

THOMAS SZASZ

## The freedom abusers

SINCE THE DEATH OF the Reverend Jim Jones, the diagnosis of paranoia has been falling on his memory like snowflakes in a winter storm in Syracuse. I suggest that we take another look at some of the facts reported about this Marxist-Christian minister before the sordid truths about his behavior and that of his followers are completely buried beneath a blanket of psychiatric speculations and diagnoses.

Virtually everyone who knew Jones—among them some prominent and presumably perceptive and intelligent men and women—regarded him as perfectly healthy mentally. For instance, during the 1976 Carter presidential campaign, Rosalynn Carter and Jim Jones dined together in San Francisco. Mrs. Carter, who is, as we know, one of America's foremost experts on mental health, found no sign of mental illness in Jones—on the contrary: In March 1977, she wrote him a letter praising his proposal to give medical aid to Cuba, and after the election she invited him to attend the inauguration, which he did.

That Jones was accepted as at least "normal" in California liberal political circles has by now become notorious. That he was still widely regarded as both mentally healthy and morally admirable during the weeks and days immediately preceding the massacre is evident from the fact that a gala, \$25-a-plate dinner benefit for the Peoples Temple was planned in San Francisco for December 2, 1978. Called "A Struggle Against Oppression," the affair was to feature Dick Gregory and

the Temple's two lawyers, Mark Lane and Charles Garry, as speakers. It was endorsed by 75 prominent city leaders and politicians. It was cancelled after the massacre.

Actually, in view of Jones's impressive record of good "psychotherapeutic" works, the enthusiasm of evangelistic mental healthers for him should come as no surprise. Jones "cured drug

addicts." He "rehabilitated" aimless Americans and put them on the road to a communitarian salvation. He was, officially at least, even against suicide—when it was a course chosen on one's own. On Memorial Day in 1977 (only 18 months before the Jonestown massacre), Jones led a delegation of Peoples Temple members on a march onto the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, demanding that the city build a suicide barrier on the bridge.

In addition to these testimonials to Jones's good mental health and commendable character, we also have the word of Jones's personal physician that the minister was both psychiatrically normal and morally admirable.



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Dr. Carlton Goodlett, identified as a "prominent black doctor" in San Francisco who had also attended Jones in Guyana, told the *New York Times*: "I was convinced that Jones was involved in a brilliant experiment in Guyana that actually put people in better shape down there than they had been in San Francisco." Even after the massacre Dr. Goodlett offered this psychiatric opinion—not about Jones, but about his disenchanted followers: "The deserters from the church had come to me, but they were just a neurotic fringe."

To say that Jim Jones was widely regarded as mentally healthy, is indeed an understatement: He was regarded as a brilliant healer of minds, a great "therapist." Many of his followers were former drug users. Two survived the massacre. One of them, Tim Carter, told the *Times* he had been "heavily involved in drugs in California" and was cured by Jones. Tim's father, Francis Carter (both of whose sons were "on drugs"), praised Jones's treatment of drug abuse to a *Times* reporter: After joining the temple "they gave up drugs, became rehabilitated, and got better." Odell Rhodes, another survivor, "had been a heroin addict from the Detroit ghetto. [W]ith the help of Jim Jones's power he had beat heroin, he said. He felt he needed his mentor to keep him straight."

**AFTER THE BUTCHERY** in Guyana, Jones's followers and friends were eager to dismiss him as "paranoid." Steven Jones lost no time diagnosing his father as psychotic, an opinion he kept carefully to himself until "dad" was dead. Why did Steven Jones think his father was mad? Because he destroyed the concentration camp that young Jones evidently loved dearly. "He has destroyed everything I've worked for," said Steven Jones.

One of Jones's lawyers, Charles Garry, characterized the commune as "a beautiful jewel. There is no racism, no sexism, no ageism, no elitism, [sic] no hunger." After the massacre, Garry declared: "I am convinced this guy was stark raving mad." If Garry believed this before November 18, 1978, he violated his professional responsibilities as a lawyer and his moral responsibilities as a human being; and if he concluded it only because Jones finally carried out his oft-repeated threat of mass murder and suicide, then Garry is asserting a platitude in declaring his

safely-deceased client "mad."

Mark Lane, Jones's other lawyer and a renowned expert on conspiracy and paranoia, described his former client to the *Times* as "a paranoid murderer who, after four weeks of drug injections, gave the orders that resulted last weekend in the deaths of Representative Leo J. Ryan. . . ." The great conspiracy-hunter thus sought to exonerate Jones by attributing the mass murder and suicide not only to "paranoia" but also to "drugs." But the fact is that Lane accepted Jones as a client and continued to represent him, up to the very moment of the debacle.

I cite all this as presumptive evidence that, before the final moment, those closest to Jones did not believe that he was psychotic. Their subsequent conclusion that Jones was paranoid is intellectually empty and patently self-serving. (Today everyone who reads newspapers and watches television has been taught that mass murderers are mad.) While Jones was alive his friends and followers did not regard him as paranoid, quite simply because they liked what he was doing. For the bottom line is a moral judgment: Jones's supporters think that he was a good man who suddenly became mad; I think he was an evil man—and not just on the day of the massacre.

Whether or not Jones had been "crazy" long before the massacre, depends on the meaning one wishes to attach to that word. However, it is now clear that for a long time Jones's behavior had been sordid and evil. It is also clear that when his followers were faced with certain facts, they deliberately looked the other way. Consider the following reports of Jones's behavior during the period when his followers and those "outside" regarded Jones as not merely "normal" but "superior":

—Jones insisted that everyone call him "dad" or "father." When there was a disagreement in the commune, the members would tranquilize one another and themselves by repeating the incantation, "Dad knows best. Just do as dad tells you."

—Jones had a wife, several mistresses, and "had sex" with many of the women and several of the men in the commune. "He told their husbands [according to Tim Carter, an aide] that he only did it to help the woman."

—Jones claimed that he was Jesus and could cure cancer.

—According to Jerry Parks, another cult member, "Everyone had to admit

that they were homosexual, even the women. He was the only heterosexual."

—Several times before the final butchery, Jones conducted rehearsals of the communal carnage.

—Members of the commune had to turn their possessions over to Jones, had to work like slaves, were starved and were kept from sleeping, and could not leave the commune.

**D**ESPITE THESE UNSAVORY facts (and many others not catalogued here), I cannot recall, in the thousands of words I read about the Jonestown affair, a single commentator—journalist, politician, psychiatrist, anyone—characterizing the Reverend Jim Jones as an evil man. Mad, insane, crazy, paranoid, and variations on that theme—that is the consensus. James Reston's judgment of Jones was sadly typical. After quoting the opinion of "one of the most prominent members of the Carter Administration," according to whom the Jonestown massacre was a symptom of "mass lunacy in an age of emptiness," Reston delivered the craven diagnosis that liberal intellectuals, when faced with evil, instinctively issue. The Reverend Jones, declared Reston, was an "obviously demented man."

The most imaginative diagnosis was offered, not surprisingly, by a psychiatrist. Explained Dr. Thomas Ungerleider, professor of psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles: "I believe it was the jungle. The members got no feedback from the outside world. They did not read *Time* magazine or watch the news at night. . . ." Dr. Alvin Poussaint, professor of psychiatry at Harvard and one of the leading black psychiatrists in America, offered this shameful and revealing diagnosis: "We cannot in good conscience fault the mission of the rank-and-file because of the acute psychosis of their leader. . . . The humanitarian experiment itself was not a failure, the Reverend Jones was."

I think we can do better than that. The evidence—despite Reston and the anonymous high Carter administration official—suggests that Jones was depraved, not "demented," and that what his congregation displayed was mass cruelty and cowardliness, not "mass lunacy." I believe that plain English words such as "evil," "depraved," "cruel," and "cowardly" furnish a better description of what

happened at Jonestown than does the lexicon of lunacy in which those despicable and pathetic deeds have been couched.

This instant metamorphosis of Jones from prophet to psychotic now conceals—as did previously the deliberate denial of the significance of his everyday behavior by those who knew him—the self-evident evil that animated this bestial tyrant long before his supposed “degeneration into paranoia.” That is the phrase used by *Time* magazine, where Jones is described as an “Indiana-born humanitarian who degenerated into egomania and paranoia.” *Newsweek* confirms the diagnosis: Jones’s “mind,” we are informed, “deteriorated into paranoia.”

I object. It is fundamentally false and distorting to view every gesture to help the poor—regardless of motives, methods, and consequences—as “humanitarian.” What tyrant has not claimed to be motivated by a desire to help the helpless? We know only too well that to those hungry for power, the prospect of “helping” life’s victims presents a great temptation; one that complements the temptation that the prospect of oblivion through alcohol or drugs presents to those hungry for a simple solution to life’s problems. That is why these two types of persons are drawn to each other so powerfully, and why each regards the competent, self-reliant person as his enemy. So much for Jones’s “humanitarianism.”

**A**S FOR JONES’S “PARANOIA,” we accept the proverbial wisdom that one man’s meat is another man’s poison. Similarly, we should accept that one man’s prophet is another man’s paranoid. It is simply not true that Jones “degenerated into paranoia.” Jones was the same person on November 18, 1978 (the date of the mass murder and suicide), that he was the day before, the month before, the year before. Jones did not suddenly change. What did change suddenly was the opinion certain people entertained and expressed about him.

What we need, then, is not so much an explanation of what happened in Jonestown, which is clear enough, but rather an explanation of the explanations of the carnage that the purveyors of conventional wisdom have offered us. Briefly put, such a metaexplanation might state that paranoia in a dead and dishonored “cult” leader is caused by the sudden realization of his follow-

ers and others that they have been duped, which instantly transforms them from sycophants (and sympathizers) into psychodiagnosticians.

Much could be, and should be, made of the carnage at Jonestown. What I want to make out of it here is, briefly, this: Access to drugs entails what is now smugly called “drug abuse.” How, indeed, could it be otherwise? Why, then, the shocked surprise that access to freedom entails “freedom abuse”? Assuredly the abuse of freedom—like the abuse of alcohol, drugs, food, or any other good that nature or human ingenuity provides us—is a small price to pay for the boundless benefits of freedom. That the abuse of freedom entails risks to innocent persons is one of the tragic facts of life. The children murdered at Jonestown are a somber reminder of the awesome power parents have over their children—a power that, as Jonestown and other communal experiments have shown, the collectivization of the family can only amplify.

The ultimate ugly and undeniable facts are that of the 909 bodies at Jonestown, 260 were those of children, butchered by the peaceloving, “humanitarian” followers of the Reverend Jones; and that, like their leader, these butchers hated the open society and “fled” their homeland to settle in a socialist country. The men and women of Jonestown rejected liberty; it is as if they had turned Patrick Henry’s maxim, “Give me liberty or give me death!” on its head, and had sworn allegiance to the maxim, “Give me death rather than liberty!”

As for Congressman Ryan and his party, they paid a heavy price for their naiveté and miscalculation, but, after being warned repeatedly about Jonestown and after being emphatically disinvited by the inhabitants, their attempt to “liberate” would-be defectors without adequate arms was as ill-advised as would be an attempt to scale the Alps without proper shoes or clothing. When Congressman Ryan insisted on staging his inspection-invasion to foist on them the liberty they loathed, the Jonestown patriots proved that they had the courage of their convictions. The point is not merely that actions speak louder than words, which is obvious enough; it is rather that in the base rhetoric of butchers—regardless of whether they come garbed as priests, politicians, or physicians—“love” means “hate”; “I will take care of you” means “I will kill you.”

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## Reefer madness revisited

**A**FTER SEVERAL YEARS of lying low, ducking the fire of congressional committees and citizens’ groups, the federal government’s drug enforcement officials are up to their old tricks again.

Back in the days of Nixon, as Edward Jay Epstein showed in his book, *Agency of Fear*, the administration and the nation’s top narcs helped devise and carry out the infamous “war on drugs,” complete with stormtrooper-style raids on innocent families and other abuses of domestic civil liberties. Stirring up a nationwide heroin scare, then exploiting the public’s dread of drugs to consolidate power, Nixon’s drug officials built a network of agents beyond constitutional control.

Now, the Justice Department’s Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the bureaucratic offspring of Nixon’s campaign against drugs, has launched an offensive against marijuana. In a speech last fall before the International Association of Chiefs of Police in New York City, DEA chief Peter Bensinger fired the opening shot in this new battle, making various misleading claims about the “real perils of marijuana smoking.” It was just the first thrust of a concerted drive to reverse the trend toward decriminalization and eventual legalization of the country’s favorite weed, and to build political support for stiffer drug penalties and, not incidentally, the DEA empire.

Bensinger’s assertions about the health risks of marijuana, which were

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