

A Conversation With Dr. Ernest van den Haag

Born in the Hague, Holland, Dr. Ernest van den Haag was educated at the Universities of Naples and Florence and at the Sorbonne. He received his Ph. D. from New York University. He has taught philosophy economics and sociology at the college of the City of New York and the University of Minnesota. For fifteen years Dr. van den Haag has been professor of Social Philosophy at New York University and lecturer in Sociology at the New School for Social Research. A very popular speaker, he has served as guest lecturer at Yale University, Columbia University, and the University of California (Berkeley).

The author of three highly regarded books, his latest The Jewish Mystique, will be reviewed in this famous old journal in September. Dr. van den Haag was a Guggenheim fellow in 1967 and has published in many scholarly journals such as the Quarterly Journal of Economics, British Journal of Sociology, the American Scholar and Ethics. Popularly he has appeared in Commentary, Commonweal, Modern Age, Encounter and National Review.

Possessing wide erudition and a scholarly mien, Dr. van den Haag is a formidable debater, though he has often proved an embarrassment to his opponents by brazenly disrupting emotive, tear drenched forums with a coldly analytical argument. As a matter of fact we found Dr. van den Haag's closely reasoned interview such an outrage that we have asked him to become a member of our advisory board. What will we think of next?

Tyrrell: Do we have a Welfare State" today Dr. van den Haag? What is it and how has it manifested itself?

van den Haag: What is a "Welfare State"? A state which tries to provide for the welfare of its citizens by making sure that the conditions exist in which they can provide for themselves? That is what we always try to have. A state that regards itself as the custodian of people's welfare? We are veering a bit in that direction. But we haven't gone all the way yet.

Tyrrell: How so? How is the state showing itself to be going in that direction?

van den Haag: Well, for instance, if it becomes a public responsibility to take care of my health, or sickness, then it soon will be part of the task of the state to make sure that I don't make myself sick. If I as a taxpayer have to pay when you go to the hospital because of cancer, I may also feel inclined to say that you are not to be allowed to smoke, because when you smoke it raises my taxes. In short, if that sort of thing expands, it will necessarily reduce people's freedom. If they are free to do things which are good for their welfare or bad for their welfare, we have freedom. But if they are compelled to act for their welfare as conceived by the government, we don't. And if money is going to be spent to take care of people's welfare then this last is more likely to happen.



Tyrrell: At the Saturday Evening Club we criticize welfare, because its mode of operation, the bureaucracy, is so haltingly inefficient. Do you think welfare is working?

van den Haag: Well, I think what you now have in mind is welfare in the narrower sense as payments made to people who do not earn enough income to live on. I think everyone agrees that it has been working very badly because the payments have been made in such a way as to reward people for abandoning their families—e.g., federal aid to dependent children is given to the family when the breadwinner is not there. So if a father has several children and is able to earn only, say, three or four thousand dollars a year, in many cases if he leaves the family, the family is able to get more from welfare than he could have earned from them. And he can keep the money he earns. Hence there is--was--a tendency of creating more and more of these dependent children. Further, when a welfare recipient earned money, that money was deducted from his welfare payment; hence, he had no good reason to earn any money. Now, Mr. Nixon has made in this respect proposals of which I fully approve, not to make aid to families dependent on abandonment, but merely on the income of the family and to make it possible for people who are on welfare to earn income which is not deducted from the welfare receipts so as to give them an incentive to earn. He has made many other proposals most of which I approve, some of which in my opinion do not go far

enough. I have some additional proposals. There are two things which I, in the main, would advocate. One, dependent children are the major and fastest rising part of the welfare population. I think the way to avoid them is to make it possible by wide distribution, both of information and of actual implements, for all women who wish to use contraceptive devices. And secondly, to inspire them to do so I would give a bounty to every woman, say of one hundred dollars, who accepts a contraceptive device of a semi-permanent nature, e.g. a so-called intra-uterine device. There will be in about six months or so a small chemical pill that is being tried out already that will release contraceptive chemicals for about a year. These other things I think would really make it much easier to avoid children whom the parents cannot support.

But this is not all. I would go a step further. It seems to me that a man who has intercourse with a woman knowing that she is not protected against conception and being himself unwilling or unable at the time of conception to provide for the child is deliberately or by neglect placing an undue burden on the taxpayers. And I would make that a crime, punishable with several years in jail—that is if it can be shown in court that a man aided in conception when he was either not willing or at the time not able to provide for the child that was the likely result, then he should be punished accordingly. If you take these two measures, I think the number of people on welfare instead of going up, as it

is now, will go down very rapidly.

You ought to remember that the number of people on welfare has gone up in a time of rising prosperity and of declining unemployment. That is, in other words, the increase in the welfare population has been largely created by what you have called before the welfare bureaucracy, that is by the way the welfare money has been spent. Now I wish to make it clear that I think some people will always have to be on welfare unless our insurance schemes are greatly expanded which will amount to about the same thing. People will be unable to earn a living because of sickness or age or so... That is unavoidable and I think we are affluent enough to take care of them. What I am saying is that we should not take care of them in a way which encourages people to create dependents which have to be paid for by the taxpayers. I would also say that we are at the present time discouraging people from taking jobs by paying them in welfare in many cases as much as they could have earned by taking a job, and at the same time, if they were to work, deducting it from their welfare payments, as I mentioned before. This I think should also be changed.

Let me add here incidentally that I see a great virtue in Mr. Nixon's proposals of paying just as much in Alabama as in New York City. You see, by doing that we will make Alabama more attractive and New York City, in comparative terms, less attractive. Right now, you know that in New York you can get almost ten times as much welfare as you can in Alabama. And that means that people will come from Alabama to New York. Now, that is disadvantageous in general terms because quiet apart from the direct payments, there are many indirect costs caused by anyone living on welfare in New York which are far higher than they are in Alabama--added police, added fire protection, and so on and so on. It is in the social interest if people who have to receive welfare stay in rural areas. And the way to do this is to increase the payments in rural areas relative to those in the cities. And that in a sense is what Mr. Nixon has begun to do; therefore I support his proposals in this respect too. Tyrrell: You have said that "Those now coming from social work schools seem to contribute as much to the creation of social problems as to their solutions." Now administration of Mr. Nixon's program seems almost impossible given the stupidity of social workers. How can this problem be solved?

van den Haag: I think the social workers we have now, contribute no less to the creation than they do to the solution of social problems. There is no evidence whatever that people serviced by social workers fare any better than they do if simply given the money without advice and supervision. I should favor that welfare cases be investigated with respect to need or income. I do not think any other "social work" is necessary except in a few special circumstances.

Tyrrell: What about the cost of these proposals, though? Some estimate that the cost is going to be over twice what Mr. Nixon estimated it would be. Also are you

not concerned about the growing specter of statism?

van den Haag: Well, it's very hard to figure out the cost. I think in the short run it certainly will rise. By how much no one knows. In the long run his proposals may decrease the cost, by reducing the number of dependent children, by encouraging welfare recipients to work, by making it possible for them to work, by training, and so on and so on. In the long run there might be a decrease.

Tyrrell: Two points. Your point on birth control. Are you not suggesting that the state take a moral stand abrasive to the sensitivities of various religious groups, say, Roman Catholics?

van den Haag: If a Catholic woman does not want to take a birth control device, no one compels her to.

Tyrrell: She's paying taxes to a state...

van den Haag: And I'm paying taxes to support children that I haven't created. I think that's very immoral. I'd rather pay the taxes to prevent the children.

Tyrrell: Why not get away from the whole situation?

van den Haag: Oh, if you have a better solution, let me know.

Tyrrell: Well, perhaps the state ought to get completely out of welfare.

van den Haag: That's good, and what will these people do?

Tyrrell: As you say, we can increase insurance.

van den Haag: Well, it's a little late for insurance. I mean there are several million dependent children. What will you do with them? Since you are no longer supporting them on welfare, how will they be supported?

Tyrrell: Private institutions.

van den Haag: Great. You let me know where the private institutions are. Ideally speaking it would be much nicer if you could do away with the problem. But you see, we have to distinguish between solving the problem and simply defining it away because we don't want to solve it. These people are there. I do not think it will be politically acceptable, I do not think it would be morally acceptable to simply let them starve to death. If you mean to say that what we should do is to act in such a way so as to reduce their number by the proper ways of distributing welfare, by discouraging people from being on welfare, then I certainly agree with you. And that's what I've been talking about. But I don't think we can simply stop paying.

Tyrrell: In the programs you have advocated we will simply continue our peregrination toward statism. Somehow you do agree that we have to take the state out of welfare?

van den Haag: No, I do not agree with it. I think welfare as I tried to say before, welfare payments are a permanent part of our social organization. In our society there will always be people who for reasons beyond their control, will be unable to earn enough money. I think we will have to provide for them in some way, whether by insurance or welfare doesn't make much difference. I think that's a minor technical distinction, frankly.

Tyrrell: You have written extensively about pornography. Though Earl Warren

could not, can you define pornography?

van den Haag: I think so. It's not wholly impossible to define. Pornography is not literature, and it is distinguished from literature very clearly. It seems to me, the difficulty is largely created by lawyers who can't get themselves accustomed to the fact that things change over time. You see, the best way of looking at it is if you look at it in terms of fashion. Today, as you must have noticed, girls wear mini-skirts. The mini-skirts reveal far more than fifty years ago was regarded as decent to reveal. Now it seems to me that a judge fifty years ago who might have had a girl punished for indecent exposure was not wrong. He followed contemporary standards. And a judge who does not do so today, by today's standards is also not wrong. In short, it is perfectly conceivable that these things change. Our laws permit the jury to decide what the standard is at any given time. The jury, being of course a section of the general public, is likely to make a reasonable decision in terms of the times. So the difficulty of definition never has struck me as a major thing. It's a question of principle whether you want to prohibit it at all, and that seems to me to be largely decidable in terms of tradition. We can live without making it illegal, making it partially legal, and in some countries it is made legal, and we can live that way too. The idea that some people have--who make pompous speeches on freedom being endangered by censorship of pornography--is historically idiotic. I know of not a single case where freedom was eroded and an anti-freedom regime came in preceded by restrictions on pornography. The Nazi regime after it came in did restrict pornography. The Communist regime after it came in did restrict pornography. I don't know of any case where the regime has been brought in by this. Therefore it seems to me whether a democracy wants to make this restriction or not is a matter of opinion. But I think it is pompous nonsense to say that that will ruin our freedom in general. It may reduce the ability of pornography fanciers to get the pornography when and where they want. But even there let me point out there is a point to be made. It seems to me that the people who fancy pornography to some extent fancy and enjoy it because it is prohibited. Therefore perhaps we are doing them a favor by keeping it prohibited. That way they will enjoy it more, and the censors will enjoy censoring, and the public will enjoy being protected and that's that. You see, censorship will never be such, for practical purposes, that a man who is bent on getting a pornographic book will not get it. What censorship basically will mean is that it becomes a little more difficult for the casual person to get pornography. Instead of finding it everywhere, he will have to take some trouble, and he won't take it unless he feels strongly impelled. I don't find any harm in it.

Tyrrell: You recently wrote an article in National Review on sex education in the schools. Would you care to comment on that article?

van den Haag: I explained, and this has always been my view, that sex education is

(Continued on Page 9)

The Bitter Fruits of Socialism: Slave Island in the Caribbean

by Lawrence D. Pratt

Before Fidel Castro began experimenting with the lives of seven million Cubans, that island nation enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in Latin America and was virtually on the threshold of developing a truly modern economy. Today it is a drab anthill, the Cuban love of "fiesta" squelched beneath the staggering burden of Communist party plans, threats and mismanagement.

Castro's version of Cuban history (as well as that of the leftists in this country) holds that the Cubans--especially the peasantry--were being exploited by unscrupulous U.S. imperialist businesses (backed by the might of the U.S. government) working in collusion with corrupt Cuban governments. Now of course there was foreign investment in Cuba, but before Castro the island's prosperity resulted precisely from the amount of foreign capital--a large amount of it American--which had gravitated there.

The Socialists' doctrinaire attachment to their theories has always prevented them from accepting a basic fact of life--there simply is no abundance of goods lying around for man to gather up. The only way to get more is to produce more, and the only countries which have high levels of productivity--and a high degree of consumer satisfaction thereby--are those countries which have allowed the free market to allocate the investment of capital.

In Cuba, there is not even an economic plan as such, for everything is a function of the political decisions of the elite which rules Cuba more firmly and completely than did any Pharaoh ever rule Egypt. The economy is now a complete mess and functions only because the people are too hungry and terrorized to rise up against Castro.

Rationing has become so severe that now--partially to avoid the huge waste of time spent in queues (people are even hired to stand in for others), and partially because of the acute scarcity of goods--Cubans will soon be standing in line only twice a month for virtually all their food. Few other lines will form, since little else is available for anyone but the Communists and the officials of the neighborhood spy groups.

There is very little meat. Nor is there fresh milk--even for the very young--because the planners decided to export milk-fed veal in order to buy arms and machinery and now a campaign is being waged in the press to convince the Cuban people how much they really do like slugs (the little garden creatures that leave behind them a trail of mucus).

Children's health is such a problem that there are even a few malnutrition clinics to pep them up so they can be shipped back to their squalid daily lives. Others can get free hospital care--if they are willing and able to donate a pint of blood (blood sold abroad buys things Castro says Cuba needs) and suffer the malpractice of

Cuba's increasingly untrained medical corps.

More and more children are being "educated" (indoctrinated to cheerfully accept the robot existence of Marxian man) in boarding schools so that the "counter-revolutionary" attitude of many parents will not be adopted by the young. Weekend sessions are held at school to get the children to inform on their parents and neighbors. Their carefully planned vacations--and indeed a good deal of their school time--is spent in para-military marching and drill. Children's brigades are sent out to the fields to perform some of the tasks left undone by the enormous percentage of the population forcibly mobilized to harvest the sugar crop.

For the first few years Castro & Co. oriented their efforts toward a crash industrialization of the economy. Once accomplished, industrialization would have been offered as proof that the U. S. has kept Cuba in the colonial, semi-captive state of a one-crop economy.

After this failed miserably, Castro abruptly reversed himself and proceeded to exhort the Cuban people to produce more sugar than ever before. Now claiming that a one-crop economy is a virtue, The Chief hopes to be able to buy the machinery needed for gradual and diversified industrialization. For months and months Castro has been calling for a sugar harvest in 1970 of 10 million tons. The largest pre-Castro harvest was 7.2 million tons. His efforts have averaged closer to five million until now.

Intent on achieving this goal, Castro has hardly bothered to conceal the slave-camp nature of his regime. He has threatened absenteeism--even of a few hours--with

harsh penalties. To the women of Cuba he has extolled the glory of dying in the fields while cutting cane. For the great harvest he has conscripted more and more youths into the army. Children go to "school" in the fields. Wages are inconsequential, the black market is very expensive, and both it and barter are punishable by longer exile to the cane fields. The quota of "voluntary" hours is high and impossible work norms of cutting as much as 5000 pounds daily per worker are the rule.

Castro's capital is not money and machines but the blood and sweat of slaves. A vast network of spies is at work in the neighborhoods and in the fields. Pocketing a potato to take home to a hungry family can result in a sentence shortened only by "occupational therapy" such as cutting cane with a machete for more than the normal 10-to 12-hour stint.

The people have answered these conditions with slowdowns and sabotage. Such actions can now bring the maximum penalty subject to the discretion of overseers or summary tribunals.

It is little wonder that at least 600,000 Cubans have fled Cuba--many at extreme peril. The exodus has included blacks and whites, middle class and peasant--in short, anyone who is fortunate enough to find a way out. But with the effrontery of which only a totalitarian regime is capable, Radio Havana declares itself to the world as "the liberated territory of America."

This is the "liberation" some of America's leftists would bring about here. That a Cuban model is the holy grail, pursued by our new left in particular, speaks clearly about their ignorance or their intentions or both. If a Castro-like regime were ever to rule America the eccentrics of the new left would be the first to suffer extermination. No one does "his own thing" in Cuba.

Larry Pratt is the midwest director of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

VAN DEN HAAG (continued from page 8)

unnecessary for people who have fairly normal ability to learn from experience, and useless to people who do not. You see the people who do not have a normal ability to learn from experience are also unable to absorb cognitive information such as the school gives. They may have some emotional disorder which is not cured by listening to lectures. Indeed they have problems, but these problems are in no way solved by what is called sex education. Now as for the great majority, I do not think they have any problems absorbing knowledge about sex. Now what educators usually say is that it is better to learn from them than at the street corner. I think the street corner is a fine place. I don't think educators have any superior knowledge about sex. I think, in fact, that the street corner is considerably more glamorous.

The only advantage I can see in sex education is that it may help us solve the

population problem. Because, as I pointed out in my article, schools usually succeed in making whatever subject they teach quite dull. They may succeed in doing that with sex and people may get off sex as they go off reading Shakespeare after the school has taught it, and by so doing, it may actually solve the population problem. But apart from that, I do not think that educators are in possession of some sort of special knowledge or experience that the children have to learn from them. It seems the schools are far too eager to teach the things that needn't be taught and very uneager to teach the things that need to be taught. You do not learn outside the school or home experience mathematics or classical languages or economics, and the schools are reluctant to teach them and do a bad job when they try. As for sex I have really no fear. □