

Pope's visit highlights Church's divisions

BOTH THE media and the Vatican pronounced the first state visit of a Pope to Britain 'a success', boosting the morale of Britain's Roman Catholics. In reality the exact opposite is the case. The visit focussed attention on divisions within the Church, and its declining influence.

Roger Bannister

From the onset the Papal visit was dogged by controversy; as a state visit it will cost taxpayers around £9 million. Set against the background of the Con-Dem government's horrendous cuts programme this provoked much controversy.

Protesters including secularists, victims of sexual abuse by clergy (often covered up by the Church), people protesting at the Church's homophobia and supporters of women priests targeted the visit. Attendance at tour events was poor and opinion polls show that 75% of the population had no interest in the visit. A senior Vatican spokesperson's declaration, just before the Pope arrived, that Britain was like a "third world country" did little to build up goodwill towards the visit!

Even Catholics were lukewarm about the visit; surveys show that only a minority of them support key doctrines of the Church. Support for the Church's position on abortion is down to 11%, on the ban on contraception the figure drops to 4%, whilst 65% agree that priests should be able to marry.

Faced with falling congregations the Church is currently merging parishes in many areas. Increasingly priests are imported into Britain from countries such as Poland, due to falling numbers of local candidates for ordination.

The Pope's main message was aimed at the marginalisation of the Church, and of Christianity, from public life.

The Pope's view that civic society needs the Church may attract superficial support, but judged against the reality of countries like Franco's fascist and fiercely Catholic Spain, and the Catholicism of the collabo-



The Pope's visit to Britain was dogged by controversy.

rationist pro Nazi Ustashe regime in Croatia (see article right), a close state-church relationship clearly does not automatically equate to humane government.

Closer to home the Irish Republic only allowed legal contraception in the 1980s, divorce on a very restrictive basis since 1995, and abortion is still illegal. This situation is a direct result of the close relationship between church and state in that country.

Cult of celebrity

THE POPE'S speech against the current cult of celebrity in modern society is also likely to attract widespread general support. Whether this message is best made by somebody who tours around on public display in a specially constructed bullet-proof glass "Popemobile" is another matter!

The problems of falling support and declining influence are not limited to the Roman Catholic Church and apply equally to the Church of England. However tension exists between the two organisations because of the likelihood of the C of E following up its decision to ordain women priests with one to conse-

crate women bishops.

The Pope announced that in this event he would welcome dissident Anglican clergy, and their flocks, into the Catholic Church, with a special section, even allowing them rights to marry. This upset the Church of England, but many Catholics were also angered at the marriage proposal, not because they disagreed with it, but because they believe all Catholic priests should be able to marry! It is no accident that whilst in Britain the Pope beatified (a process on the road to sainthood) John Newman, Britain's most famous convert to Catholicism.

Was it relevant to workers? Millions, Catholic or not, face unemployment, the vulnerable face cuts in much needed services, many depending on housing benefit contemplate eviction and possible homelessness. This misery emanates from a government in which most of the ministers would profess to be Christians of one denomination or another.

The Pope made reference to helping the poor, but in a low key way, at the end of the tour. It caused the Con-Dem government no embarrassment whatever.

Government savages mental health services

DESPITE THE government's pledge of a "ring fenced" NHS budget, NHS Trusts providing mental health and learning disability services in England and Wales are being ordered to carry out 'efficiency savings' to 'streamline' care. Typically, NHS managers and directors implement these cuts with gruesome vigour.

A mental health worker

Community services that provide intensive, specialised support to those with mental health and learning disabilities are being disbanded, merged and/or having their resources seriously cut. The result is overloaded health workers and service users left isolated, abandoned and hopeless. Staff are repeatedly told to do "more for less", which highlights the capitalist view of people's health.

In-patient services are told to discharge patients more rapidly into the community, often before they are ready and leaving no time to

carry out vital mental health development.

Due to staffing cuts and vacancies because of 'cost improvement', wards are forced to operate on dangerously low levels of staff.

This will inevitably lead to a return to the custodial model of care where staff and patients are not valued or supported. The level of burn-out rates among staff will also rocket.

Should these disastrous mental health cuts be allowed to happen, then one of the Con-Dem government's supreme legacies will be thousands of vulnerable people left without support from specially trained and motivated staff, with death and deterioration in quality the tragic result.

Social isolation, poverty and declining living standards are proven factors in the frequency and severity of mental health disorders. These conditions are set to worsen considerably under this government. The net result will be a generation of people born and raised in hopelessness and isolation, with their care trusted to dishonest and undemo-

cratic private services, if at all.

Every mental health worker should push their trade union representatives to come up with clear and effective strategies to fight and defeat these cuts at every turn. Many right wing NHS managers say it is 'immoral' for nurses and other health workers to strike, but we say it is immoral to let the people we care for suffer from these cuts.

As well as trade union action, workers must form alliances with community groups to build a grassroots movement. Capitalism cannot provide for the vulnerable; a socialist alternative is needed to put the needs of the vulnerable first.

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Catholic hierarchy and the Nazis

POPE BENEDICT attacked atheism during his recent tour in Britain. But this time he compared it to the forces of Nazism. How not believing in a god turns someone into a jack-booting fascist isn't clear, but his outburst reminded me of the Catholic church's chequered history with fascism.

A little publicised episode was the Catholic church hierarchy's role in letting Nazi mass murderers flee Europe and escape to Argentina after World War Two. In particular, members of the wartime Croatian Ustashe Nazi puppet regime - whose genocidal activities resulted in 700,000 Serbs, Jews and Gypsies being murdered.

The Ustashe leaders - including the Croatian Fuhrer Ante Pavelic - were protected by the Catholic church in Italy. Holed up in the San Girolamo monastery, these Nazis regularly commuted to the Vatican in a chauffeur-driven car bearing a diplomatic number plate. From there, some 250 war criminals made good their escape to Argentina in 1946.

Argentinian Uki Goni who investigated this escape route is

convinced of the church's connivance. "The verdict is abundantly clear. Cardinals such as Montini, Tisserat and Caggiano masterminded their escape. Bishops and archbishops such as Hudal, Siri and Barrère implemented the necessary procedures. Priests such as Draganovic, Heinemann and Domoter signed their passport applications.

"In the face of such incontrovertible evidence the question of whether Pope Pius XII [the Pope at the time] was fully informed is not only immaterial, it is alarmingly naïve" (quoted in The Real Odessa, Granta Books).

Simon Carter, east London



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Lifestyle choice tax avoidance

So, the Standard Chartered bank is pressing ahead with plans to relocate abroad and 'avoid the increasing burden of regulations and taxes in Britain'. Its chief executive, Peter Sands, was one of the architects of the 2008 financial bailout, and 'has enjoyed a close relationship with ministers'. We have heard a lot lately about benefit fraud (estimated cost £5 billion a year) and tax evasion/avoidance (the PCS union estimates this costs £125 billion a year ie 25 times as much). Standard Chartered are just about to boost that last figure, by who knows how much.

Do we think that people struggling to bring up kids on benefit, who are called into an office every week and asked: 'why haven't you got a job yet?', could just uproot and move to a country where the regulatory regime is 'less harsh'? Sadly this particular 'lifestyle choice' (as referred to by George Osborne) is not available to them.

Paul Gerrard
Salford Socialist Party

Youth Fight for Jobs

It is good news that the TUC will back the Youth Fight for Jobs campaign. As a student who is just starting university I feel it's a great win, not just for the campaign, but for all young people. I just hope the TUC follows what it has pledged, and shows the government that cutting needlessly is counterproductive and pushing back young people. Capitalism's attitude towards our future is another piece of evidence that the system is short-sighted and doesn't work.

Keiron Hopkins
Caerphilly

Though cowards flinch

Rotherham council, after announcing £11 million's worth of cuts to public

services, asked for the public's help to tell them where to wield the axe. Instead of leading a campaign to stop the cuts, our councillors surrendered. Cometh the hour, cometh the cowards!

Labour councillors just accept Cameron and his nodding dog sidekick Clegg who say 'we all have to accept pain' but it is working class people who feel the pain not millionaire politicians.

Public services came about due to the suffering, deprivation and squalor suffered during the industrial revolution and beyond. Workers felt that pain so their bosses could extract maximum profit. In the 21st century we are told the same thing - pain for us, profits for them.

Public services were for the millions not the millionaires. It's time we told these millionaires that our public services are not theirs to destroy. We will fight to keep them.

A Rotherham rebel

Bolsheviks beat Britain's 'armada'

In his article 'The legacy of Leon Trotsky' (Socialist 635) Peter Taaffe mentions the 21 armies of intervention in Russia after the revolution, which is an indisputable fact. Indisputable? Not so, as I found out last year when I read my son's A level history textbook on the Russian revolution.

However the truth slips out occasionally. The Guardian recently reported the discovery of wrecks of three British warships sunk by German mines off Estonia during 1918-19. The article briefly mentions the "British anti-Bolshevik squadron of 22 ships"!

Clearly the standard version of British history that glories in the repelling of the Spanish Armada cannot afford a page or paragraph for the ugly truth that the British Armada lost the battle with Bolshevism.

John Merrell
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