

out dishonoring our ancestors and adulterating the cultures of both countries. It is time—it is way past time—for patriots who love our country and who understand that home is not elastic to take their stand on the American soil of the Old 48.

*Vivan los independentistas!* For Puerto Rico's sake, yes—but for ours, too.

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## Live Right, Think Left

by George Watson

“Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy” is a famous phrase, and in January 1996, Harriet Harman, Labour spokesman for health in the British House of Commons, became an object of scorn on both sides of the House by sending her 11-year-old son to a school outside the public sector, chosen by entrance examination. She was later, after 1997, a minister in the Blair government.

She was only following her leader, it must be said. In fact it *was* said, repeatedly. Prime Minister Tony Blair sends his son to another such school, hardly less selective, and both events caused public outrage, since Labour is against selection. Left-wing hypocrisy is suddenly a fashionable topic again.

To live right and think left has its advantages, after all—you get the material benefits of the one with the moral satisfactions of the other—and it has been about for much of the century. In fact, most languages have witty descriptions for it, all coined before the war. The English speak of “champagne socialists,” the French have *gauche de luxe* and the Germans *Salonbolshewiker*. So the hunt for hypocrisy is an old one, and there are those who are happy to be back at the game. The prime minister of the day, John Major, took all his chances at parliamentary question-time. “I’m just being tough on hypocrisy and tough on the causes of hypocrisy,” he told Tony Blair blandly in 1996, to Conservative cheers and jeers, echoing a phrase the Labour leader had once thought he had made his own. Meanwhile, after a stormy

meeting with her own party, Ms. Harman, who is married to a prominent union official, kept her job—just. But with a year to go before a general election, the matter was not soon forgiven or forgotten.

There are several explanations to be offered for her behavior that are more or less convincing. There are also her own explanations, which are not. She was only, she told an interviewer, making a choice that thousands of parents have to make for their children; but Labour is publicly committed to abolishing the right of parents to choose. The present school system in Britain, she claims, which is divided between public and private, is not of Labour’s making; but in fact it is, since it derives from the Butler Education Act of 1944, which Labour (in coalition) supported. In any case, there is nothing unsocialist about selection. It was practiced widely in Eastern Europe in the days of the Soviet Empire, and it was endorsed by Labour down to the 1960’s. Communism, in its day, had nothing to do with equality, and the privileges of its ruling class were notorious.

There are contradictions when a dedicated egalitarian seeks to abolish educational selection, in Britain or elsewhere. To start at the top: If Eton College and other fee-paying schools were abolished, education would probably become even more unequal, since Britain enjoys freedom of movement with its neighbors as a member of the European Union. If fee-paying were abolished, the rich could still send their children abroad to private schools that would probably cost even more, since they would involve travel costs as well as boarding and expert teaching. So a universal public sector at home might well prove not less elitist but more. As for the middle tier, or grammar schools, if you abolish them and let Eton survive, as Labour has long been pledged to do, you destroy the ladder by which the poor have traditionally climbed into the professional classes—in which case, in a competitive world, Etonians would enjoy even better chances of promotion than now. These are arguments that Labour leaders would prefer not to hear, and they hope no one will have the wit or audacity to utter them. They are likely, in that hope, to be disappointed.

The world is plainly right to be tough on hypocrisy and its causes, whether left or right. And it will be, in an age where the media are merciless to those in office and no less merciless to those who seek

it. Power can expect no pity. But I suspect there is another issue here, and one that is so far unheard. I mean the case of the justified sinner—one who believes, and honestly believes, that he has fulfilled his moral duty to God, or to some abstraction like social justice, when he has declared his allegiance. It is enough, he thinks, to speak up. A declaration of virtue can then be used to justify a life of sin. But my term is borrowed from a novel now seldom read, though it deserves to be, and I should explain.

*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is a horror story by a Scottish poet named James Hogg. It appeared anonymously in 1824, and it tells the grim tale of Robert Wringhim, who is legally the son of a land-owning laird but has been strictly and piously brought up by a Calvinist minister who is probably his real father. From boyhood on, Wringhim justified a life of deceit and violent crime by a certainty that he is one of the elect of God. His sins are divinely justified, and he cannot be damned. “Hath He not made one vessel to honor and another to dishonor, as in the case with myself and thee?” Wringhim tells a wretched servant who has convicted him of lying. That is only a beginning. Wringhim grows up to kill his elder brother, and when his father dies of a broken heart, he inherits the estate and continues his profitable career of murder.

The fable, in a melodramatic way, is apposite to our times, and there may even be those who find Hogg’s book too close for comfort. Wringhim was son and heir to a laird, for one thing, and it is notable that parties claiming a socialist tradition are seldom led by the low-bred. Tony Blair, who went to a private school and then to Oxford, is today the most socially superior leader of any British political party. Conservatives, by contrast, gave up electing gentlemen to lead them as long ago as 1965, when Edward Heath replaced Sir Alec Douglas-Home; and John Major, who was brought up in rented rooms in south London and went to no university, has the humblest social origins of any British prime minister since the war. Harriet Harman, true to form, is the daughter of an eminent physician, was privately educated, and is a niece to the Countess of Longford. It may seem entirely natural for such people to give their own children a privileged education. That is all they know. It may even have seemed natural to them

