

# Ages in Chaos by Samuel Francis

*"In history the way of annihilation is invariably prepared by inward degeneration. . . . Only then can a shock from the outside put an end to the whole."*

—Burkhardt

**Treason in Tudor England: Politics and Paranoia** by Lacey Baldwin Smith, Princeton: Princeton University Press; \$25.00.

**Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt** by Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$22.95.

Discussion of treason has become almost impossible without quoting Sir John Harington's famous couplet, "Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason? / For if it prosper, none dare call it treason." Lacey Baldwin Smith quotes it as the epigraph of the first chapter of his learned and entertaining study of treason in 16th-century England, and various snatches of the lines have been used for several book titles in recent years. The popularity of Harington's poem may be due not only to the seeming ubiquity of betrayal in the 20th century but also to the revival of the world view that it reveals.

Harington's cynical insight contains a statement about human nature and, more deeply, about truth: men will not condemn the victors, even if their victory is won by treachery. Hermann Goering, among other celebrities of the 20th century, understood this precept; when asked by the official psychiatrist at the Nuremberg trials to write something appropriate on the copy of his indictment for war crimes, the former Reichsmarschall scribbled, "The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused."

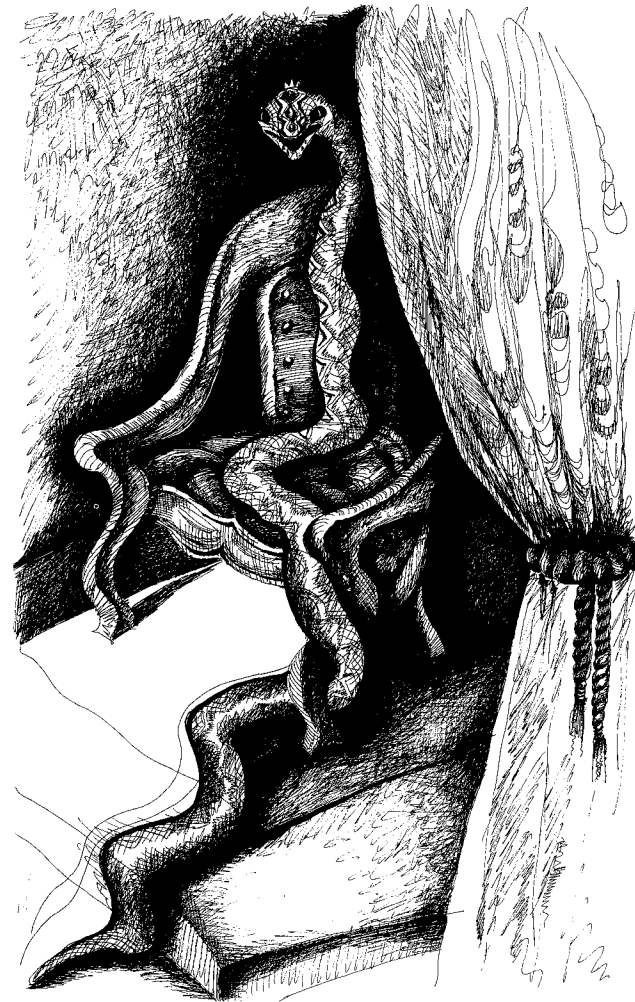
Harington's lines also suggest that the meaning of treason is itself relative — one man's traitor is another

man's patriot — and the linguistic nominalism implicit in the couplet recalls Humpty Dumpty's counsel to Alice. Can words mean what you want them to mean? asked the small Victorian girl. But of course, said Dumpty, and they must mean what you want them to mean if your will is to prevail, which, after all, is the most important thing. Harington's simple doggerel thus contains the germ of a philosophy (or an antiphilosophy) not very pleasant, to be sure, but strikingly similar to ideas that have been current throughout much of our own century: the universe has neither purpose nor meaning; values are entirely subjective; and all that matters is who wins. Whether Harington himself subscribed to this creed or simply offered it as a sarcastic commentary on his age I do not know, but enough of his contemporaries and ours did and do adhere to it to account for the drastic deflation in the price of loyalty that characterizes both eras.

In his account of the problem of loyalty and disloyalty in 16th-century England, Mr. Smith is acutely aware of the similarities in the two ages, though he tends to be somewhat cavalier toward treason. While acknowledging that the century was "not clinically paranoid," he assures us that it did manifest many of the symptoms of "the paranoid cognitive response to life," whose central feature is "the conviction that things are never as they appear to be — a greater and generally more sinister reality exists behind the scenes — and the corollary that what is standing hidden in the wings, prompting, manipulating, but always avoiding exposure to the footlights, is the presence of evil." Mr. Smith presents a considerable body of evidence from literary sources to substantiate his view, but he seems somewhat to forget that in the days of Henry VIII, Queen Mary, and Elizabeth I, there was often good reason to believe that things were not what they

seemed.

The political revolution that occurred on Bosworth Field in 1485 brought to power a dynasty (Tudors) that for over a century had problems reproducing heirs, eliminating rivals, and securing the allegiance of its subjects, mighty and miniscule. This uncertainty was compounded by the religious revolution of the Reformation and the persistent struggles among Catholic, high Protestant, and Puritan factions. There was also an economic upheaval called the "Price Revolution," in which the prices of goods doubled between 1550 and 1600 (caused by a growing population and aggravated by the inflation that followed of gold and silver from new South American and Central European mines). Finally, there was the intellectual revolution, headed by, among others, Copernicus, Machiavelli, Luther and Calvin, and Bodin, which challenged the bases of political and social loyalties. It is therefore not surprising that men of the



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period kept their options open and their powder dry as they cast about for something and someone to adhere to. Mr. Smith correctly notes that "the proper study of treason . . . is the study of the entire sink and puddle of sixteenth-century politics." Also correctly, he dwells on the ineptitude of Tudor traitors, who often detailed their conspiracies in letters to each other and entertained grandiose visions of what they could accomplish with a purse of gold and a few bodkins, only to wind up on rack and scaffold after their harebrained schemes were discovered by Mr. Secretary Walsingham. For all the influence Machiavelli is supposed to have had on the politics of the century, the plotters should have read him more carefully. The longest chapter in the Florentine's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius* deals with conspiracies, but the burden of his advice is that conspiracies hardly ever succeed and are at least as dangerous to those who hatch them as to the states against which they are directed.

But it was not mainly Machiavelli whom the plotters of the period read. Mr. Smith surveys the court literature of the Tudor era and finds in it the elements of societal paranoia. Treatises on how to advance one's career at court openly counseled spying, blackmail, mendacity, flattery, braggadocio, cultivating the right friends, and avoiding getting caught. Mr. Smith compares this literature to such contemporary classics as Robert Ringer's *Winning Through Intimidation*, an exemplar of a genre which chain booksellers now devote entire sections to. Inevitably followed a few years later by other volumes with titles such as *Why Do I Feel Lonely?* what Mr. Smith calls the "soulless," antisocial quality of such 20th-century reading for young managers on the make lacks the "free, demonic spirit" that characterized Mr. Ringer's predecessors at the court of the Tudors. "The ethics of loyalty today," writes Mr. Smith,

have little meaning for the upwardly mobile success hunter, for loyalty can "be too easily simulated or feigned by those most desirous of winning." Where the twentieth and the sixteenth century part company, however, is in the concept of

the enemy as the villain who seeks the destruction of his opponent for his own sake. In Robert Ringer's *Winning Through Intimidation* . . . "the game of business is played in a vicious jungle," but that jungle is filled with impersonal types, not with depraved and personal enemies.

The "sink and puddle" of 20th-century politics in relation to treason has been agonizingly appraised in a small library of books from Whittaker Chambers and Rebecca West to Allen Weinstein and Ronald Radosh. Once dismissed as right-wing fantasy or political opportunism, concern over the loyalties of Western elites to the institutions that enable them to hold wealth and power has by now been understood as a profoundly important historical factor in mid-century politics and diplomacy. Although Alger Hiss and Kim Philby have served as the archetypes of 20th-century traitors, the late Anthony Blunt was recently giving them a run for their money. Barrie Penrose and Simon Freeman, however, in their large *Conspiracy of Silence: The Secret Life of Anthony Blunt* do little to advance this archetypal status; they are more concerned with compiling biographical facts about this distinguished art historian and pervert who was exposed as the notorious "Fourth Man" in the House of Commons in 1979, years after his complicity in treason with Philby, Guy Burgess, and Donald Maclean was covered up by his friends in the British establishment. The authors' digest of Blunt's life is likely to remain the major biography and the most dispassionate account of the Blunt circle for some time.

Blunt's background as a marginal but respectable member of the British upper classes was not extraordinary, and his early years were apolitical. He was drawn into Communism while at Cambridge and was assiduously courted by a party cell led by Marxist economist Maurice Dobb and in which John Cornford, son of the classical scholar F.M. Cornford, was a dominant and active figure. Young Cornford's physical attractions (though heterosexual) probably had more than a little to do with the attention that Blunt and his close, weird friend Bur-

gess bestowed upon him and with their eventual political subservience to him.

Given the upheavals of the early 20th century, it should not be remarkable that bright, frustrated, and often deviant young men became Communists, especially in an era when Soviet atrocities and failures were less well-known than they later became, and when the vacuity of traditional elites in America and England was becoming apparent. What is more remarkable, and far more dangerous, has been the inability of the elites themselves, traditional or new, to take the defections of their peers seriously. The insouciant attitude toward treason displayed by Alger Hiss's defenders from 1948 to the present indeed remains the paradigm of this phenomenon, but the cover-up of Blunt's role in espionage is no less noteworthy and is part of the same enduring pattern. Even after his exposure to British security authorities in 1964, Blunt was allowed to remain a Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, to retire as "Adviser" for the Queen's Pictures in 1972, and to retain a knighthood as well as his reputation, until his exposure by Mrs. Thatcher in the Commons on November 15, 1979.

If there is one difference between the 16th and 20th centuries' attitudes toward treason, it lies in the contemporary conviction that treason not only does not prosper but does not even exist. As German political theorist Carl Schmitt understood, a political society defines itself largely through the enemies it perceives. When an elite refuses to recognize enemies, it cannot take its own rule seriously or define the limits of permissible deviance within the society it pretends to rule. In the superstition of universal friendliness to which 20th-century elites generally subscribe and in the bureaucratic "games" of conflict in which they compete, there can be no perception of enemies, foreign or domestic, and therefore, no treason. Nor can there be an adequate definition of what fidelities comprise the state and society to which both elites and their subjects are supposed to remain loyal.

In a nation where untold millions of illegal aliens wander at will across the borders, where the proponents of capitalism boast of living in a "global economy" permeated by foreign own-

ership and bending to every breeze of foreign exchanges, and where crucial foreign policy decisions are vetoed by allies in Europe, Japan, and the Middle East, how can anyone expect routine faithfulness to, much less willingness to risk life and fortune for, the

fatherland? What is extraordinary is not that there are so many traitors and spies in contemporary America but that there are so few. Whatever the problems of their era, the failure to discern enemies is one weakness that Henry VIII and his children did not

have, and in their determined efforts to eradicate their foes and to consolidate their own rule, they addressed the fundamental threats to their regime far more forthrightly than the would-be rulers of our own age of treachery have dealt with theirs.

## U.S. — Staying in Business *by William R. Hawkins*

*"He that fails in his endeavors after wealth and power will not long retain either honesty or courage."*

—Samuel Johnson

***Manufacturing Matters: The Myth of the Post-Industrial Economy*** by Stephen S. Cohen and John Zysman, New York: Basic Books; \$19.95.

Not all change is progress. This simple statement is one of the dividing lines between right and left. An element of common sense to the conservative, it is denounced as timidity or a lame defense of vested interests by liberals and radicals. F.A. Hayek in his essay "Why I Am Not a Conservative" stated that "the liberal position is based on courage and confidence, on a preparedness to let change run its course even if we cannot predict where it will lead." Hayek is a moderate liberal whose optimism about change is made bearable only by an apparent assumption that people adhere to basically conservative modes of behavior. More radical thinkers — Rousseau, Godwin, Marx, Marcuse — have urged change with different expectations about where it would lead. Certainly the changes over the last 30 years provide plenty of examples of decay and disaster. History only reinforces the conservative position that a commitment to "change" without thought of consequences is irrational.

In the social, political, or military spheres, those on the right easily agree that many recent changes have been for

the worse. The aim of conservative public policy is to control events in the best interest of the United States, i.e., to foster changes that are beneficial while working to retard or reverse changes that are harmful. Only in the economic sphere do conservatives abandon common sense in favor of an unfounded liberal optimism: economics, alone among the activities of mankind, has an "invisible hand" that guarantees progress. Indeed, to listen to some exponents it would be easy to think that market outcomes were the result of divine intervention rather than the strat-

egies of businessmen and governments pursuing gain.

Yet, as anyone in business knows, competition produces both winners and losers. The failure of individual firms can be devastating to those directly involved, as well as entire communities. But within a closed society this may only be a ripple, with the expansion of the victors making up for the collapse of the losers. However, on a global scale, things are different. Nations, not just firms, compete for wealth and power. The stakes are much higher. Summing costs and benefits across national boundaries is not valid. There are still fundamental differences between the loss of market share by GM to Ford or the shift of jobs from Ohio to Georgia, and the loss of market share to Nissan or a shift of jobs to Brazil. There is no consolation in being told that the de-



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