

BOOK REVIEWS

A TAX TRADE-OFF FOR VOTES

*Politics and Psychology:
Contemporary Psychodynamic Perspectives*
Joan Offerman-Zuckerberg (editor)
New York: Plenum Press, 1991

WITH the presidential candidates now blazing their trails across the United States, we search with difficulty for qualitative differences between the policies of Democrats and Republicans.

Voters long ago rumbled the ritualised aggression on the hustings - which is why so many refuse to vote. What can the parties do to revive participatory democracy? Herbert Barry III, the Professor of Pharmacology and Physiology at the University of Pittsburgh who is President of the International Psychohistorical Association, advances one idea in his contribution to this book.

Democrats "can broaden their appeal by accepting the Republican policy of lower income taxes". Yes, but how would Democrats make up the lost revenue? "A preferable source of government revenue is the land value tax, which continues to be advocated by many economists," he suggests, citing Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879). He drives home the lesson: "The Democrats can propose higher taxes on the value of land accompanied by lower taxes on the products of human labor and enterprise, including income taxes, sales taxes, and taxes on the value of houses and on other improvements of property. This would obtain more revenue from large corporations and other wealthy landowners without impairing the incentives for individuals to maximize their earnings."

IAN BARRON

IS SOCIALISM DEAD?

Socialism - the Great Delusion,
Arthur Moss,
The Self-Publishing Association Ltd.,
Upton-upon-Severn, Worcs., £14.95

IS SOCIALISM dead? No. In Britain it is alive and well and living in the heart of not only the Labour Party but in the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties too.

Socialist ideas have entered into our blood stream and circulate at an almost subconscious level, so that we do not question, for example, that over a third of our national income should be taken by the state and, after an army of bureaucrats have siphoned off a large portion of it, be redistributed according to a formula related to something called social justice.

It does not occur to us that if we allowed our economic

system to operate naturally this redistribution would not be needed (nor, indeed, would the non-productive bureaucrats). Unfortunately, Arthur Moss's book fails to reveal the stumbling block that prevents this happening. However, it is an important work in that it examines the bright ideals that gave birth to Socialism and traces the hard facts that brought about the downfall of its more thoroughgoing manifestation, namely, Marxism.

The failure of this has been universal. And where it existed in its most extreme form the failure has been catastrophic. One has only to look at the USSR, to Eastern Europe, to Cuba, or to any of the African Communist countries to see that. China's apparently hard-line Communist economy survives only because it is rapidly, if discreetly, adopting capitalist methods. If it doesn't it will break up just as the USSR has done.

Capitalism has serious flaws which make it imperfect, but the knowledge that in general people have a higher living standard in capitalist economies than those in communist ones make it an acceptable alternative.

Arthur Moss points out that the old British Labour Party was, in its vital aims, founded on sound harmonious: on adequate food and shelter for all; on care for the sick and for those unable to find work. But socialism didn't know where to stop.

From nationalising monopolies it went on and wanted to nationalise all large enterprises. Egalitarian propositions threatened to ensure that what all cannot have none shall have. It could not accept the fact that human beings are naturally competitive, are not equal either in desires or abilities, and that society is innately hierarchical.

No sooner, for instance, did the USSR dispose of its aristocracy than it replaced it by an elitist, privileged and equally hierarchical bureaucracy. Incentive was replaced by fear, freedom of the individual by a collectivist command structure and opposition by death (estimates from fifteen to sixty millions in the USSR). The delusion that this was freedom and justice was fostered by a corrupt educational system and by highly organised propaganda.

Mr. Moss believes the spread of effective democracy to be a vital step towards ultimate freedom. In particular he feels it essential that the United Nations Organisation should become more democratic. A problem, as he acknowledges, since well over a third of its member countries are tyrannies.

The author believes in the efficiency of a well-informed free market. He also stresses the need for a philosophy commensurate with the dangers of the times. If, as he suggests, a body be set up of people chosen for their impartiality and for their disinterested pursuit of truth, then perhaps the land question would find its rightful place in such a philosophy.

GEOFFREY LEE