Comment:
Defence Regulation 18B

Speaking in Greenock in March 1938, on 'The enigma of the Jew', the Revd James Black, Moderator elect of the Church of Scotland, maintained that 'politically the Jewish question presented the greatest problem in Europe today'. 'There were only two ways to treat the Jews', he is reported as saying: 'and these were to fight them or to convert them'. He believed that the 'methods' of 'Herr Hitler', as he put it,'had done no good'. 'Britain's desire', in contrast, 'was not to fight them, but to see them converted to accepting the pure and unsophisticated principles of the Christian religion as their faith'. While of course not knowing what was to come of Hitler's genocidal plans, Black evidently knew well enough what kind of violence was being practised against Jewish people in Germany.

It is almost incomprehensible to us now, sixty years later, that a distinguished churchman should voice such views, or even offer a lecture under such a title — particularly in Britain. That a generation of Catholics in France, since the Dreyfus affair, were thoroughly contaminated by anti-Semitism might not be surprising; but among the relatively tolerant and unfanatical Britons it seemed rare.

Rare, perhaps; but not entirely absent. Worse among Catholics, perhaps, as Richard Griffiths shows in his recent book *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and British anti-Semitism 1939-40* (Constable, £25). Famous as the only Member of Parliament to be imprisoned in 1940 under Defence Regulation 18B, Captain Archibald Maule Ramsay — Jock to family and friends — was a devout Catholic, much given to quoting as the authority for his views the disreputable book by Father Denis Fahey, CSSP, *The Rulers of Russia* , published in 1938 in Dublin, with the imprimatur — incomprehensibly — of the Archbishop of Dublin. In this work the author claimed that of the fifty nine members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1935, fifty six were Jews and the remaining three had Jewish wives. This was part of the alleged evidence for the 'Judaeo-Bolshevik Plot' to take over the world and destroy Christian civilization. By his suppression of both Jews and Communists in Germany, Hitler was showing his understanding of the threat and dealing with it as best he could.

Held in Brixton prison, along with a number of other supposed security risks and fifth columnists, Captain Ramsay continued to insist

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on his patriotic motives. Educated at Eton and Sandhurst, wounded in the First World War, he lived in a castle near Arbroath, had strong family connections with the Scottish and Irish aristocracy, and was popular in his fairly rural constituency of Peebles and South Midlothian. By the time the war against Hitler broke out, he was regarded as dangerously disloyal and immediately interned. Accused in the House of Lords, by a certain Lord Marley, of being Hitler's chosen *Gauleiter* for Scotland, Ramsay had his solicitors write a letter to *The Times* angrily denying this patently ridiculous charge. He continued to send questions to the House of Commons, mostly to do with local matters in his constituency and mostly eminently sensible. The local Conservative and Unionist committee petitioned Parliament several times to have him removed but he had the law on his side and refused even to consider resigning. In September 1943 he was allowed to attend the memorial service in the Guards Chapel for his eldest son Alec, who served with valour in the Scots Guards and died of pneumonia in South Africa. (A younger son, who served in the same regiment, became a priest of the archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.) Defeated at the general election of 1945, Ramsay died in 1955.

Comic, pathetic, as the story may be by turns, a very persuasive public speaker and far from a stupid man, Captain Ramsay was only one of a considerable number of people with the same sort of background and outlook who were utterly convinced of the threat posed by 'aliens'. Crazily identified by Father Fahey, the Republicans in Spain were barely being held off by Franco's supposedly Catholic armies, while Jewish financiers were manipulating the entire world economy.

No doubt it is a far cry from such wild delusions to the discreet exclusion of Jews from this or that golf club or to coarse anti-Semitic jokes. Yet a significant minority of the British governing elite was undoubtedly attracted by what they saw in Germany and Italy in the 1930s; and an even more significant number of middle and upper class Catholics allowed their fears of 'Bolshevism' to draw them into anti-Semitism and then into sympathy with Fascism and even Nazism. In these days of 'owning' — owning up to — darker elements in our inheritance, it is of course true that there was no Drancy nor any Holocaust in Britain — but there were unmistakable signs of the same madness, however incipient and never — thankfully — allowed to develop.

F.K.

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