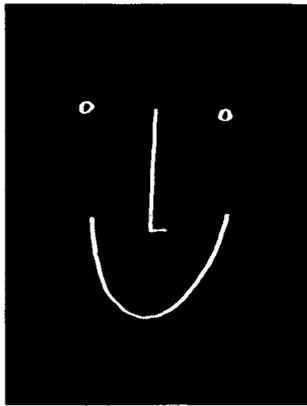


It was these that Eisenhower so evidently provided at an earlier and easier period of American history. He served his

country well and left his great office enhanced by the honesty and dignity he had shown in that service.

The Hucksters of Happiness

From Ideas to Slogans—By KENNETH MINOGUE



THERE IS an echo of the Declaration of Independence about the title of Ghita Ionescu's *Politics and the Pursuit of Happiness*¹ and it gives us the clue to the fact that Professor Ionescu dates the fall of modern man from about the 1770s. His book thus belongs to what one might call, in the widest sense, the literature of prophecy, a *genre* which is seldom entirely absent from writing about states and societies. The big fall of

man in the Garden of Eden provides the overarching structure within which little current falls, like the cold war, the rape of the environment, the military uses of atomic energy (and the rest) may be discovered and explored. Without this literature, it is difficult to see how the inhabitants of modern societies could grasp the changing contours of their world.

The Ionescu diagnosis is, in these terms, medium in scale; but it ranges over our civilisation from ideas to institutions. Broadly, it runs like this. Somewhere about the second half of the 18th century, European civilisation succumbed to the illusion, first cultivated among the *philosophes* in France, that political change could bring about happiness on earth. This illusion has trivialised our lives by focusing our attention upon nothing grander than the succession of desires, and by diverting it from certain ineluctably tragic features of the human condition (such as the inevitability of death). In its pursuit, we have destroyed much of the inherited fabric of social life because we have fallen for the promises made by political parties acting as hucksters of happiness. Two doctrines in particular have come to dominate this process: Benthamite liberalism, which taught Western societies that "maximising happiness" is the point of life; and Marxist communism, which has clamped a sclerotic despotism upon Eastern countries by promising them the delights of "true community."

The very promise of happiness, so the argument goes, transforms our way of thinking about social and political

matters. In particular, it erodes moral principles and encourages the progressive articulation of interests each of which protects and advances its own claims to happiness. The effect is both to intensify social conflict and to impair a government's capacity to deal with it. Worse, each of these current doctrines of hedonistic salvation competes militarily with the other for dominance over the rest of the world. But the character of our predicament is even more dire than this suggests; for we are afflicted not merely by false beliefs and misguided practices, but by a process which continually transforms whatever we do into service to the same idea. We have, in other words, been "ideologised", and we shall remain doomed to futility (and to the mortal dangers of Superpower competition) unless we recapture what the Spanish philosopher Unamuno called "the tragic sense of life", and perform an operation which Ionescu calls by the almost unpronounceable name of "disideologisation."

It will be obvious that, in terms of prophetic literature, this is no mere bagatelle, but a full-scale opus. And in order to put it in context, we may observe that Ionescu's argument belongs in a recognised tradition of European self-criticism. Some of its elements derive from those intellectual historians (such as J. L. Talmon) who derived the violence and irrationality of modern totalitarianism from the magnitude of misplaced hope among the *philosophes*. Other elements derive from the view that contemporary society is clogged by out-of-date abstractions called ideologies, and would function better if it confronted its problems more pragmatically. But as a lifelong student of comparative institutions, Ionescu can enrich this tradition by attending to the dysfunctionality (as he calls it) of competing interests. And in the background of his criticism of happiness (entangled with his invocation of Unamuno, and other critics of modern mass society), there may be detected the view that only the reappearance of a religious dimension in modern life would have the power to break the self-perpetuating grip of ideologisation.

BUT EVEN IN TERMS OF the Ionescu argument, our position is such that religion itself would hardly be enough to reverse the process; for many forms of religion stress a kind of immanence which is itself almost inescapably a concern with happiness. If happiness is to be taken in a wide sense, then, the only device which could supply an alternative to it would be some sort of transcendental idea. Otherwise we are left at the mercy of the dominant self-evident proposition of the age:

¹ *Politics and the Pursuit of Happiness*. By GHITA IONESCU. Longman, £16.50.

that the point of everything is to make good vibes. Since the Churches are busy dismantling any surviving elements of the transcendent in order to be less vulnerable to criticism, there doesn't seem much hope of release from the predicament Ionescu describes. He can only exhort us again and again to give up happiness and contemplate the tragic dimension of life, rather like latter-day Stoics. From this point of view, his book on *Politics and the Pursuit of Happiness* contents itself with adumbrating the social and political contours of a problem and tossing it into the lap of others.

ONE OF THE MANY PARADOXES of happiness is how much people are prepared to suffer for it—a point excellently illustrated by the Jacobin attempt to create *le bonheur publique* by way of the Terror. Ionescu treats the Jacobins as an early encapsulation of the whole process of “ideologisation” in both its intellectual and its institutional forms. He argues that it is a tragedy in the fullest sense, and finds its roots in the emergence in 18th-century France of a special class of self-conscious intellectuals for whom sharing advanced ideas established a far-reaching bond. The extent to which the authorities frowned upon the cultivation of such ideas was just right for giving them a delicious sense of daring without constituting any actual danger. In all parts of the realm, this emerging set of people formed what one historian (Auguste Cochin) called *sociétés de pensée*. The striking feature of these societies, which in many cases were to become part of the Jacobin system of affiliated groups, was their classlessness. They were explicitly dedicated to what they themselves described as *sociabilité démocratique*, a curious, indeed paradoxical expression. Across the barriers of class and profession, these men cultivated a bond of intellectual sympathy; and, abstract as the beliefs they shared might have been, they were yet concrete enough to guide some intellectuals, when the elections of the Estates-General were called, in manipulating these elections so as to make sure that enlightenment would triumph in Paris.

Here, then, was a party constituted in its essentials by an idea. The idea was that of public happiness, and it was inspired at several removes by the philosophy of Rousseau, even though Rousseau himself did not seek disciples or attempt to set up a school. The process by which more or less philosophical ideas are transformed by vulgarisation into a programme of political action is central to Ionescu's conception of ideologisation. What it generally requires is a mediator between the man and the followers, a role he believes was played by James Mill in the spread of Jeremy Bentham's ideas, and by Friedrich Engels in those of Karl Marx.

A party thus constituted by an idea is a special kind of

institution; and in the case of the French Revolution, it was some little time before the Jacobins emerged as the purest exponents of that specialness. It was noted at the time, however, that the Jacobins could be relied upon to take over disciplinary duties in the new order, a task others found distasteful. Because they had a network of affiliates throughout the country (and, indeed, in some instances beyond), the Jacobins could claim a representative status that might well rival the Convention itself. But their real claim to this superiority lay in the conviction that they stood for the universal principle of Virtue itself. Hence it did not seem incongruous that the Jacobins were eventually to move into the apparatus of state *en bloc*, thus foreshadowing the development of what later came to be called by the self-contradictory name of “the One-Party State.”

During its brief period of ascendancy, the Jacobin Club (which was closed down by the Convention a few months after Thermidor) evolved most of the usages we have come to recognise as central to the politics of enthusiasm. A tight discipline meant that even the most brilliant men who tried to set up competing organisations failed to make an impact. Robespierre's importance in the revolutionary government derived from the extent to which he was largely in tune with what was implied in the idea. It was he who had the instinct—his English biographer, J. M. Thompson, calls it “statesmanlike”—to make the execution of the King a party issue; and to recognise that the King's trial could bear no serious resemblance to a judicial proceeding. Unlike many of his fellow-Jacobins, however, Robespierre wanted to salvage from the wreck of inherited tradition a cult of the Supreme Being; and, as pettifogging lawyer, he continued to sustain the Convention, a non-party representative body whose members, trembling for their necks,² finally ganged up on him. As Ionescu observes, Lenin learned from this particular mistake, and prevented the Constituent Assembly from even beginning to threaten the hegemony of his Party. One might also observe that it was the fall of Robespierre on the Ninth Thermidor which saved Destutt de Tracy from going to the guillotine on the Eleventh. (Would there, then, have been someone else to invent the word “ideology”?)

It is clear that the Jacobins reveal much about the new style of politics emerging in 19th-century Europe; but they clearly tell us more about Communist than about capitalist practices. Ionescu's argument that beneath the grand doctrinal struggles

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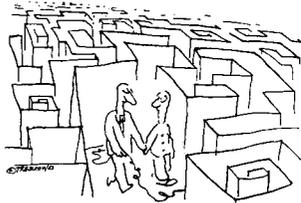
² “... Saint-Just appeared in the tribune, and read out his Report, in a sententious, expressionless voice, one hand motionless, holding the manuscript, the other emphasizing his theme with a monotonous gesture ‘like the movement of the blade of a guillotine’.” J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (1935), vol. II, pp. 158-9.

of our day may be discovered a fundamental agreement on the Titan's project of "building happiness here on earth" casts an interesting light on many things. We learn, as we would expect, much about the thought and structure of modern societies. But as we approach contemporary issues, Ionescu succumbs to several familiar temptations of the prophetic style: off-the-cuff comments on issues in the daily headlines; and a generalised conviction that current frus-

trations are already impelling many people towards the very path which Ionescu himself has found. One virtue of his inquiry is that he has raised the widest of all questions, and it has taken him to the threshold of philosophy and theology. But he has not crossed over. It is a measure of the problem he delineates that many readers will be tempted to interpret his argument simply as: We'd be an awful lot happier if we didn't worry so much about happiness.

The Political Ecology of Britain

Monetarism, Money & Moods—By IAN DAVIDSON



UPS AND DOWNS in the fortunes of governments are inseparable from democratic politics, and they have become increasingly inseparable the more politics has come to be defined as the art of economic management. Little enough is understood of this baffling art, and that little is dangerously contingent on events, unpredictable and uncontrollable, that may happen in other parts of the world. Mr Edward Heath's Conservative government was brought down in 1974 as a result of a miners' strike; perhaps his government mishandled that strike, and perhaps he was ill-advised to turn it into a pretext for an election on the theme "Who Governs Britain?"; but incontrovertibly the conditions for a strong coal-miners' challenge were laid by the massive increase in oil prices precipitated by the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

Yet these causal links may only be apparent with hindsight. In the flux of everyday events, in which the casual observer is daily assaulted by a hail of contrary goblets of information, it is exceedingly hard to distinguish the fundamental from the ephemeral, to assess whether a spot of bad news for the government of the day is a serious setback or merely an eccentric blip on the screen, soon to be forgotten in a surge of better news to come. In the early months of 1982, the fortunes of Mrs Thatcher's first government were at a low ebb. Few people then would have predicted the jingoistic triumph of the Falklands War and her smashing victory in the 1983 general election. When the man said that the race is not to the swift, what he meant, among other things, was that there are a lot of ups and downs in democratic politics, and that neither the ups nor the downs are necessarily deserved.

It is therefore with some trepidation that one begins to wonder out loud whether Mrs Thatcher's government may not be starting to get into serious trouble. This trouble does not, of course, come from the official Labour Party opposition, which is in as great a disarray as it was before and after its thumping defeat in 1983, and which appears incapable of mounting any kind of effective attack, political,

intellectual, or moral, against the government.

Who knows? The Labour Party may yet return as a credible opposition: having failed to make any plausible protest as unemployment rose inexorably to, and through, the three million mark, it may perhaps do so as unemployment starts to accelerate yet again. All one can say is that this particular worm shows no sign of turning just yet.

Nor does Mrs Thatcher's government so far face any serious trouble, in the main, from Conservative dissenters. The "wets", the patricians, and the old-style Tories have been purged from the Cabinet, and while some backbenchers have started to take advantage of the Government's unmanageably large parliamentary majority to stage rebellions on isolated issues which directly affect the vested interests of themselves or their middle-class electors, there is no sign of organised revolt.

No; the trouble comes from abroad, in the shape (as so often in the post-War era) of a sterling crisis, which erupted at the end of January. This was a most peculiar event, both in terms of short-term rational explanation, and in terms of the Government's reaction to it. But, peculiar or not, it may mark a watershed in the Government's fortunes.

ON THE FACE OF IT, there was no compelling reason for the sudden slump in the sterling exchange rate. After ten months of (yet another) coal-miners' strike, Mrs Thatcher's intransigence was at last promising to bear fruit, either through dissipation of support from striking miners or through the effective surrender of their leaders, or both. If Mrs Thatcher's government had identified itself with the struggle against militant trade-unionism, then a victory over Mr Arthur Scargill, whose motivation was almost overtly revolutionary, should have been seen as a signal victory indeed.

Many commentators looked for an explanation in the underlying weakness of the oil price, and in the palsied efforts of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to prop it up. Since the North Sea accounts for 5% of