
THIRTEEN years ago, on June 19, 1953, Julius Rosenberg, 35, a New York electrical engineer, and his wife, Ethel, 37, parents of two young boys, were executed in the electric chair at Sing Sing penitentiary.

They had been found guilty with two others—David Greenglass a machinist (Ethel Rosenberg's brother) and Morton Sobell—of conspiracy to transmit American atomic bomb secrets to the Soviet Union.

The motive for the crime was said to be ideological—communism.

The conviction of the Rosenbergs and their execution two years later after judicial appeals and two appeals to the White House for clemency had failed, aroused world-wide protests.

From the time of the conviction to the execution there were repeated demonstrations of protest and demands for withdrawal of the death sentences in cities throughout the world.

The French philosopher and writer, Jean Paul Sartre accused the U.S. Government of "criminal folly" and likened it to a mad dog.

Now, beginning ten years after the execution, an American couple, Walter and Miriam Schneir (unfortun-ately the books tells us nothing about them) have made an exhaustive re-examination of the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs.

There have been other similar examinations of that trial, but this is by far the best.

The Schneirs posed themselves the question: Were the Rosenbergs guilty and, if so, of what?

Their verdict: "Not only were Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Morton Sobell (the alleged co-conspirator, still serving a 30-year sentence) unjustly convicted. They were punished for a crime that never occurred."

Or: "The light of a new decade (after the executions) has revealed the executions of the Rosenbergs as a deed naked of the justification with which it was clothed."

The Schneirs conducted their inquest on the Rosenbergs with painstaking thoroughness—a thoroughness that was noticeably lacking in the initial trial and the subsequent judicial appeals.

They have, piece by piece, tested the evidence submitted at the trial and appeals, and their tests have shown that the prosecution had no real case against the Rosenbergs. They have proved that there was not one piece of direct evidence linking the Rosenbergs with their alleged crime.

They have demonstrated that neither during or after the trial were the authorities able to prove the existence of a spy ring through which the Rosenbergs were alleged to have transmitted their material to the Soviet Union.

And, most important of all, they have proved that the information the Rosenbergs were alleged to have transmitted was completely valueless.
The French Nobel Prize-winning author, François Mauriac raised the same question in a note of protest in the conservative Parisian newspaper "Figaro" the day after the execution.

"Have the Rosenbergs committed the crime for which they were executed?" he wrote. "That is the question. But another question obsesses and worries me: Was it of any use, and if so to whom?"

The Schneirs have assembled their material most skilfully. They begin with a brief but brilliant account of the development of the atomic bomb up to its use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, to the first Soviet atomic explosion on September 24, 1949 (five years before U.S. experts had estimated they could possibly develop it) that ended the U.S. atomic monopoly and triggered off in America the wave of spy mania that engulfed the Rosenbergs.

The Schneirs go painstakingly through the trial evidence up to the conviction, give the complete letters that passed between the Rosenbergs themselves, their children and their defence counsel, in which they resolutely maintained their innocence.

Then, in perhaps the most telling part of the work, they examine the chief prosecution witnesses against the Rosenbergs—David Greenglass, the simple machinist who was supposed to have stolen top atomic secrets from the Manhattan Project, and who had every reason for lying and implicating the Rosenbergs; Elizabeth Bentley, the professional anti-communist pimp; Harry Gold, the obscure chemist who rocketed to fame on his confession (and only his) that he was the American contact for Klaus Fuchs, the British atomic scientist who confessed to passing atomic secrets to Russia; the same Harry Gold who admitted under cross-examination to "16 years of lying" and who said it was a wonder "smoke didn't come out of my ears" because of the lies he had told.

The Schneirs leave this sorry array of witnesses in tatters.

Right up to the moment they stepped into the death chamber, the Rosenbergs could have saved themselves by confessing. A phone line was kept open to the White House from Sing Sing so that they could do so, but they refused, maintaining to the end that they had nothing to confess.

The Schneirs say in an epilogue: "The Rosenbergs and Sobell, pressured by a vast state apparatus to tell a story they knew to be untrue, stood firm.

"In a period of expediency and cynicism, they refused to co-operate, refused to save themselves at the expense of others.

"Faced with a profound moral choice, involving for them the question of life or death, they unhesitatingly chose.

"In this, the final triumph was theirs."

Mr. Justice Felix Frankfurter, one of the Supreme Court justices who thought that the Rosenbergs should be allowed another appeal, published his reasons the day after the execution, and added: "To be writing an opinion in a case affecting two lives after the curtain has been rung down upon them has the appearance of pathetic
futility. But history also has its claims."

In "Invitation To An Inquest", most readers will feel that history has given its verdict.

TOM LARDNER.


SYME's name is generally associated with Victoria's protection policy in the second half of the 19th century. The legend that he was the Great Man of Protection and other important Victorian political matters, was possibly started by himself. It was certainly given wide credence by his first biographer, Ambrose Pratt, who not only styled Symes as the Father of Protection but set out to prove that Syme and The Age were the saintly and implacable Victorian parents of protection, popular opinion, liberalism, Deakin, governments and governmental policy.

A more formidable evaluator of Syme is Professor La Nauze who made a study of his role in the political economy of Australia with an analysis of his writings outside The Age. La Nauze severely criticised Pratt's book and more recently Sayers on Syme, expressing the opinion that adequate biography is yet to be written.

In the main, Sayers' study of Syme has been damned with faint praise. But it should be said at the outset that he has done much to prune any idea that Syme invented the protection policy. He sees The Age as the mouthpiece of the popular movements of the time in the period that David Syme owned and controlled the newspaper, that is, 1860-1908. That the popular movements existed independently of The Age is indicated quite clearly by the writer in his section on Protection. From the late 1850's protection for native industries was gaining strength as a platform nostrum. Syme was still counselling caution in 1864 when protection became an election issue, though from 1860 his paper had been publishing favourable editorials and encouraging the formation of Tariff Reform Leagues. Sayers explains that Syme, wanting land for the people and full rights of self-government, saw a practical difficulty in the way of the too-early fostering of native industry. The squatters held the public estate; they controlled, too, the Legislative Council. The power of the squatters had therefore to be broken before other reforms could take place.

The association of the protection policy in Victoria with liberalism should not lead to wide generalisations either about Syme's role as the formulator, or about protection and liberalism being twin sisters. New South Wales liberalism had Parkes as its political leader and Parkes was a Free Trader. In New South Wales the labor movement was sharply divided on the fiscal issue both before and after the formation of the Labor Party. Free trade, of course, was the orthodox Empire economic doctrine and it was held tenaciously by squatters and importing manufacturers in the Australian colonies. The opposite view, the promotion of native industry, appealed to the wealthy in the towns but not necessarily to all workers, urban or rural. The free trade doctrine was spent in Victoria much earlier than in N.S.W., where it persisted, of course, after Federation.

That the doctrine of protection gained favor so early in Victoria has
been explained variously. Most views hold that it had something to do with the squatters—either because the wealthy pastoralist was from the beginning the big man in N.S.W. (the older colony) or because revenue from land sales in Victoria declined earlier and there was greater urgency for alternative sources of income. The cry to open the land had the support of the liberal movement in both States, but neither in N.S.W. nor in Victoria did the potential small farmer benefit from the liberal-promoted and worker-supported Land Acts of the 60’s to the 80’s.

In what position then can Syme and The Age be placed? It cannot be denied that he and his paper were influential media in a period when newspaper editors wielded greater influence than they do today. Syme helped, indubitably, to make the protection doctrine a practicable political question. Whether he made and unmade governments is another matter. He was a shrewd man (usually), with a flair for knowing which political horse should be backed; nor did he fail when necessary to give the right tips from the newspaper stable.

Sayers has written a biography of Syme, a much more objective one than Pratt’s was. One inevitably expects too much from a biography; details of personal life and private attitudes, a full knowledge of the economic and political background in which the subject moved. Syme lived in a period which is full of events, confusing because so many things were happening in a large new country where capitalism was developing on the basis of convictism, the pastoral industry and the discovery of gold. Sayers as an Age journalist has thrown more light on an important figure of this developmental stage in Australia’s history.—M.W.


On July 7 this year the Minister for Territories stated that the people of Papua and New Guinea were free to choose any form of government: “This is their prerogative and a matter entirely for their own decision.” Unfortunately, the Australian Government has made no effort to provide ideas on the many types of government that could produce the stability and development necessary. Many Europeans are now confident that New Guinea and Australia will be joined for many years to come. The Highlands Bulletin (July 9, 1966) has stated that the “way has been cleared for a special relationship to be established between Australia and New Guinea when self-determination is attained.” Few people have remarked that it is foolish to give a person a choice between the Australian system and any other system unless the person in question knows the good and bad points of both systems.

The author of The Challenge of New Guinea is to be praised for producing a pamphlet that does clearly outline an alternative, and also points out weaknesses in the Australian system. New Guineans who have managed to attain literacy, a very small percentage, will find this pamphlet both easy to read and relevant to their situation at the present time. It will also provide useful information for Australians who want a survey of existing conditions in the Territory.

Apart from some information about current industrial unrest, I found a chapter on “Forms of Revolt” disappointing. The author sees the millenarian movements as a progressive
movement "representing the emergence of new forms of rudimentary political organisation to cope with the new situation." (p. 25.) However, most of the Cargo movements have been reactionary rather than progressive and have attempted to use the traditional forms of magic and religion rather than new beliefs. On page 25 Yali, a cult leader of the late '40's and early '50's is described as being "dropped by the Administration." This I believe to have been the natural result of Yali's bitterness at broken promises and lies told to the people by the Army and Administration at the end of the war. The Administration could not very well continue to employ a person who did have such a feeling of injustice and hatred for the system.

Most of the pamphlet has a degree of competence that reflects the author's familiarity with the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The quoting of sources of information is an important advance and adds to the value of this publication. Writers of pamphlets often seem loathe to acknowledge sources and this detracts from their work.

Cost was, no doubt, a great consideration in the production of photographs and some are rather poorly reproduced. There would have been advantages in editing out some of the photographs and leaving more space for those remaining.

The value of this pamphlet is in its low cost, making it within the reach of people on a weekly wage of 50/-.

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Professor Albinski, Associate Professor of Political Science, Pennsylvania State University, utilising a Visiting Fellowship in International Relations at the Australian National University, has made a well documented study of Australian policies vis-a-vis China since the end of the Second World War.

The writer relies for his basic material not only on printed sources, but also on interviews with a wide range of personalities significant in Australian public life ranging from Mr. B. A. Santamaria to Dr. Cairns and including prominent Liberal Party members and academics.

The Menzies government's opportunism and expediency, its "hypocrisy if not downright prevarication" (p. 301) on China trade are effectively presented.

Professor Albinski shows convincingly the enormous benefit accruing to the Australian economy from the sale to China of wheat totalling seven million tons to the value of $500,000,000 to 1964, equivalent, as the author dryly remarks, to the total defence budget for the latter year. As a result of the China trade "bonanza" the acreage sown to wheat doubled between 1957-8 and 1964-5. Simultaneously, wool sales totalled $22,000,000 per annum with the expectation of sales five times as great by 1970.

These benefits did not deter the Menzies government from following the United States hard line in the United Nations on the seating of
China. The U.S. government was far from pleased with the show of independence by its satellite represented by the sale of wheat to China and protested vigorously, especially as part of the purchase was shipped directly to Cuba, which, of course, was under a complete U.S. trade embargo. However, as the author shows, the influence of the Country Party was decisive.

Professor Albinski analyses in some detail the economic trends impelling the Australian economy towards Asian trade: the decline in exports to Great Britain from $718,000,000 in 1952-3 to $418,000,000 in 1962-3, and the trade deficits in 1962-3 of $214,000,000 with Great Britain and $210,000,000 with North America.

These, taken in conjunction with United States reductions of Australian lead and zinc quotas, and discriminatory tariffs against Australian meat, wool and cheese, and with Britain's moves towards the European Common Market underlined the urgent need for Australia to find alternative trading partners. And, of those offering, China was beyond all comparison the most important.

Professor Albinski's analysis of the position of the A.L.P. on foreign policy is particularly interesting. As he shows, the Labor Party accepted the basic postulates of the Liberal Party: its anti-communist position, the United States alliance, its identification with "the west". As a result, the attempt to give a more democratic orientation to basically identical policies served to throw Labor into disarray and to open the way to dishonest and misleading attempts by the Liberal Party to make it appear that the Labor Party was "soft on communism" and would leave Australia defenceless against "communist aggression". As Professor Albinski comments, "This was rather dirty pool, but it probably had its effect" (p. 209). Elections were won by the Liberals in which this "dirty pool" played a prominent part.

There is an interesting account by former Senator Arnold of an attempt by an official of the U.S. embassy to bribe him into changing his mind about visiting China with an A.L.P. delegation in 1957.

"Arnold was approached by a U.S. embassy official and . . . urged not to go to China. If he changed his mind, a round-the-world trip and an expenses paid holiday in America would be provided for him. If he persisted in going, he would not, in future be welcome in the United States. The story comes from Senator Arnold himself who spoke for the record." (p. 380.)

A very valuable section of the book deals with the brutality and corruption of the Chiang Kai Shek regime. It is salutary to recall as the author does that most of the millions of pounds of economic aid provided by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency in the post-war period went into the pockets of the Kuomintang officials, that relief food was sold on the black market in the streets of Chinese cities and that an Australian UNRRA official, Mr. H. R. Heath, "charged with embezzling UNRRA property, was detained for months without trial and locked in chains under intolerable sanitary conditions . . . (as) a scapegoat to shield implicated Chinese officials." (p. 7.)

There is no evidence that the ethical standards of the Chiang Kai Shek regime have changed for the better.

Professor Albinski writes with objectivity from a liberal political position.
The political cynicism of the Menzies government emerges clearly. However, whilst its opportunist subservience to the policies of the United States are underlined, the material of the book brings out sharply contradictions between the interests of sections of the Australian bourgeoisie and some aspects of United States global strategic plans.

It seems likely that the further step taken by Mr. Holt (since the book was published), towards subordination of Australian to United States interests in his “All the way”, will sharpen these contradictions.

—BILLY GOLLAN.

VIETNAM STUDY GROUP

A USEFUL piece of work in assembling documents from all sources on the much-debated issue of negotiations to end the Vietnam war has been done by the Vietnam Study Group in Melbourne. It surveys the “negotiating positions” of the U.S., the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the South Vietnam Government, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the U.S.S.R., Britain, Australia and other interested parties.

Highly illuminating is the Study Group’s analysis of the D.R.V. attitude, because this is a position most frequently distorted and misrepresented in the Australian and American press. It shows that, as the Group says, “North Vietnam does not insist on prior unilateral withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam before negotiations, but does insist on a prior cessation of American bombing of North Vietnam”.

The D.R.V. is not saying that the South Vietnam National Liberation Front must run South Vietnam; it is saying it must be run in accordance with the Program of the N.L.F.

This provides for a democratic, elected government representing all sections of the people, whether N.L.F. or not. It is hard to see how the Americans could object to this, and in fact, the Group shows that what they really object to is any negotiations at all with the N.L.F., their main opponent in the war.

The Group’s report says:

“While America has expressed a willingness for ‘unconditional negotiations’ she has, up to date, imposed several conditions that would be unacceptable to the North Vietnamese and N.L.F.; no negotiations with the N.L.F.; negotiations to be carried out publicly . . . under threat of bombing or further escalation”.

This is also the position of the Ky government in South Vietnam, and the Study Group quotes from the daily press report of April 23 (Keesing’s Contemporary Archives):

“At a press conference on February 8, General Nguyen Van Thieu and Air Vice-Marshal Ky declared that they would not negotiate with or recognise the N.L.F”. (This stand was re-affirmed by Ky on July 25, 1966.)

So it is clear that when the Americans and Ky say they want “negotiations” it is not negotiations for peace that they are talking about. There were negotiations for peace in 1954, which resulted in the Geneva agreements. These were deliberately violated by the U.S. Government and its South Vietnam puppets. The negotiations they want now are negotiations which would legitimise their violation of the previous negotiations.

As the documents here presented show, this is also the position of the Holt Government of Australia.

W. A. WOOD.