

Scientology in the House

'The effect of this organisation is that money is extracted from the weak, the credulous and the mentally ill, and the techniques used are potentially, and in many cases, positively, harmful to the mental health of the community.' With these words, Peter Hordern (Cons. M.P. for Horsham) urged the Minister of Health, Kenneth Robinson, to hold an inquiry into the practice known as scientology in an adjournment debate in the Commons on March 6.

Mr. Hordern told the members: 'The public have been hampered in its knowledge of scientology by the fact that, so far as I can establish, on every occasion that the organisation has been named by a newspaper, that newspaper has been served with a writ of libel.' (A writ has been served on the National Association for Mental Health in connection with an item on scientology in the 'Matters of Public Concern' column in the autumn 1966 edition of this journal.)

'It may be argued that to draw attention to scientology may be to attract sympathy, and that it might even draw more deluded people to it. That is arguable, but what would be quite inexcusable would be to allow great harm to come to some who are men-

tally ill, who would not have attended this organisation had they been aware of its real nature.'

Serious threat

He quoted the case-history of one of his constituents who had been associated with the cult and also quoted from the report, published in 1965, of the Commission on Scientology in the State of Victoria, Australia. The commission was led by Mr. Kevin Anderson, QC. 'This report,' continued Mr. Hordern, 'says: "Scientology is evil; its techniques evil; its practice a serious threat to the community, medically, morally and socially; and its adherents sadly deluded and often medically ill."'

Mr. Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Cons., East Grinstead), in whose constituency the headquarters of scientology are situated, also referred to the report of the Anderson Commission. 'I do not believe that anyone can read that report, particularly the part dealing with brainwashing, without feeling shocked and deeply perturbed about the organisation.'

Since answering the question on scientology put to him by Lord Balniel, the chairman of the National Association for Mental Health, on February 7, 1966,

Lord Balniel, M.P.

Peter Hordern, M.P.

Geoffrey Johnson Smith, M.P.
Photos: Camera Press



the Minister had, he said, received letters from a number of people and organisations 'drawing my attention to what the writers feel are the damaging effects of scientology particularly on health and, above all, on mental health. In many cases the courses are said to have brought about not the enhancements of personality promised them but a deterioration in mental stability and an estrangement between the persons concerned and his family and friends.'

Dangerous techniques

Mr. Robinson quoted the Anderson Commission report which concluded: "The Hubbard Association of Scientologists claims to be 'the world's largest mental health organisation'. What it really is, however, is the world's largest organisation of unqualified persons engaged in the practice of dangerous techniques which masquerade as mental therapy."

'I am told that Mr. Hubbard (Mr. Ron Hubbard is the founder of the organisation) has threatened with an action for libel anyone in this country who quotes from the Anderson Report. His attitude is understandable, because it is difficult to believe that anyone acquainted with Mr. Anderson's findings would willingly submit to the teachings of an organisation so comprehensively condemned.'

'To what can we reasonably take objection in scientology? For a Minister of Health, the overriding consideration must be the effect of these practices on mental health. Here, one must distinguish between what the leaders of the cult currently claim and what they have until recently professed and, in my judgement, still perform.'

Polio ravages

'Mr. Hubbard wrote to me in February last year and said "we do not treat or cure anyone and are not a healing science". But most of the voluminous scientology tracts tell a very different story. I quote from a handbook printed in London in 1962:

"There are scores of people alive today who would not be alive except for this science. There are children and old people who would not be walking except for this new science. Polio ravages, arthritis and scores of other ills are handled daily by this new science with success."

The Minister stressed that he did not want to give the impression that there was anything illegal in 'the offering by unskilled people of processes intended in part to relieve or remove mental disturbance. The law places no barrier against this, provided that no claim is made of qualified medical skill, and the scientologists do not claim this.'

'What they do, however, is to direct themselves deliberately towards the weak, the unbalanced, the immature, the rootless and the mentally or emotionally unstable; to promise them remoulded, mature personalities and to set about fulfilling the promise by means of untrained staff, ignorantly practising quasi-

psychological techniques, including hypnosis. It is true that the scientologists claim not to accept as clients people known to be mentally sick, but the evidence strongly suggests that they do.

Sinister motives

'As the scientologists draw their adherents into the fold, so they instil into them a distrust, even hatred, of other influences—including that of orthodox medicine—which might draw them away again. Squalid and even sinister motives are imputed to relatives or friends who advise against an attachment to scientology.'

'What I have said will have made clear my belief that scientology is not merely ludicrous, which would not matter, but is potentially harmful to its adherents. My view remains that a further inquiry is unnecessary to establish that the activities of this organisation are potentially harmful. The Anderson Report in Victoria and the evidence put before me in this country make this quite clear.'

'There remains the question whether the practice of scientology should be prohibited. My present view is that this would not be the right course to take. Legislation would certainly be necessary to achieve prohibition. . . . We would all be reluctant to contemplate legislation—which would almost inevitably have to range considerably beyond its immediate object if it were to be effective—unless the case for it were overwhelming.'

Harsh light

'I am satisfied that the condition of mentally disturbed people who have taken scientology courses has, to say the least, not generally improved thereby. I have not had evidence that scientology has been directly and exclusively responsible for mental breakdown or physical deterioration in its adherents in this country. I intend to go on watching the position. 'My present decision may disappoint the hon. members, but I would like to remind them that the harsh light of publicity can sometimes work almost as effectively. Scientology thrives on a climate of ignorance and indifference.'

Reminded by Mr. Hordern that his remarks were not likely to be repeated after the debate, the Minister replied: 'I certainly consider that steps can be taken to publicise what I have said. I shall be very surprised if the Press are so poltroonish as the Hon. Gentlemen fear they may be. Mr. Hubbard himself has said: "Incredulity of our data and validity. This is our finest asset and gives us more protection than any other single asset. . . ."

'What I have tried to do in this debate is to alert the public to the facts about scientology, to the potential dangers in which anyone considering taking it up may find himself, and to the utter hollowness of the claims made for the cult. I hope that the debate will be widely reported, so that the views of the House on the activities of scientologists may be known to all.'