

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Yves Barbero

MARKETING RELIGION

by Yves Barbero

"We are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.
A holy nation, a peculiar people"
-- from the distributed song sheet

Halloween evening, at the Civic Center in San Francisco, took on a surreal atmosphere. Outside were the more extreme of the radical gays, costumed as much for the witching hour as for a political statement. If there were people there solely concerned with freedom of thought or religion, they stayed in the background.

Inside, several thousand people had come to hear Larry Lea, self-proclaimed leader of a nation of prayer warriors, exorcise the evil spirits which plague the Bay Area. His claim to have the ability to fight the "Spirit of Perversion" is what triggered the demonstration outside.

The press, meanwhile, had a clearly defined confrontation to report on. Sound-bites aplenty from both sides would fill the Eleven O'Clock news. "They're at it again folks!", implying that us "normal" folk could stay above the fray and have a good chuckle as the brave reporters, with only mikes to shield them, got the usual idiot statements from both sides.

Austin Miles, author of "Don't Call Me Brother", said that Lea is relatively new on the national scene. He had not heard of him until recently although he follows the televangelists closely. "But," Miles, an ordained preacher himself, added, "before he comes here to cast out the territorial demons [referring to the Spirit of Perversion (San Francisco), the Spirit of Murder (Oakland), the Spirit of the New Age (Marin), etc. -- ed.], he should cast out the Demon of Blasphemy from his home state of Texas where charlatan preachers who merchandise God originate and multiply!"

Miles also pointed out that it is one of the underlying tenets of Fundamentalism that to attribute something to God which isn't true is blasphemy and under such a criterion, a lot of televangelists commit blasphemy regularly by promising cures for money and, Miles suggested, Lea belongs in that not-so select group.

New on the block or not, Lea, headquartered in Rockwell, Texas, certainly has the organizational touch. He managed to get a lot of

free publicity with his outrageous statements, "...will quake Satan's camp at the San Francisco Bay Area Breakthrough." There was a plastic bucket at each end of the aisles in the Civic Center to be filled generously by the faithful. The book stalls were well stocked with attractively designed and expensive hardbacks and cassettes of all varieties. He managed to get the San Francisco tactical police squad to separate the sheep from the wolves and the few who got through the lines were quickly ejected by efficient "Rent-A-Cops" who looked as if they spent their off-time weight lifting (they were quite arbitrary, by the way, and a number of people were ejected for their "looks" or because they laughed or shouted at the wrong moment).

Marketing seems to be the main doctrinal innovation of the Larry Lea Ministries. A brief thumb-through of his magazine, "The Cutting Edge", displays merchandise as prominently as the inspirational articles. In fact, the text in the articles referred to books and other merchandise in the slick catalog insert to the magazine. And they ain't cheap, folks!

A number of volunteer pastors were on hand to keep the more excitable believers from serious confrontation with the merry-makers outside. [To] "...keep everybody calmed down," said one itinerant preacher from Alabama. In fact, despite some shouting, there was nothing to suggest that the Larry Lea Ministries wanted a physical confrontation.

A number of believers said that being a "prayer warrior" meant they prayed for sinners. Not one suggested any sinister political agenda and there was no indication that they were briefed in any way by Lea's organizers. It was certainly the case that many, if not the majority, of believers came with local evangelical church groups (I went with a group from the Gateway Ministries who were most gracious in tolerating me) and had no intention of confronting anyone.

The program started with music, very loud, well thought out, and with a variety of styles, including one "rap" number and lots of rock and roll. First, there was recorded music, soon followed by live music. I had to walk to the back because the amplification was hurting my ears. But for most, the music was appreciated and brought everyone together. The swaying and singing was electrifying.

After forty-five minutes of this, Larry Lea walked on stage for the first of three nights of preaching (the protesters were only there the first night). I found him a disappointment and a bit of a second-rate Jimmy Swaggart in that he is a crier (for a sample, watch KFCB, Channel 42, 7:30 a.m. any day of the week). One woman, an unbeliever who had walked in because "I look straight", said she counted the word "blood" used 36 times in a five minute period.

In this country, at least, established religion has made its peace (except for certain highly charged issues) with the fact that we

have a largely secular government. People like Larry Lea are mostly an embarrassment to them. When I participated in the writing of BAY AREA SKEPTICS' by-laws, I had that more traditional relationship in mind rather than a modern public relation or marketing approach to preaching. We decided that we would make no comment about religious dogma. After all, dogma is not a scientific or public policy issue. Since then, we've found a number of situations where we felt it necessary to speak up to protect the public or in cases where science was attacked (See Mark Hodes's excellent summary of this policy on page five).

Religion has made alliances with government and commerce in the past and it usually worked against the public interest. Now, upstart religious groups are taking advantage of the uncertainties of our heterogeneous society to create in-groups without regard to the civil rights of minority segments of our population. They have cynically used the deep faith of many people to raise funds and create power bases. Their dogmas (when expressed) are chosen more for the strong emotions generated than a religious purpose. The preachers which come to the forefront are picked for their charismatic qualities rather than their intellectual accomplishments.

If we have the right to expose psychics and fortune tellers, whether sincere or not, have we not the right to expose the methodology and tactics of those who claim religion? It is, of course, merely my opinion but as the Larry Leas of the world rape and pillage the emotions of decent people for a buck, we skeptics, whatever our own religious feelings, should take notice.

THE ROLE OF SKEPTICISM IN MODERN SCIENCE AND IN UNDERSTANDING THE FLUORIDE PROBLEM

by John R. Lee, MD

[It is the policy of "BASIS" to allow individuals with controversial (and often debatable) scientific claims to express them as fully as possible. It is in this spirit that this piece is published. Readers are invited to comment.]

Skepticism is inherent in modern science. Medieval science was dominated and controlled by obedience to past authority, learning the wisdom (such as it was) of the ancients; in medicine, this meant following the teachings of second century Galen, one of whose dicta was that nervousness in a female stemmed from a wandering of her uterus (the "hyster"). Even today, we still have the word "hysteria." Independent research was forbidden and skepticism was strictly weeded out. Even simple anatomy and dissection of the dead was a criminal offense. Science, as we view it today, was stultified.

With the advent of the Renaissance (14th - 16th centuries), science

was reborn with the underlying principle that skepticism is the avenue of progress. Rabelais, whose work we read today, in the early 1500's shattered with wit and ridicule the old tradition that truth emanates from rote learning of old teachings and gleefully championed the cause of open questioning and independent research.

Galileo, while professor (1589-92) at the University of Pisa, initiated experiments concerning the laws of bodies in motion which brought results so contradictory to the accepted teachings of Aristotle that strong antagonism was aroused. In 1610, using a simple magnifying lens from Holland, he discovered four satellites of Jupiter and the phases of Venus leading to his acceptance of the Copernican theory of the solar system. For this he was denounced as a religious heretic and warned not to teach it.

In 1633 he was brought to trial by papal authorities and forced to recant his beliefs and findings. Nevertheless, in 1638, he published his last book in which he restated his scientific contributions.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) led the movement in England that restored inductive reasoning and full and open investigation of evidence, which we now call the scientific method. It was not until 1843 when Mendel, an obscure Austrian monk working with garden peas, established the fact that genetic inheritance proceeded from both the female and male genders of breeding plants and animals.

Today, we are comfortable with the concept that science means accurate observation of events, the forming of these explanatory hypothesis, and experimental testing of these hypothesis. It is understood that truth, in science, is not absolute but is merely more closely approximated. That which we regard as true means only that the hypotheses is not yet disproved. The findings in science are temporary way-points to future better hypotheses.

Remnants of medieval scholasticism still abound, however, in our educational institutions. More than not, the good grades go not to the student who is skeptical of his teacher's pronouncements but to the student who faithfully reiterates them. Medical schools are classic examples of this art. Getting an "A" usually means the student repeated what the teacher wanted to hear.

I well remember my first anatomy test when the only correct response to the fill-in question, "The inguinal canal is _____," was an "an oblique passageway." When so much depends on getting good grades, the student quickly learns to still his skepticism and his independent questioning and acquiesce to the system of skillfully regurgitation of his superior's words. This system extends and becomes even more rigid in bureaucracies where job survival, not to mention advancement, depends on such skills. Our medical bureaucracies are no exception to this anti-scientific tyranny.

The 50-year old fluoridation problem begs for the fresh air of

skepticism to free it from the prison of bureaucratic intransigence which is its present abode. Lewis Thomas writes that the greatest medical discovery in the past two generations is the discovery that we know so little. He might well have added that so much of what we "know" is wrong, some way or another. The fluoride we use in fluoridation is a toxic waste product of industry. The older studies, on which fluoridation is based, were so poorly designed and performed that no competent scientist accepts them as credible.

When Rand Corporation scientists conducted a fluoride literature review in 1981, they found systematic errors; yet not a whisper of it appeared in our news media. As consultant for a large test of school-based fluoride treatment programs, the Rand consultant concluded that the \$60 million spent annually is money being "spit down the drain;" yet programs continue. All studies of the past two decades find that fluoridation provides no discernible dental benefit.

Our National Institute of Dental Health recently investigated the fluoridation status and dental health of over 39,000 school children and announced that fluoridation reduced cavities by sixty percent. Yet, when the data are eventually obtained, no dental differences are found among the fluoridated, partially unfluoridated, and unfluoridated communities.

The NIDH also claims no increase in dental fluorosis (an early sign of fluoride toxicity) in fluoridated communities and yet refuses to release their data to support that claim. When studies document the fact that our daily intake of fluoride (from our contaminated processed food supply and our fluoridated dentifrices) now greatly exceeds the so-called "optimal" level, our public health officials turn a deaf ear and refer the question to "experts in Washington."

When even some public health dental health experts question the wisdom of fluoridation, they are quickly demoted, shunned by their colleagues, and silenced by their agencies. And, when expert medical witnesses testify to the toxicity of fluoride, it is promptly denied but not disproved. When rat studies illustrate this toxicity (rats are notoriously resistant animals), the fluoride bureaucracy floats the claim that rats are not proper test subjects. Does not all this harken back to the Dark Ages? When skepticism is silenced, science (and our health, in this case) suffers.

At the BAY AREA SKEPTICS January meeting, I plan to review the scientific evidence concerning fluoridation. The pro-fluoride mind-set will be exposed as a throwback to medieval authoritarianism. The window to open this closed corner is skepticism. Let us throw open that window.

[John R. Lee had a family practice in Mill Valley for thirty years and chaired the Marin Medical Society Committee on Environmental Health in 1972 which was charged with reviewing the pros and cons of fluoridation. He has a continuing interest in Environmental

| The Ten Most Accurate Psychics |
| in the Bay Area and their |
| Telephone Numbers.* |

| *These psychics have been tested |
| and certified by BAY AREA SKEPTICS, |
and may be safely consulted.

REPORTING TURNED HYPERBOLE

by John A. Taube

From a scientific point of view, the article "Healthy-Heart Guru" by Sylvia Rubin, San Francisco Chronicle, October 2nd, was a disappointment. It was not journalism or investigative reporting. It was a hype. It reeks with hyperbole and uses large graphics for illustrations. Its sole purpose was to ballyhoo yoga. The article was on a certain guru's method of yoga. Yoga has many paranormal phenomenon implications and to associate it with health can be confusing and, in some incidents, can be dangerous.

As to good health, it is well established that lowering fat intake, adding fiber to one's diet, exercise, reducing stress and not smoking will lower one's chance of suffering a heart attack, along with other health benefits. The article describes in detail the various yoga exercises used that supposedly prevent heart attacks. But there is no scientific evidence that any of these yoga exercises, by themselves, has any preventative worth.

Instead of hyping such practices, the article would have rendered better service to readers if it had suggested a scientific double-blind test to determine if yoga exercises have any significant health value whatsoever. This is not to suggest that people should not do yoga exercises. Question: If one forgoes these yoga exercises and concentrates on established practices of good health, will not the use of yoga be a waste of time? That very well might be. Furthermore, if one gets emotionally involved with yoga, might there not be a tendency to disregard good health practices? It is very probably so.

From a scientific point of view, the article should have alerted people and put them on guard about the pitfalls of getting emotionally involved with yoga.

[This is an article from the May 1986 "BASIS", an issue devoted to our expose, with magician James Randi, of "faith-healer" Peter Popoff.]

BAY AREA SKEPTICS AND RELIGION by Mark Hodes

BAY AREA SKEPTICS is a diverse organization. Our Board of Directors, consultants, and subscribers include men and women of differing religious and non-religious persuasions, persons affiliated with religious institutions and persons not so affiliated. The position of BAY AREA SKEPTICS on religion is, simply, that we have no position. The claims and attitudes of religious organizations and individuals, with few exceptions, are neither offered nor taken to lie in the domains in which scientific inquiry is effective or applicable. Therefore such claims generally do not engage our attention.

Exceptions, however, do occur, and they fall into two overlapping categories:

- I. Religious claims whose proponents assert scientific justification for their truth.
- II. Religious claims that, if unchallenged, exact grievous societal costs.

This is a touchy subject involving, at the least, highly subjective judgment, if not downright prejudice. Allow me to illustrate these categories with three specific examples:

1. The Shroud of Turin is a paradigm for Category I. The Shroud is a linen wrap that surfaced in France in the 1350s, and carries an image supposed to have been scorched into the fabric by radiative emission from the crucified body of Jesus. In 1978 a team of dozens of American and European scientists subjected the Shroud to an impressive battery of sophisticated tests, and were widely reported to have proclaimed the Shroud authentic!

Once the question of the Shroud's authenticity had entered the scientific literature, that question and earlier work on it became fair game for the critical evaluation that attends all surprising and significant results in science. The more surprising the outcome, the more meticulous and compulsive the scrutiny it receives. This is the conservative side of science, but note that this same scrutiny leads sometimes to the astonishingly rapid acceptance of those rare revolutionary ideas that stand up to it.

As the purpose of this essay is not to review the Shroud literature, I refer you to the notes for further information.

2. A topic that spans categories I and II is creationism, so-called Creation Science. Creationists offer what they profess to regard as empirical justification for their beliefs. This places them in Category I. However, they misrepresent the nature of their beliefs, seek to promulgate their dogma in public school classes, and pursue political means to effect this goal.

The costs to society of weakening the science curriculum are manifold and manifest. In a broader context, the Constitutionally mandated separation of church and state is as crucial a safeguard as freedom of speech, and is a foundation of academic freedom. The case against creationism has been made elsewhere, and so I refer you again to the notes.

3. The sensitive subject of faith healers falls squarely in Category II. Faith healers' numbers are legion, and their annual "take" is exceeded only by the extravagance of their claims. Peter Popoff, the subject of other articles in this issue [May, 1986], is not exceptional either in his apparently cynical exploitation of those who place their faith in him, nor in his apparent lack of regard for the unnecessary health risks to which his followers may be exposed.

Here the connection with religion is wholly incidental. The substance of our criticism is not against anyone's religious beliefs, but what may be the use of stage magic of the mentalist genre, clothed as a religious service, to perpetrate possible medical fraud. Again, religion PER SE is not the issue.

Certainly situations will arise in which our intuitions will differ as to whether to become involved. Ambiguity is among the usual costs of dealing with complex issues. My point is that BAY AREA SKEPTICS is neither antagonistic toward nor supportive of religion in general, or the religious beliefs of individuals in general. We do take interest in controversial subjects that enter the scientific literature, and in areas where the penalties for uncritically holding beliefs are unconscionably severe.

Notes:

1. A good place to start reading about the Shroud of Turin is "The Skeptical Inquirer," vol. VI, #3, Spring, 1982. This issue contains carefully researched articles by Maavin M. Mueller and Steven D. Schafersman, each including a large bibliography.

2. For the case against creationism I suggest Godfrey, Laurie R. (ed.), "Scientists Confront Creationism," W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1983. This volume, introduced by Richard C. Lewontin, contains essays by 15 distinguished scientists, including Stephen Jay Gould. The essays carry individual bibliographies, and the collection includes a detailed cumulative index.

AUERBACH IN BUSINESS

Loyd Auerbach, who holds a master's degree in parapsychology from John F. Kennedy University* in Orinda, has opened a New Age business with his partner Christopher Chacon in Orinda, according to the "San Francisco Chronicle" (10-29-90).

For twenty-five smackers an hour, they will remove any loose poltergeists from the premises. The "Office of Paranormal Investigations", located in Orinda, is only the second such business in the U.S. according to the Chronicle.

Readers will remember Auerbach for the entertaining lectures he presented to BAY AREA SKEPTICS in the past. It is hoped his clients are just as entertained when they whip out their checkbooks. Don't forget to ask about the warranty should you make use of their services.

*The CATHOLIC CHURCH has long opposed traffic in the paranormal. It must be a wonderful irony that a school named after one of their most prominent members issues such degrees.

Book Review

PAINTED BLACK, by Carl A. Raschke. Harper & Row, 1990. Hardcover, 276 pages, \$16.95.
by Shawn Carlson, PhD

For the last ten years, communities throughout America have suffered at the hands of profiteers of the irrational who see the Devil under every quilt and cornerstone. Churches have been burned, minority religions harassed, and millions of tax dollars wasted in efforts to expunge a non-existent "satanic conspiracy" from our lives. And just when it seemed that the fires of anti-satanic hysteria couldn't burn any hotter, along comes another tanker of kerosene in the guise of Carl Raschke's new book, "Painted Black". In it, Raschke lands a firm clout on the jaw of reason by hailing Satanism as the force behind child abuse, teen suicide, and drug addiction.

Despite Raschke's position as a professor of religious studies at the University of Denver, the text is bursting with sloppy research and fuzzy thinking. Howling errors and half truths leap off every page. Raschke messes up even the simplest facts. He refers to the "Ordo Templi Orientis", an extremely well known occult group, as the "Ordo Templi Orientalis" (p. 92 and index). Practitioners of the "Palo Mayombe" religion call themselves "Paleros," but Raschke invents the awkward "Palomayombists" (p. 11) and misrepresents their beliefs.

During an interview on KGO Radio in San Francisco, he even

mispronounced the name of the most infamous figure in twentieth century occultism -- Aleister Crowley -- and then dismissed a caller's correction, saying, "you must be a follower of [Crowley] if you know how to pronounce [his name]." Not true, Carl -- people with only a passing knowledge of the occult get it right.

Raschke's retort to the caller illustrates his tactics; he prefers intellectual bullying to persuasive reason. "Painted Black" bullies with a clever trick -- it barrages the reader with many unbroken sequences of one paragraph summaries of newspaper stories with recount reported satanic horrors. The word "item" leading each such paragraph produces a dramatic impact -- looking over these pages the reader sees "Item ... Item ... Item ... Item ... Item ..." for page after page giving the impression that satanism is running wild.

But Raschke doesn't help his readers think critically. In the chapter, "Bad Moon Rising," for example, Raschke presents 41 separate "Items" without a single citation and neglects to mention that some of the stories are over ten years old. An appendix does contain a list of "sources" used in each chapter, but Raschke covers his tracks by listing these alphabetically (sometimes by title, sometimes by author) with no way of telling which, if any, relate to a given "item." Worse, Raschke apparently didn't follow up any of these reports, as though he just believed them to be complete and accurate. In fact, newspaper accounts are rarely such. I've found that most newspaper stories of "satanic crime" are more often due to the reporter's ignorance of minority religions and cultures than to Devil-worshipping cultists.

Raschke puts nothing in context. He talks of the rising satanic tide but doesn't mention that of the 100,000 murders committed in the U.S. over the last five years, fewer than 100 involved occult or satanic overtones and most of these were committed by mentally disturbed adolescents who were doing violence years before they took up the occult.

Raschke makes much of the tragedy in Matamoros, Mexico in which the leader of a drug running cult ritually sacrificed fifteen people in order to obtain Magickal [sic] control over the police. But Raschke doesn't report that to find another example of ritual human sacrifice one has to go to Cuba over eighty years ago. In fact, according to the FBI, there hasn't been a single documented case of a stranger being abducted and ritually murdered in the United States in U.S. history.

So where does Raschke get his information? In his preface he thanks one Dale Griffis "for his mentoring and Avuncular oversight" (p. X). He borrows heavily from "Dr." Griffis' materials throughout the book, lauds him as a "leading expert in the investigation of occult crime" (p. 76) and even uses his endorsement on the book's back cover. But Raschke omits the fact that "Dr." Griffis is a one man anti-satanic crusade whose degree is from an unaccredited diploma mill and whose work has never been considered reliable by serious

researchers.

Raschke's material on Jayne Mansfield comes from May Mann, who wrote "Jayne Mansfield: A Biography" after Jayne's ghost supposedly returned from the grave demanding that Mann complete the biography. How much of this work was dictated by the ghost is unclear. Raschke acknowledges the ethereal connection (p. 199), then uses the book as the definitive source on Mansfield's involvement with the Church of Satan. Many of Raschke's other sources are equally dubious.

It's not that good information isn't available. Many skilled researchers have investigated satanic crime. Yet Raschke dismisses or ignores the Justice Department, the FBI, The National Child Safety Council, and numerous scholars and police officers as "cult apologists." When he singles out a detractor by name, Raschke can be extremely vicious, even petty, in his attacks. For instance, referring to FBI special agent Ken Lanning, Raschke writes "... satanist criminals have had one of their best friends ... at the highest level of national law enforcement" and opines that Lanning's paper, "Satanic, Occult, Ritualistic Crime: A Law Enforcement Perspective", is "written with the literacy, the research sophistication, and the rhetorical finesse of a high school sophomore" (p. 75).

According to Raschke, Lanning's paper consists of "volley after volley of emotional diatribe, innuendo, non sequitur, glittering and unsupported generality, and bogus appeal to his own authority [as an FBI agent]" (p. 75). In fact, Lanning's report, with its solid reasoning and clear command of the facts, earned him the respect of his colleagues and cemented his position as a premier authority on Satanic crime. After Raschke finishes his sophomoric tirades, he goes on to systematically misrepresent Lanning's ideas.

In short, "Painted Black" is a masterpiece of the new "satanic" McCarthyism. Horribly researched and hysterically reasoned, it sets new standards in panic mongering. Although its unclear how many people will be hurt by the social scares it is sure to generate, one thing is certain -- "Painted Black "is the EXXON VALDEZ of rational journalism. Some American communities will be years in recovering from Harper & Row's decision to publish it.

[Physicist Shawn Carlson works at Lawrence Berkeley Labs, is the science columnist for the national "Humanist" magazine and is on the Board of Directors of Bay Area Skeptics]

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Letter to the Editor
REPLY TO HEARN
from Thomas H. Jukes, Ph.D.

Walter Hearn ("BASIS", Nov. '90) has commented on my letter in the October "BASIS". He sees very little similarity between ASA's [American Scientific Affiliation] statement of faith in God as the creator of the physical universe, and the same statement by "scientific creationists" that God created everything between 6,000 and 20,000 years ago. I said that ASA and ICR [Institute for Creation Research] had similar requirements for a Statement of Faith, and this is indeed the case. The number of years has nothing to do with the identical religiosity of the affirmations.

I said that his attack on William Provine was unprovoked, and he says that because Provine has a personal credo that the universe cares nothing for us, therefore this is a religious statement, and therefore Provine's name should be brought in. But Provine's statement is the antithesis of religion.

Hearn tips his hat to pro-creationist [Robert] Root-Bernstein and then, in an obscure passage, quotes Judge [William R.] Overton as saying "evolution does not presuppose the absence of a creator or God," and Hearn says that "when it DOES, it has become scientism." But Overton said that evolution did NOT make this presupposition! Whom is Hearn rebutting? Certainly not me.

Hearn then shows his incomprehension of molecular evolution: he says that "in tracing 'disappeared' children in Argentina, molecular evidence of descent is not 'overwhelming' beyond a couple of generations." But this has nothing to do with the identical hemoglobin sequences of humans and chimpanzees. The sequences of humans and rhesus monkeys are five percent, of humans and cows sixteen percent different, and so on.

So we infer from this and other evidence that humans and chimpanzees had a recent common ancestor, and there was a less recent common ancestor for human, apes and monkeys. Please, please, W. Hearn, read "Hemoglobin" by Dickerson and Geis (1983). Do more reading and less soliloquizing! And less misquoting; I did NOT say that "in the days of Darwin, T. H. Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce many people thought evolutionary biology had settled the basic questions." I said, "the common ancestry question [of humans and apes] was settled in the days of Darwin, T. H. Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce."

It is appalling that "Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy" has been distributed to tens of thousands of schools when one of its co-authors, Hearn, has such confused ways of thinking and writing that are reflected in its text. The picture on the front cover of the publication mirrors Hearn's own bewilderment.

[THOMAS H. JUKES is professor of Bio-physics at UC Berkeley and has done extensive research in molecular evolution. He is a long time

advisor to BAY AREA SKEPTICS.

"Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy" will be reviewed in an upcoming issue by a high school biology teacher. "BASIS" welcomes other reviews of this book, both pro and con.]

"The court would never criticize or discredit any person's testimony based on his or her religious beliefs. While anybody is free to approach scientific inquiry in any fashion they choose, they cannot properly describe the methodology used as scientific, if they start with a conclusion and refuse to change it regardless of the evidence developed during the course of the investigation."

-- JUDGE WILLIAM R. OVERTON
Quoted from "Voices for Evolution" (1989)
Betty McCollister, editor

Book Review

"KHRUSHCHEV: THE YEARS IN POWER" by Roy A. Medvedev and Zhores A. Medvedev (Norton, 1978), 198 pages \$6.95.
by Yves Barbero

Why a book review on a Soviet leader in these pages? Because the book spends about a third of its pages on the disastrous agricultural policy of the Nikita S. Khrushchev years and much of this policy was because of the power of one Trofim D. Lysenko.

To be sure, the book is a political analysis of the Soviet government of the time by Roy A. Medvedev, a dissident historian of some talent and repute. It's a damn good one too. His brother, Zhores, was a biochemist living in London at the time of publication with a clear interest in the agricultural and science policy of his native land. He was in a unique position to access Western sources as well as Soviet sources through his brother, Roy, then living in Moscow.

Khrushchev, largely remembered in the US for a shoe pounding incident in the UN, started, in fact, as a reformer. He'd had some success with agriculture so he became head of the Soviet Union. He brought Joseph Stalin down from his pedestal as a godling and began the long rehabilitation process of officials and individuals who had been disgraced. This was necessary, the Medvedev brothers point out, for the nation to come out of its political and social freeze. For this, Khrushchev became well loved. Unfortunately, he used this reservoir of trust to exercise dictatorial power.

This may have been useful in reducing a reluctant and powerful military establishment but when it came to agriculture, "Without any education in agronomy and never having seriously examined Lysenko's bizarre theoretical ideas about heredity, Khrushchev

quickly fell under Lysenko's influence and, in various addresses and reports, supported Lysenko in the latter's disputes with scientific opponents. In 1961, Lysenko was reinstated as President of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences and M. A. Olshansky, his close friend and associate, became Minister of Agriculture of the Soviet Union" (p. 132).

The disaster of Soviet Agriculture, from which, a generation later, it has not yet recovered, cannot be laid completely on Lysenko's door. Khrushchev's sudden changes in policy had much to do with it. But Lysenko was responsible for a great deal of it. The book gives a blow by blow description of what can happen when individual scientists take on political power and manage to suppress their opposition (Remember Ronald Reagan's support of Creationism once he'd been approached by Creationists with a key to the back door of the White House? How about Edward Teller's support of Star Wars, a scientifically dubious (and costly) project at best? Yes, Virginia, it can happen here!).

That political pressures affect science cannot be denied. We see it every day. Powerful groups can determine policy. Research on embryos is restricted because of religious and ethical objections. AIDS research is helped by the support of the Hollywood establishment and hindered by fundamentalists. Cancer research (morally neutral) has important support since it is frightening to the middle class, which is likely to live long enough to contract it. So it is reasonably well financed.

Basic science, suffers because it is not in the public mind. (Curiously, popularizers of basic science such as Sagan, Gould and Asimov seem to get only grudging acknowledgment from the PhDs of the line.) All in all, for all our problems, we are better off than nations with dictators since scientific policy is not suddenly reversed every time there's a change in leadership.

CALENDAR

December meeting...

POT LUCK PARTY

Kate Talbot's House, 479 Ebken, Pacifica, 359-5555

Sunday, December 9, 1990, 5 pm

Bring a "pot" of salad, main course, or dessert, and optionally BYOB.

Directions: From CA Rte. 1, west on Fassler and first left on Ebken.

Watch for coming events in the BAS CALENDAR, or call 415-LA-TRUTH for up to the minute details on events. If you have ideas about topics or speakers, leave a message on the hotline.

WARNING: We **STRONGLY URGE** that you call the hotline shortly before

attending any Calendar activity to see if there have been any changes.

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