or which I had allowed to be committed, having the authority to prevent them.”

This was the “key log,” says Braine, in his switch from socialism to conservatism. Often it happens that when one switches from one extreme he goes to the other extreme. On his way from Left to Right, it is a pity that Braine missed some important points.

The postulate of socialism that one has to make an admission of personal guilt for every dark deed in this world is, of course, artificial, ridiculous and impossible to sustain. But just as bad is its opposite belief, to put on blinkers, to stone sinners, to be well fed and yet to condemn the behaviour of a hungry man.

In his transition, Braine missed a whole spectrum, including the meaning of “There but for the grace of God go I.” The point is not that I am I and he is he, and he did it, not I. The point is that “he” is a human being

IT IS YOU

reacting to circumstances—and if I were to experience all those circumstances, I cannot swear that I would not behave in the same fashion. Although we are all different, we are also similar in a fundamental way, and this is what makes possible a science of human behaviour—including economics—which deals with the traits and tendencies we all have in common.

People are more susceptible to their immediate social environment than they realize or are willing to admit. “We catch our manners from one another as we catch colds,” says Shakespeare. From a distance and surrounded by people who agree with us, we deplore the racial policies of South Africa. But the South Africans speak of “boat converts,” quondam liberals who migrate to that country and adopt its racial mores with astonishing alacrity.

John Braine was sure he would not have been a Nazi if he had been in Hitler’s Germany. How can any one be sure? Recently a music critic discussed the release of a record of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, the work of a celebrated conductor under Hitler’s regime, recorded live. The reviewer was horrified to note that one could hear coughs, etc., in the audience. Those were *Nazi* coughs! How could such creatures sit and listen to such sublime music—the same music *we* enjoy? How indeed? Beethoven was German, Schiller was German, and the Nazis were sure they were the bearers of this superior culture to the world.

When one is surrounded by people of a particular sort, one tries almost unconsciously to please and not to appear to be too “far out,” for that is one of the basic traits of man, the social animal. I have seen an implacable foe of communism, finding himself at a social gathering with a group of Russian officials, behave in a conciliatory fashion, wishing to say or do nothing to offend them. *Tat tvam asi!*

Braine’s rule for acceptance of guilt is worth noting in one respect and that is when one gives authority for a bad deed, or having the authority, does not use it properly. In a sense, we the people are guilty for the dreadful things done by our governments. Most new legislation arouses our disgust, but have we done all that is needed to make the laws the way we want them?

During the Nazi occupation of Paris, a gauleiter who

fancied himself an art connoisseur visited Picasso. There in the master's studio was his newly-finished painting "Guernica," prompted by the Fascist bombing of that sad Spanish town. The gauleiter managed to murmur a compliment: "That is a fine painting you have done."

Politics of Urban Planning

PETER RHODES

ASK ANYONE what they consider to be the first need of every family and the answer is likely to be "somewhere decent and pleasant to live." In a society in which nearly everyone has what the sociologists call "middle class aspirations" the desire for a home is readily understood.

These aspirations are being capitalized by politicians throughout the western world. "Homes for everyone" is the tune played upon the vote-enticing drum, and all parties are committed to urban planning, offering a brighter vision for future generations. Smokeless cities, free-flowing traffic, idyllic park lands, thriving centres and cheap public transport are dangled like mirages before the electorate.

Mr. and Mrs. Everybody have long been encouraged to believe that everyone has a right to a modern house or appliance-packed bungalow. They see themselves and their children leading the lives of happy elegant families like those in television advertisements. Their prime ambition, it would seem, is to emulate the lives of the Californian extroverts featured in films. Such is the substance of dreams. To the successful middle class homeowner, however, the picture is a different one.

Encumbered by a mortgage which may account for 40 per cent. of his salary, the home-owner probably spends his summer evenings in the garden with his lawn mower. Most likely he thinks about how he is going to finance the family vacation, a replacement car, central heating for the winter, and new autumn outfits for his offspring. He is also likely to be troubled by distracting thoughts on rates, taxes and hire purchase commitments. So we find that most of those who are striving for the accepted "better things in life" will obtain them only at a cost of great personal effort, no mean sacrifice and continuing future obligations. Nevertheless, the vision is so pure that to many millions of people its achievement has become the prime aim in life.

Politicians of the Right traditionally base their faith on the market mechanism. When the market impetus slows down as land prices soar they leap to the rescue with tax concessions, subsidies and grants. In the long run these only have the effect of increasing land prices.

The politicians of the Left, however, being inherently

Picasso turned to him and said coldly: "I didn't do it; you did."

The next time our legislators come up with an idiotic law, if we can say "They didn't do it, I did," we will be one step closer to reform.

suspicious of the market, create their own monopoly in the form of publicly-subsidized and publicly-built housing. This often falls far short of the standards really desired, eliminates choice, warps the economic structure and provides measurable results only for the lucky recipients. Still the dream remains unfulfilled.

Yet another planner's "utopia" has recently been inflicted on a community—this time in New South Wales. The publication of the Sydney Regional Plan towards the end of last year was followed three days later by an announcement by the State Planning Authority of large immediate "releases" of non-urban land on the edge of existing developed areas. While political consideration is to be given in some form to the resultant change in the value of land, the large developers and speculators are moving in.

Whatever the merits of the plan (and some say that it has few, if any), the end result must be higher priced housing. Fortunately, in New South Wales the rating of site values tends to lower land prices to some extent, but the tax rates do not rise as fast as land prices. It still pays large companies to hold land vacant in the hope of increasing future returns.

From current reports it seems that the possible use of a Betterment Levy to recoup some of the land profits has been discarded following the miserable British experience. As Mr. J. M. Pullen wrote in the *Australian Planning Institute Journal* last year: "One thing is certain—a betterment levy operating in isolation is impracticable and to have any chance of success it must be combined with an extensive use of compulsory purchase, with the emphasis being on the latter." The Planning Commission, it seems, has ruled out such a combination, which in any event has little prospect of making land cheaper to buy. The advantages offered by the release of more land are inevitably seized by land owners or speculators leaving the would-be homeowner in the same



position as before. Meanwhile homes are becoming progressively more expensive and the dreams engendered by the politics of land-use planning dissolve into harsh reality.