

U.S. election is also a referendum on Britain's Lord Rees-Mogg

by Mark Burdman

The U.S. Presidential and Congressional elections will have an impact far beyond the borders of the United States. One dynamic to be watched closely, is the effect on the factional battles in the British establishment, and on the policy brawls that can be expected to heat up, as Britain approaches its own national elections, to be held by May 1997, at the latest. In particular, the influence of Lord William Rees-Mogg, former chief editor of the London *Times* and now a *Times* commentator, in the balance.

Often (and mistakenly) characterized as representing a "far-out fringe" of the British establishment because of his extreme views on certain issues, Rees-Mogg is, in fact, a chief spokesman for the British monarchy and at least a faction of its powerful Privy Council. He is on the board of Jacob Rothschild Holdings, together with billionaire Anglo-French wheeler-dealer Sir James Goldsmith. As he acknowledged in an Oct. 28 discussion with a Washington-area journalist, he is "sympathetic to" Goldsmith's new Referendum Party in the U.K. (see accompanying article).

For approximately the last three years, Rees-Mogg has been the chief promoter, within the British establishment, of a vicious slander and defamation campaign against U.S. President Bill Clinton, a President who has, on various occasions, acted to the disadvantage of British "geopolitical" interests. The populist milieu in American political life is familiar with the slanderous barrage, through the pages the *Strategic Investment* newsletter, co-owned by his lordship. The British authorship of the slanders was fully documented by the LaRouche campaign, in spring 1994, in its widely circulated *Assault on the Presidency* report.

While writing for the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Times*, Rees-Mogg has entered into a working alliance, in this anti-Clinton war, with Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, Washington correspondent for the London *Sunday Telegraph*. The *Sunday Telegraph* is a flagship newspaper of the Toronto, Canada-based Hollinger Corp. Hollinger owner and chief executive Conrad Black swims in the same waters as does Rees-Mogg. His Hollinger International Advisory Board includes Lord Rothschild, Goldsmith, and Rees-Mogg's heroine, Baroness Margaret Thatcher. Some years back, Black was inducted into the Canadian Privy Council, in a ceremony presided over by

Queen Elizabeth II.

Black and Rees-Mogg both profess to be Catholics, yet both are devotees of the anti-Christian worldview of "free trader" Adam Smith. In recent days, Rees-Mogg has issued diatribes against the "Catholic social doctrine" of Pope John Paul II and his predecessors, Pope Leo XIII and Pope Paul VI, and has explicitly attacked those papal encyclicals of the last 100 years that have reaffirmed this doctrine.

This is hardly a "theoretical" or "abstract" matter. Battles over fundamental questions of economic and social doctrine will increasingly come to the fore, as the Western world enters a conjuncture of social and economic crisis, similar to that which brought down the Soviet communist system in 1988-91. Policy elites, as well as populations in general, will be forced to begin to call into question the "Thatcherite" free market axioms that have reigned supreme in recent years. Rees-Mogg and his ideological cohorts could find themselves the target of the ire of those victimized by their policies.

'The shades of derision will finally gather'

On Oct. 25, a leading figure in the British liberal establishment, London *Guardian* chief editor Peter Preston, affirmed that the American elections would be as much a referendum on Rees-Mogg and Evans-Pritchard, and their friends in the "Oliver North talk show" circuit, as it would be on other issues.

In an article entitled "A Double-Barrelled Assassination," Preston wrote: "The real ticket to watch in days hence, isn't Clinton/Gore or Dole/Kemp. No such terse euphony, alas. The ticket I'll be watching, as the results come in, fires on all double barrels. Evans-Pritchard/Rees-Mogg. Either they'll win big, or the shades of derision will finally gather. Ambrose Evans-Pritchard is Washington correspondent of the *Sunday Telegraph*. Lord Rees-Mogg is Lord Rees-Mogg. Together, over the past four years, they've been *de facto* world chairpersons of the Bill Clinton Non-Fan Club."

Preston stressed that this pair has not been involved simply as passive *rappoteurs* of events. Evans-Pritchard, he noted, has often acknowledged being deeply involved in anti-Clinton investigations, and his "Presidential revelations echo back across the Atlantic and into American consciousness."

Meanwhile, Rees-Mogg, from his position within the establishment structures, has given these findings an aura of “respectability.”

Preston reviewed their various blaring predictions of recent years, with the theme always being, that Clinton was on the verge of being brought down, by this or that scandal. “The point, as shrewd readers may already realize, is not that Bill Clinton has never done anything wrong—but that, for the EP/RM ticket, he is, and always has been, incapable of doing anything right. Now we are about to find out what the American voters think.” The truth, of course, would only be known early on the morning of Nov. 6. Should Bob Dole win, “the Ambrose/Mogg ticket will be Pundits of the Millennium. But if they should, by chance, be wrong—what then?”

He answered that his question is relevant “not only for America,” since it touches upon a type of journalism that is like a “thin screech of outrage, which makes some of the facts into all of the facts. There is more to U.S. political life than the tiny world of talk-radio stations (run by Oliver North), and little magazines. November’s vote is, in its way, a referendum on that world. We shall see. We shall see what ordinary people, not narrow ideologues, actually care about. . . . Certainty can be a kick in the pants waiting to happen.”

Attack on Pope Leo XIII

His lordship, meanwhile, was launching some offensives on other fronts. Here, too, he may soon come to regret his ideological obsessions.

On Oct. 21, he declared war on the 1891 papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, authored by Pope Leo XIII. This is entering on very sensitive terrain. After all, as his lordship noted, in one of his few non-lying statements, this encyclical forms the basis of the “economics of Catholic social doctrine.” It was formulated by Leo XIII, to defend workers and the poor against the ravages of unfettered British-style “liberal” capitalism. To this day, it inspires not only the current pope, who has incorporated its core ideas into various of his own encyclicals, such as *Centesimus Annus* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. It is also an inspiration for such militant union leaders as AFL-CIO President John Sweeney in the United States.

In his article, self-professed “Catholic” Rees-Mogg sneered that the economics of *Rerum Novarum* is not based on the teachings of “economists” such as Adam Smith or Lord John Maynard Keynes, but rather on the “canon law and the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas,” and is therefore “medieval” and “corporatist” in content. For Aquinas and his followers, “it may be obvious that a minimum wage will contribute to justice and welfare in society, and prevent employers from exploiting the weakness of their employees’ bargaining position.” These may be “powerful arguments,” but an economist would immediately object, saying that “raising the minimum price of labour would reduce its marginal sale.”

The “defensive corporatism” of *Rerum Novarum*, he raved, “will certainly not be relevant to the global economy

of the next century. . . . In the 1980s, Britain managed to move away from the corporatist economy it had adopted as a wartime measure. Catholic Europe under the *Rerum Novarum* doctrine, moved further toward the corporatist system. The result has been rising corruption, rising unemployment, and declining competitiveness, relative to America and Asia. European corporatism in the 1980s and 1990s has been an economic disaster. Yet the Catholic Church is still wedded to it, and will not consider the arguments against it. . . .”

In discussion with a journalist on Oct. 28, Rees-Mogg stated that the objections to *Rerum Novarum* extend to such other encyclicals as Paul VI’s 1967 *Populorum Progressio*, which proclaimed that “the name for peace is development.” Said his lordship: “I do not like that whole tendency within the Church, but went to the beginning of it [by attacking *Rerum Novarum*]. Pope John Paul II is part of it.” He castigated the pope, for striving to discover a “Third Way,” between capitalism and socialism.

Against the ‘common good’

What has his lordship so unnerved, is that there is something of a *revival* of “Catholic social doctrine” going on in Britain, at this moment. This is because, in direct contradiction to his glorious portrayal of Britain’s economic success, the country has become a destroyed heap under “Thatcherism,” and growing segments of the population are fed up.

Hence, it was with considerable relief, in various quarters of the country, that a “pre-election manifesto” by the British Catholic Church, entitled *The Common Good*, was released. The very use of the term “Common Good” is exceptional in Britain, as it potentially converges on the concept “General Welfare” that is in the Preamble to the American Constitution.

While the British Catholic Church document makes obeisances to certain Fabian concepts such as the notion of a “stakeholder society” promoted by Labour Party leader Tony Blair, it also condemns “the unlimited free market,” warns about the dangers posed by the continuing decline in trade union membership, demands that workers not be treated as commodities, and rejects the Thatcherite “trickle-down” theory, that wealth creation automatically benefits the poor. It also attacks the policy of “downsizing” workforces, ostensibly to boost “shareholder profits.” One section of the “manifesto” warns employers: “If employers do not [pay a just wage] voluntarily, Catholic social teaching would allow the state to make them do so, by means of a statutory minimum wage, either nationally or in some sectors. It is not morally acceptable to seek to reduce unemployment by letting wages fall below the level at which employees can sustain a decent standard of living.”

Reflecting the factional brawls at the top in Britain, the Oct. 22 *Times* editorial drew attention to Rees-Mogg’s objections to aspects of Catholic social doctrine, but then welcomed the new manifesto, for reaffirming the ideas in various recent papal encyclicals, and concluded that “the document is a

worthwhile contribution to a widening debate." An accompanying *Times* editorial drew attention to the strength of "the precepts of mainstream Roman Catholicism," as the key factor driving the social/political protests now in Belgium.

All of this was obviously too much for his lordship. The next day, he attacked not only *The Common Good* document, but also the very concept of "the common good."

He accused the British Catholic Church of promoting "corporatism." The manifesto, he said, is a call for "regulation in the name of the common good," and is, therefore, an attack on the "open market economy. . . . I believe in democracy and the free market, and I view the bishops as supporters of bureaucracy and regulation."

Echoing the propaganda of the U.S.-based Christian Coalition, he expressed horror that the Catholic bishops who authored the manifesto in Britain had gone to great lengths, to discourage voters from treating abortion as a "single issue," and to advise that a candidate should be judged on his or her overall merits, and whether the candidate's views are generally aligned to Catholic social doctrine, whatever his or her position on abortion might be.

'The appeal of fascism'

Having attempted to rip to shreds the moral bases for economics and social life, Rees-Mogg is obliged to come to

the obvious conclusion: The return of fascism is "inevitable" in Western societies.

He had sounded the clarion call, in an article published Oct. 17 in the *Times*, under the title, "Europe's Fascist Spectre":

"For the last 50 years, it has been embarrassing for people to express even the most qualified admiration for fascism, so horrible were the crimes of European fascism in the 1930s and 1940s. Yet some of the attributes of fascism have always been popular. . . .

"In fact, these policies led to the war, the Gestapo, the concentration camps and the Holocaust. But that does not mean that they had no appeal at the time, or that similar arguments have no appeal now. Some of the Nazi arguments were, indeed, true. . . . If Hitler had not been responsible for the Holocaust, he would probably be a hero to many people in Europe today, just as Napoleon was a hero in France 50 years after Waterloo. . . .

"Suppose that in the early years of the next century, there is a systemic failure of the European economy. . . . A Europe-wide systemic failure of democracy would open the way for neo-fascism in the national electorates. We do not need to fear fascism because it is weak and repulsive, but because many people find it strong and attractive. Like the Devil himself, fascism is strong, attractive but deadly."

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