

The Rise and Rise of Aggressive Secularism

We all have our favourite jokes about Political-Correctness, whether it is the urban legend about the banning of black bin-bags because they were considered “racist” or Ann Widdecombe’s riposte to a BBC producer who described her as “Chair”: “I am a Chairman, not a chair – I have never been sat upon!”

Most people regard Political-Correctness as a bit of a joke and a bit of a laugh, but in its serious consequences it is neither. Consider one of the most far-reaching consequences of PC in recent times: the Macpherson Enquiry which followed the murder of Stephen Lawrence. This is the enquiry which invented the ill-defined concepts “institutional racism” and “unconscious racism” and declared the police force to be institutionally racist. When sceptics asked for a justification for these tendentious neologisms, Lord Macpherson declared loftily,

“We do not pretend to produce a definition which will carry all argument before it”.

In other words, we won’t answer your awkward questions. Just like the secret police.

Worse, the MacPherson Enquiry went on to define a racist incident as:

“..any incident so described by the victim, *or any other person*”.

This too is meaningless of course, but it is the catch-all, you’re-guilty-even-when-you’re-innocent terminology of the gulag. If *anything* can be legitimately described as a racist incident, then when I ask you if you’d like a cup of tea, you can report me to the race relations authorities. Meaningless jargon, politically-correct or not, is not merely spurious: when a meaningless expression is made the basis of a law of the land it is a prescription for confusion and chaos. Certainly the definition of a racist incident set out by Macpherson is incoherent and as such cannot reasonably stand as the basis for law-making. But it does and so makes us all victims of an insane procedure. Badly-framed legal definitions damage our whole society and undermine our way of life.

Among those who dared criticise the Macpherson Report, William Hague, former Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition, said:

“It has led to every police officer in Britain being branded a racist.” Hague promised to “...take on and defeat the liberal elite that has never trusted the police force and now wants us to believe they are all racists”.

There is racial prejudice in Britain today, but is it as widespread and ingrained as the race-relations industry makes out? “Institutional racism” is a systematically vague expression. It is relatively easy to demonstrate racial prejudice in an individual, but how would you go about showing that a whole institution such as the police force or, as Archbishop Sentamu has said, The Church of England, is guilty of this crime?

And the PC obsession with race leads to some bizarre consequences: for example, murder is bad – or as Orwell, who understood the lying manipulation of language for political purposes better than anyone, defined it “doubleplusungood”. But “racially-aggravated murder” is worse and actually attracts a more severe sentence. I wonder if the worst suffering of the victim of a drive-by-shooting as he lies in a pool of his own blood is the echo of his assailant’s insult, “White bastard!”? Bizarrely, racially aggravated murder is one of those events which comes under the category of “hate crime” – as if other criminal acts were perpetrated out of affection and love. It is this sort of example which conclusively demonstrates the absurdity of PC.

The PC category of racism does not allow us to speak the truth. If you say, rightly, that black athletes on the whole run faster than white athletes, that is acceptable. But if you say that ninety per cent of the gun crime in Britain is perpetrated by black men, you will be in trouble. It is facts like these which demonstrate the socially-destructive power of PC – for no society can be secure when it deliberately and constantly misleads itself about what is actually going on in that society.

Lies are the original house built on sand. And the house built on sand cannot endure when the rough weather comes. Of course we have free speech in this country – it’s just that we’re not allowed to say things that are officially disapproved. “Democracy” was once cynically defined as “Say what you like but do what you’re told”. Now even the saying is banned. As I write, David Coleman, Professor of Demography at Oxford, is being hounded because he has ventured to criticise the PC line on immigration – that it is always beneficial to this country and a fine thing, above criticism. Professor Coleman said:

“It seems to me to lead to the creation of an establishment consensus in the respectable media and elsewhere, intolerant of dissenting interpretations, regarding them as almost axiomatically to be heretical or malevolent.”

My only question to Professor Coleman is to ask him why he thought the “almost” to be necessary in that sentence. Professor Coleman does not deny that much immigration is beneficial: he is merely questioning whether *all* immigration is beneficial. And for this he is pilloried. Not only does PC not allow us to state the truth concerning many social issues, but it does not even allow us to *ask* what the truth might be in a particular case. This is totalitarianism and it is operated according to the apparatus of PC: the control of our thoughts and speech by an establishment elite. To say this is not exaggeration, scare-mongering or ranting. There are many instances, such as the one featuring Professor Coleman, in which dissidents from the PC line are gagged, shouted down or even prosecuted and forced out of their jobs.

In the dogmatic system of PC, racism has a twin called “sexism”. This is an artificial construct which at some time in the 1960s and 1970s began to replace chivalry and good manners in the definition of attitudes towards women. No one denies that the emancipation of women was and is a good thing, but political and social emancipation were only interim goals for the PC feminists. They demand absolute equality. But this is logically impossible, for equality can only be between things that are alike. And we have noticed that, while men and women share a common humanity, they are not alike in certain crucial respects.

Women are made for childbearing. Why should it be contentious to say this? It is just a fact of life. And with childbearing comes child-rearing – a task which traditionally belongs more to the woman than to the man. The reason for this is not that every civilisation known to history has deliberately sought to imprison women in the home: it is because women are naturally suited to child-rearing – which is not to say that men may not play their part in this activity.

I have defended women as child-bearers and child-raisers on ontological grounds, and of course I accept the fact that not everyone will agree with this approach. But even on the practical and utilitarian grounds – so beloved elsewhere by modern moralists – there are good reasons for thinking that absolute equality of function between men and women in the running of the family is not a good thing. It is an idealist's dream that a woman with two children under the age of four should be free to leave the family and join the army – or even set herself up as a full time member of a peace-movement. There are practical consequences if she does. Someone else – another woman? - has to be engaged to look after the children. Besides, is it best for the well-being of the family if mothers and children are separated and surrogates are brought in? Perhaps it is. But that is not the point: the point is that PC does not even allow us to ask this sensible question. Because PC is not a range of policies developed in response to circumstances: it is an ideology, a prejudice. And even – especially – a society based on utilitarian principles should take account of the facts.

PC is sometimes taken to be simply the codification of modern manners. The world has changed and sensitivities have become more refined. We are said to have “moved on.” So, for example, attitudes and conduct which would have passed without comment a generation ago are now rightly outlawed as offensive to women, for instance, or to ethnic minorities. This programme is presented as modern, liberated and high-minded, but in reality it is something else entirely, something nasty and subversive of our established way of life.

Wittgenstein said, “Change a language and you change a world”. And this is what PC has achieved. It has done so in the manner predicted by George Orwell in his novel *1984* – that is by abolishing disapproved words so that they become literally *unthinkable* while a list of approved neologisms becomes compulsory. PC is not innocent, neutral and fair-minded. It is a way of banishing dissent, made all the worse by the pretence to be doing this out of fair-minded and “liberating” motivation. In short, PC is a form of linguistic dictatorship and social conditioning – made more dangerous by its subtlety, its appeal to our better nature and the admonition that it is all being done for our own good. You might call PC “dictatorship-lite”. I will give some examples of its perniciousness.

There are many aspects of PC which appear benign, even enlightened. Who, for example, could object to the coining of more kindly expressions to refer to people who suffer physical and mental adversity? So in the modern world there are no blind people, nor deaf nor intellectually retarded – only the partially-sighted, the hearing-impaired and those with learning difficulties. There are mildly amusing unintended consequences of these innovations. For they change our traditional and conversational language of simile and metaphor: you can't really say, “As partially-sighted as a bat”; “As hearing-impaired as a post”; and “With the learning difficulties of three short planks”.

It may be argued that this impoverishment of common speech is more than made up for by the more enlightened and humane new references to those who are physically or mentally disabled. But euphemisms rarely do any good, for they gloss over what is hard and cruel with the result that the weasel words prevent us from seeing the harsh aspects of the world as they really are. You would be inclined to have more sympathy for a man described as “blind” rather than one who is *only* “partially-sighted” – which doesn’t sound so bad. Our deepest pity needs to be stirred if we are to go to the aid of an injured, disabled or poverty-stricken person. But it is precisely our pity which is undermined by weasel words and phrases which imply that the actual suffering is not so very severe. So when PC enthusiasts declare that their euphemistic neologisms are the way to create “a more compassionate society”, their method is in opposition to their stated aim.

And sometimes PC euphemisms go so far as to destroy meaning altogether – as we saw in the case of The Macpherson Report. For instance, once there were some people who were “poor”. But “poor” sounds derogatory or patronising, so now there are no poor but only “underprivileged”. This is nonsensical, for it implies that – after the banning of “poor” – there are only left to us various degrees of “privilege”: the “underprivileged”, the “overprivileged” and the rest who, we are obliged to conclude, are merely “privileged”. This is to render language meaningless. And to do this is not a small matter.

It is ironical that the PC generation which does not believe in *personal* guilt – every man responsible for his own sins – yet makes us all share a *corporate* guilt which has no cause in fact and therefore for which confession makes no logical sense. This illogical view of moral responsibility permeates the whole of life after PC. So, for instance, I am fat not because I eat too much and take no exercise: I am only “suffering from” obesity. It is suggested that my fatness is not my responsibility – though of course I must be called to account for the bombing of Dresden which happened before I was born.

The world of medicine, and especially of psychology and psychiatry, has been redesigned according to the canons of PC. There are PC ailments and diseases. In 2005 a man aged eighteen murdered his parents, took their credit cards and ran off to a posh hotel in New York with his girlfriend. When his case eventually came to court, he was acquitted of murder because it was said he was “suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder”. What’s the difference between NPD and being a scheming murderer? In this way, PC removes all occasions for justifiable personal guilt and tries to inculcate a spurious corporate guilt over matters concerning which we could never have had any influence.

Where did Political-Correctness Come From?

PC is not an accidental mutation in the development of society and culture: it is a change in what T.S. Eliot called “sensibility”, in the unconscious presuppositions which, while they themselves go unexamined, form the mores of culture and society. I believe that PC originated in modern times in the work and ambitions of a radical political group, the Institute for Marxism which became known as the Frankfurt School. Patrick J. Buchanan in his book *The Death of the West* says,

“Political-Correctness is cultural Marxism. In a third of a century, what was denounced as the counterculture has become the dominant culture, and what was the dominant culture has become a dissident culture, an ideological state, a soft tyranny where the new orthodoxy is enforced not by police agents, but by inquisitors of the popular culture”.

I would only amend this to include police agents. What else, when the police are called to schools to arrest children for calling one another “racist” names – as happened in at least one state school in Britain in 2007. In another recent incident, police in London removed the barbed wire which residents had put up over the roof of a block of flats after a series of burglaries: it was to be understood that the barbed wire presented a danger to the burglar in the course of his occupation – as if it were a form of the restriction of trade.

The precursors and originators of the Frankfurt School included Georg Lukacs (1885-1971) who declared, “I saw the revolutionary destruction of society as the one and only solution” – where the solution was the overthrow of Western capitalism. But, as Buchanan, points out, it was not economic capitalism which stood in the way of the revolutionaries’ ambitions but the ancient order that underlay it:

“Marx had been wrong. Capitalism was not impoverishing the workers. Indeed their lot was improving and they had not risen in revolution because their souls had been saturated in two thousand years of Christianity. Unless and until Christianity and Western culture, the immune system of capitalism, were uprooted from the soul of Western man, Marxism could not take root. In biblical terms, the word of Marx had fallen on rock-hard Christian soil and died”.

Lukacs saw the necessity for the destruction of Christian civilisation and he advocated “demonic ideas” in the spread of “cultural terrorism”. It is to Lukacs therefore that I am indebted for the title of this book. Lukacs was Hungarian, an agent of the Comintern and he set up a schools programme in which children were instructed in free love, and sexual intercourse while being taught that the family was an outdated institution along with monogamy and all manifestations of religion. His aim was to undermine the family by promoting licentiousness among women and children and so weaken the basis of Christian living.

Buchanan prophesied accurately the means by which the new order would become established: “Contraception, sterilisation, abortion and euthanasia – the four horsemen of the culture of death.”

Another of these cultural revolutionaries and nihilistic iconoclasts was the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who noticed that the Russian people had not been converted to Communism: rather, they hated it. Gramsci called for “a long march through the institutions” – the arts, the cinema, education, theological seminaries, the mass media and the new medium of radio. Gramsci became fashionable among the *radical chic* revolutionaries of the 1960s and 70s, among them Charles Reich who revealed Gramsci’s influence on him in his best-selling, *The Greening of America*:

“There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will

not require violence to succeed and it cannot be successfully resisted with violence. It is now spreading with amazing rapidity and already our laws, institutions and social structures are changing in consequence.”

Victory in the culture wars was guaranteed once Christianity had died in the soul of Western man. This was happening at a speed which the revolutionaries could hardly have imagined in their most optimistic moments. I described the conflict as “culture wars”. In fact there was only a phoney war, as Christian civilisation surrendered as soon as the first shots were fired. The method of the nihilists was an ideology of perpetual change, the human spirit the subject and victim of endless malleability. This method found its rationale in the doctrine of “absolute historicism” – which meant that all morals, values and standards were products of the age. There are no absolute moral standards and morality itself should be seen as something which is “socially constructed”.

The leading light – one is tempted to say misleading darkness – of the 1960s revolution was Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) who invented Critical Theory whose supporters repeated over and over again the slogans that Western societies are racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi. The fundamental ambition of Critical Theory was the mass inculcation of “cultural pessimism” and “alienation” wherein, as Buchanan says, “A people, though prosperous and free, comes to see its society and country as oppressive, evil and unworthy of affection and love.”

Marcuse knew that past revolutions had prospered by the use of rallying oratory and persuasive books, but he believed drugs and sex were better weapons. In his book *Eros and Civilisation* he called for the universal embrace of the Pleasure Principle – derived of course from Freud – and the creation of a world of “polymorphous perversity”. It was like the trumpet call of the pagans and bacchanalians who stirred the Israelites to the licentiousness of the Golden calf while Moses was up the mountain talking with God. His famous slogan caught on worldwide; “Make love, not war”

Marcuse’s colleague, Wilhelm Reich produced a hugely successful movie *WR The Mysteries of the Organism* which argued “There is no political revolution without first a sexual revolution”. The sexual revolution was simply the abolition of traditional Christian morality and the family.

The western world seemed to be full of antinomian gurus, radical chic professional people who used their respected positions in society to undermine society. These included Timothy Leary (1920-1996), the anti-psychologist who preached the virtues of the psychedelic drug LSD and nihilism:

“My advice to people today is as follows: If you take the game of life seriously, if you take your nervous system seriously, if you take your sense organs seriously, if you take the energy process seriously, you must turn on, tune in, and drop out.”

That is to say, life, beyond the pleasure principle, is meaningless.

It was no argument to point to the fact that the Western societies denounced as tyrannical and oppressive by the cultural revolutionaries were actually so free and accommodating that even its

declared mortal enemies and those who worked for its destruction were able to speak and write freely.

This was a great success among the student radicals and hippies in Europe and the USA in the 1960s and 70s – a generation privileged and pampered beyond all its predecessors, which came to pity itself as oppressed and downtrodden by “authority.” I was an undergraduate at Liverpool University at the time and I remember the sit-ins and trying to find out what these were about. I was told that the students were protesting their sit-ins because “The authorities are keeping secret files on us all.”

“How do you know? What evidence have you got?”

“We can’t know and there is no evidence available – because the files are secret”

Secret files and non-existent files: the identity of indiscernibles.

Those decades too saw the origin of the therapeutic state, in which sin was redefined as illness, crime was only aberrant behaviour and psychoanalysis and even the anti-psychiatry of such as Thomas Szasz and Wilhelm Reich became intellectually fashionable and culturally influential. In a revaluation of all values, the movies and TV discovered new heroes and new villains. William Lind of the Free Congress Foundation commented:

“The entertainment industry has wholly absorbed the ideology of cultural Marxism and preaches it endlessly not just in sermons but in parables: strong women beating up weak men; children wiser than their parents; corrupt clergymen thwarted by carping drifters; upper class blacks confronting the violence of lower class whites; manly homosexuals who lead normal lives. It is all fable, an inversion of reality, but the entertainment industry made it seem more real than the world that lies just beyond the front door.”

Roger Kimball, writing in his own journal *New Criterion* – worthy successor to Eliot’s *The Criterion* – says:

“The long march through the institutions signified in the words of Marcuse, ‘working against the established institutions while working in them’. By this means – by insinuation and infiltration rather than by confrontation – the counter-cultural dreams of radicals like Marcuse have triumphed.”

Traditional Christian culture is now, in Gertude Himmelfarb’s words, only “a dissident culture”.

This produces in many thoughtful people a spirit of desperation bordering on incredulity – such a man is Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and leader of the catholic Church in Britain who asked in his Corbishley Lecture on 28th march 2007, “What kind of culture are we developing which wants increasingly to divorce religion from the public forum?” And he warned, “Religious freedom is not a by-product of democracy but a driving force of it.”

The Cardinal explains exactly why the attempt to base democracy on absolute relativism is a contradiction in terms:

“Relativism takes its stand on a desire for equal treatment of different beliefs in the conviction that these beliefs are relative. Yet in contradictory fashion it does so because of a belief in human equality and human dignity which are not relative values. Relativism is no friend of true democracy. By banishing religion from the public realm in the name of equality, it discounts religious perspectives from debate, banishes truth to a private sphere, labels it ‘religious’ and infers it to be irrational. But in fact truth is not something we construct. It is something we seek together. And there can only be a democratic discussion when truth is a matter of universal concern.”

There has been here and there an almost apocalyptic flavour to this chapter and I make no apologies for it, because I believe our situation is dire. But it takes an apparently benign and inconsequential example to reveal just how far our whole culture, civilisation and way of life has been permeated and taken over by the social revolution that is PC. On the face of it, nothing is more benign and respectable than a late afternoon books programme on Radio Four.

One week early in 2007 the guests on this show were discussing their favourite books and they enthused over Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Scoop!* Beyond the short discussion about literary style, plot etc, there arose the question, “But, when you were reading it, how did you deal with its political-incorrectness?”

And they all replied, “Oh I just had to ignore it, put it on one side and regard it as a thing of its time”.

Those nice people on that books programme really and truly believe that our generation has made moral progress over Waugh’s – that views expressed in *Scoop* might have been excused in their day as belonging to a poor, primitive and unprogressed era, but that nowadays, since the coming of the secular gospel of Political-Correctness, we are all so much better and more enlightened. People like so to think of themselves. That is why PC has found such an enthusiastic reception. But it has been the language of the social and cultural revolution which has replaced Christian civilisation.