

Topical BOOKS

Editor: Ian Mitchell
Editorial Assistant: Pavel Marek
Business Manager: Hazel Johnstone

Published by:

Topical BOOKS Ltd
 The Cogitorium
 Tarbert
 Argyll PA29 6XX

Tel: 0880 820206
Fax: 0880 820864

Printed by:

CWS Printers
 35 Bogmoor Place
 Shieldhall
 Glasgow G51 4TL

Distributed by:

Scotmail
 420 Swanston Street
 Glasgow G40 4HW

ISSN: 0960-7927

All material © Topical BOOKS Ltd 1990

Submissions: Topical BOOKS welcomes submissions from subscribers. Please send a stamped, addressed envelope if you wish your manuscript returned. Overseas readers should send disposable manuscripts (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons.

Subscriptions: Topical BOOKS is available on subscription at £8.50 for one year's enjoyment (4 issues) from the address above. An application form is on the order insert at the back.

Ordering: All books reviewed in Topical BOOKS may be ordered through the magazine (see the order insert at the back).

Cover picture

From 'Arthur Rackham – A Life with Illustrations' by James Hamilton. This is one of the most beautiful books we have ever received. Not only does it contain a full biography of an extraordinarily interesting man (fully annotated, with a complete bibliography etc.), it also reproduces a multitude of his paintings and sketches. It is all done at a standard of quality which is evidence of a deep love of the subject.

Published by Pavilion at £25.00 in hardback. 195pp ISBN: 1 85145 531 0

The new quarterly magazine for the bookshop browser

What we've got for you this time

Picasso and Warhol

Two outrageous egotists and the wierd way they treated their friends.
 Was obsession with art a sufficient excuse? 6

J.R. Ackerley

The outrageous life of the first animal rights campaigner 10

The English abroad

Ireland and the inner roots of the enterprise culture 12

Sex in Hollywood

How the star system operated 'at the sharp end' 15

Cricketing mythology

Was the game an art, a social discipline or just a sport? 16

The power of the Press

The history of the political ambitions of the great newspaper magnates 18

Lies, suspicion and falsehood

How the business community keeps watch on 'subversives' 20

Einstein and the garden shed

How a modern inventor has broken the laws of science more radically than the famous Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies. Or has he? 22

The richest woman on the planet

Britain and the Monarchy 25

Fun in the fresh air

The freedom of the open road and of the high seas 26

Ian Hislop

Ian Mitchell interviews the editor of Private Eye 32

The Mafia

Do the Sicilians or the Americans control the world heroin trade? 34

Science fiction

Jack Vance's *Lyonesse Trilogy* examined 37

Poetry

Dannie Abse, Simon Armitage, Peter Sansom and Hilary Mellon 39

Irish jokes

Flann O'Brien, Brian O'Nolan and, of course, Myles na Gopaleen 42

Life in the dull lane

The appalling diaries of Tony Benn 46

And there's much more besides...

Who's reading your dossier now?

THE ECONOMIC LEAGUE

by Mark Hollingsworth and Charles Tremayne

The National Council for Civil Liberties £3.95, 130pp paperback ISBN:0 946 08835 7

ASTROLOGY: TRUE OR FALSE?

by Roger B. Culver and Philip A. Ianna

Prometheus Books £9.50, 228pp paperback ISBN: 0 87975 483 4

THE BOOK OF THE FALLACY

A Training Manual For Intellectual Subversives

by Madsen Pirie

Routledge £4.95, 192pp paperback ISBN:0 7102 0521 X

The Economic League was set up in 1919, and, according to the authors, has been instrumental in denying many tens of thousands of people their livelihoods by secretly blacklisting them. Hundreds of firms who subscribe to the League, from Bass Charrington to ICI to the Yorkshire Bank, as well as many smaller companies, buy information on the (mostly political) activities of job applicants. Almost invariably, the job seekers have leftist leanings, some of them belonging to or having belonged to such subversive and anti-British organisations as the Child Poverty Action Group, the Low Pay Unit and the Labour Party.

Hollingsworth and Tremayne claim that the League, as well as keeping dossiers on tens of thousands of people, also advises its clients against employing 'subversives', 'troublemakers' and the like, which means anyone on their list, basically.

This, the authors say, is undemocratic and incompatible with all concepts of decency, freedom and fair play, a cry which is echoed by the publishers of this book. In the introduction they state: "The National Council for Civil Liberties (Liberty) was founded in 1934 on the basis of a number of fundamental premises, one of which was to protect and safeguard the freedom of each individual not to be discriminated against on political grounds."

Which is true enough; unfortunately they forget to mention that in 1984, this same organisation decided that 'racists' and 'fascists' had no such rights, and have refused to defend National Front supporters for example. The term McCarthyism is also a slur, not against the Economic League, but

against Senator Joseph McCarthy. Far from conducting a 'witch hunt' as is always parroted by the press, McCarthy in fact purged the State Department of communists and fellow travellers; it is largely forgotten now that of the 57 'subversives' he identified in the State Department, 54 resigned rather than face a Loyalty Board.

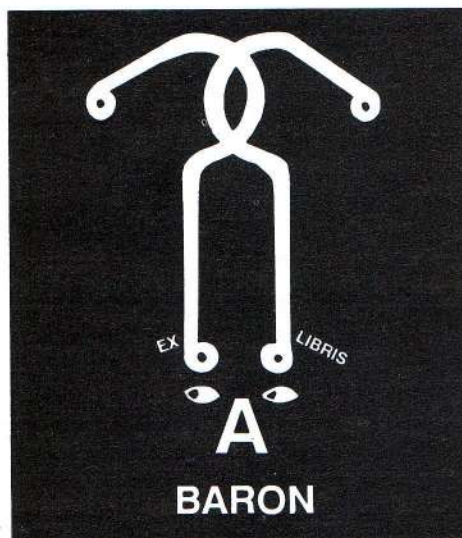
Nevertheless, the fact that 'fascists' *et al.* are denied their civil liberties and livelihoods, does not make the victimising of 'leftists' any the more palatable, indeed it compounds the injustice; and the fact that the Economic League's dossiers are at times wildly inaccurate compounds it further. The authors cite the cases of two men, both labourers from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, said to have been members of the Communist Party in Middlesborough. Both claim neither to have been communists nor to have been to Middlesborough. There are

many other instances of sloppy 'intelligence gathering', including collecting names from petitions and the radical press.

The book raises more questions than it answers, and furthermore, does not put most of them formally. Surely employers should be allowed to vet employees for certain posts? One is reminded here of the hullabaloo that has gone up in recent years when several dubious characters have obtained employment as social workers – only to use their positions to abuse children. Perhaps this is not quite the same thing, but the real problems here are information (or rather disinformation) and lack of accountability.

The strength of the book is that it not only catalogues a series of probable, and in some cases unarguable, injustices, but that it also suggests real solutions. Under public pressure, many companies, including all the high street banks, have already ceased to subscribe to the League. An amendment to the Data Protection Act and an Access To Information (Blacklist) Bill would also be steps in the right direction. Unfortunately, the Economic League is only one head of a modern Hydra; who knows how many others will appear when this one is finally severed?

Astrology: True or False? is a fully revised and updated reprint of *The Gemini Syndrome*. Published by a leading sceptical publisher, and written in an easily readable style by two professors of astronomy, this book is partly sceptical enquiry and partly popular science. If it has one



fault it is its tendency to fly off at tangents, discoursing on philosophy, history and the scientific method. I find this slightly off-putting, but for readers without a grounding in quantum theory and formal logic it will be helpful. The major strength of the book is that, although not entirely devoid of humour, it avoids sneering, jeering and making sarcastic remarks: a trap into which many sceptics and debunkers fall.

Dispassionately, the authors dissect every aspect of astrology from its early origins down to the present day. In the introduction they state point blank that, whatever else it may be, astrology is *not* a science. Then they prove this statement at every turn. The roots of astrology are examined; it turns out to have less in common with astronomy than is generally believed. The astrological houses and precession are discussed; the possibility of planetary bodies exerting an influence over living creatures on Earth is considered, and sound scientific reasons are given why they don't; the force of gravity exerted on a newborn baby by its mother is 20 times greater than the planet Mars; the force of the hospital building is nearly a million times greater.

The effect of the Moon is discussed; the Moon causes tidal effects in the oceans – couldn't it affect fluids in the human body too? The authors explain the tidal effect and debunk lunacy, the full moon's relation to crime, madness, etc. More crimes, they say, are committed at weekends than under a

full moon; the prosaic explanation is that people get tanked up on Friday nights and generally have more time on their hands than during the week. The Moon is found to have an effect on the behaviour of nocturnal insects: there are fewer of them about at full moon. But again, there is a prosaic explanation: predators can't see them so easily in the dark.

Personal horoscopes are analysed, and readings score no better than chance would dictate; the work of the Gauquelins is discussed; astrology is tested in practice as well as in theory, and, as one might expect, it fails miserably every time. Thus we read about how, in 1977, "The President will release detailed government records which will prove conclusively that we have been visited by beings from other planets." Did he? A total of 3011 predictions made by leading astrologers over a five year period are analysed; 338 (a mere 11%) were fulfilled. Most of them, one imagines, could have been made just as easily with no astrological 'knowledge' whatsoever.

The authors end with a challenge to professional astrologers to make one of ten meaningful, successful predictions or divinations under scientifically-controlled conditions: to identify 27 of 30 violent criminals from 60 individuals, given their birth data; to predict the high point and low point of the Dow-Jones Index to within one day/one year ahead, etc. They have found no takers so far.

Although written mostly from an American viewpoint, this is probably the best book debunking astrological quackery to date, and is therefore a welcome addition to the sceptic's bookshelf, wherever he lives. The authors wonder why in spite of its millennia-long record of failure, astrology has any devotees at all. Two thousand years ago, enlightened men were wondering the same thing.

"I recall a multitude of prophecies which the Chaldeans made to Pompey, to Crassus and even to Caesar himself (now lately deceased), to the effect that no one of them would die except in old age, at home and in great glory. Hence it would seem very strange to me should anyone, especially at this time, believe in men whose predictions he sees disproved every day by actual results."

What more can one ask of a book than that it be educational, thought-provoking and fun to read? In *The Book Of The Fallacy*, Madsen Pirie, Secretary of MENSAs, focuses his mighty IQ on the problem of thinking – more particularly on how *not* to think. Although it is written in an easy-to-read, slightly irreverent style, it does have a serious message: every argument must be judged and every decision made on merit. Which means *all* the facts must be gathered and analysed dispassionately, rationally and as objectively as possible.

BLASTS!

A NEW SERIES OF PAMPHLETS FROM THE CLARIDGE PRESS:

Two years ago Chatto & Windus stirred the air of debate with its series of pamphlets called *Counter Blasts*, designed to challenge the received ideas of the world we live in. Almost without exception, the series has trotted out the predictable views of the left-wing liberal establishment, and hardly an *Idée reçue* has been challenged in its pages. We begin our answer to these paltry effusions with one of the last texts prepared for publication by Peter Fuller before his tragic death earlier this year. Commissioned as a *Counter Blast*, *Left High and Dry* was rejected by Chatto, perhaps because it is a genuine challenge to the orthodoxies that the other pamphlets have upheld. In BLASTS the reader will encounter what was promised but not delivered by Chatto: challenges to the prevailing climate of opinion.

Peter Fuller: *Left High and Dry*

October 1990, approx. 40 pp. £4.50 paperback (inc. p.& p.) ISBN: 1 870626 36 2

FORTHCOMING:

Anthony O'Hear against Education
Roger Scruton against Equality
David Marsland against the Health Service
David Pryce-Jones against the trendy novelists

Obtainable through your local bookseller, or direct from:
The Claridge Press, 6 Linden Gardens, London W2