



# Secrets of the sect

A HARSH and highly-secretive religious cult with extraordinary influence over its members has been uncovered by a Standard investigation.

The activities of the cult, known as the School of Economic Science, are now to be raised at the General Synod, the Church of England's supreme assembly.

Leading church figures have condemned the cult as "evil" after dealing with numerous cases of marriage breakdown and mental stress. Pages 8 and 9.

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Cult has links with the Liberals, the Church and schools...

# The secrets of the

...It is ruining a lot of lives, says Bishop

# secretive sect

A HIGHLY secretive religious cult founded in London 40 years ago is operating an educational charity offering courses in economics and philosophy to the public.

The organisation which now has branches in at least 15 countries has been condemned by several leading churchmen as "evil" after they came across numerous cases of people with mental problems and marital breakdowns. Now the matter is to be raised at the General Synod later this year.

A Standard investigation has uncovered puzzling links between the cult, called the School of Economic Science, the Liberal Party, the Church of England and four independent schools with a total of more than 600 pupils.

Two leading cult members are standing as Liberal candidates in the General Election.

Thousands of people, many in influential professional positions, have committed their lives to the cult and its revered leader Leonardo da Vinci MacLaren, a former barrister known as The Master.

The cult's ideas are a mixture of philosophy and religion culled from many ancient teachings.

Today the SES derives most of its spiritual enlightenment from an Indian mystic, the Shankaracharya of the North — often referred to as "His Holiness".

Members are expected to show total loyalty to their leaders—to the point where it can put impossible strains on family relationships. These are expected to take second place.

Many former members claim the name of the cult is highly misleading.

### Habit

Though the SES advertises its courses in economics and philosophy openly in newspapers and at Tube stations new students are never made aware of the organisation's hidden practices.

And the economics and philosophy courses are really a disguised introduction to the SES's beliefs.

These lead to rigorous indoctrination sessions at two of the SES's country estates in Surrey and Oxfordshire where members are expected to sleep for no more

than four hours a night—a practice that is expected to become a habit.

Former members of the cult believe that they were brainwashed by the indoctrination techniques used by the SES.

They say that membership of the SES had controlled their whole life—the way they ate (a special vegetarian diet) the way they dressed (clothes made of wool or cotton, long dresses for women) and even who they were to marry.

SES members are expected to consult with their "tutors" on questions of marriage partners, when they were to have children and even when to change their jobs.

A major part of the SES's expansion plans has been the creation of four independent schools for children aged four to 18.

These schools, based in



LEON MacLAREN  
The Master in 1951



ROGER PINCHAM  
Ex-Liberal chairman.



JOHN BURNETT  
Liberal candidate.

## Special report by PETER HOUNAM and ANDREW HOGG

Kensington and Hampstead are operated by a separate charity but, as The Standard has uncovered, there are many reasons to be concerned at the type of education the children are being given and the use of corporal punishment.

Though these schools exist to bring up children in the SES's own practices, some parents are unaware that their children are being educated by a cult, having responded to advertisements that make no mention of the SES connection.

They have expressed concern at worrying personality changes in their children.

One critic of the School, the Bishop of Woolwich, the Rt Rev Michael Marshall, told The Standard: "This is an insidious organisation. It is ruining people's lives."

The Vicar of Hampstead, the Rev Graham Dowell calls it a "heresy" and has compared the SES to the Moonies.

Later this year the Dean of St Albans, the Very Reverend Peter Moore, plans to ask a question about the school at the General Synod.

He became concerned about their activities after members booked the Chapter House next to St Albans Abbey for meetings.

The sub-dean at St Albans, Canon Colin Stee, is severely critical of the School's activities. He first encountered them while chaplain at King's College London.

He said: "I am very worried that they are brainwashing people."

The SES, an educational charity founded in London in 1937, claims that its aim is more peaceful, prosperous and

harmonious society.

But, some people drawn into it suffer mental illness and family break-ups as they become increasingly involved in its activities.

Anti-cult groups both in this country and overseas that have helped former School members are also severely critical of its apparent hold on people.

Members are taught a home span mixture of Eastern and Western philosophies with the aim of forming an elite to halt what the School sees as a dangerous slide towards decadence in the world. They think an apocalypse is imminent.

The School, whose property holdings in London alone amount to more than £3,000,000, has strong ideals which govern the way members are expected to live.

# ...It is ruining a lot of lives, says Bishop secretive sect

THE BISHOP of Woolwich, the Rt Rev Michael Marshall, is in no doubt about the dangers of the School of Economic Science. He has helped nearly 30 people escape from its grip.

He told *The Standard*: "They are ruining a lot of peoples' lives.

"When religion goes wrong it doesn't just go a bit wrong, it goes very, very wrong. This is an insidious organisation.

"They are power maniacs, and really do want to manipulate peoples' lives. They are a society with spiritual aims that have gone wrong."

Worried students of the School first began contacting the Bishop in the early Seventies while he was a vicar of the West End church of All Saints, in Margaret Street, off Regent Street.

What started as a trickle of anxious inquiries turned into a flood. He had to call in other churchmen and women to cope.

**“I always knew the School was evil. There is a tremendous lust for power”**

—DR MARTIN ISRAEL

Some former students were sent to a religious retreat in Kent to recover.

"Every person I saw who had come out, and I am talking of about 20 to 30 people, all say there is a lot of good in it," he said.

"That's the disarming thing about it. There is a lot of good in evil. It's good corrupted. The worst evil is the corruption of the best."

"But I was having to help people who had come out with various breakdowns, and marriage break-ups. It often splits couples up."

The bishop said the type of meditation practised by the school helped seal off a person's mind from the sexual, emotional, and fantasy worlds.

"All images are suppressed. They are very articulate and begin to

speak slowly and precisely while fixing you with an incredible stare," he said.

"They are fastidious about cleanliness and they are legalists. Life becomes a lot of rules. You get the feeling almost of fascism."

One person called in by the bishop to help former members of the School was Dr Martin Israel, a lecturer in Pathology at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Dr Israel is also the priest at Holy Trinity Church in Prince Consort Road, Kensington, just around the corner from the SES's Queens's Gate headquarters.

He told *The Standard*: "I always knew the School was evil. There is a tremendous lust for power there — I felt that right at the beginning."

"It was made clear to people joining that they had to give up a

great deal of their time to it. It completely intruded into their private lives and often made family relationships extremely difficult.

"Furthermore, it was obvious they were given a certain way of thinking. They couldn't think spontaneously — and that is what worries me."

"It seemed to take away their sense of inner identity and individuality. They become somewhat like automata. They thought according to a pre-conditioned pattern."

"Obviously it wasn't completely gone, otherwise they couldn't have left the school."

"The type of people involved would be fairly intelligent, middle-class people of the professional type—lawyers, that sort of thing."

"If they did leave the School every effort was made to bring them back. They visited and phoned and then they were ostracised completely—treated as pariahs."

Canon Colin Slee, who first encountered School members while chaplain at King's College, London, said: "I discovered there were



**THE BISHOP OF WOOLWICH**  
"Life becomes a lot of rules."

members of the SES in my choir, going through ordination classes, and quite a number in the Classics department.

"I married two of them, but I wouldn't do it again. The Church needs to make a statement against the SES explaining how it is theologically shot through with holes."

"Parents of one member came to me and pleaded for my help in getting their daughter out of the cult."

"Another girl student was living in a flat belonging to SES members, and when she wanted to leave she was told she would become a prostitute if she lived apart from the SES," said Canon Slee.

"Eventually, she managed to make the break, but she had a terrible row with the SES about it."

"I'm very worried that they are brainwashing people."

## Mystery surrounds Christian connection

FOR AN organisation that looks to an Indian guru for spiritual enlightenment the SES has an extraordinary interest in the Church of England.

Most remarkable is the way it has nurtured the European Christian Industrial Movement.

The ECIM is an official C of E body aimed at helping Christians working in industry and improving relations between employees and management.

Its driving force is Tom Chapman, now 68, a colourful former trade union official who is Secretary General and its only full-time employee.

He vehemently denies any links with the SES. But the links are there.

The ECIM is a charity. Two of its three official trustees are Peter Green and James Armstrong. Green is SES

Principal; Armstrong its treasurer.

Last year Mr Chapman moved to the Lake District, but the man he left in charge in London was barrister James Dean—an SES member.

Even more extraordinary was the acquisition of Mr Chapman's former London headquarters in Pimlico.

Mr Chapman agreed that

SES members found the house for him and extensively converted it.

When he needed the roof repaired, Mr Green and other SES members Leslie Blake and Roger Pineham arranged for a loan.

Mr Chapman later acknowledged that he had been friendly for a long time with SES leaders and regularly

saw Leon MacLaren, the cult's "master."

Mr Green agreed that many SES members had become involved in the ECIM.

● The president of the ECIM is the Rt Rev Ross Hook, formerly Bishop of Bradford, but now Chief of Staff to the Archbishop of Canterbury. He told *The Standard*: "I have never heard of the SES and did not realise there was any connection."

**TOMORROW: The teenage followers**

# Election candidates are leaders

WHEN SES members take an interest in politics they turn to the Liberal Party.

Liberal candidates in Maidstone and Leominster are also leaders of this cult and many people helping in their General Election campaigns have been SES members.

In Leominster, the Liberal candidate is Roger Pincham. For the three years up to last Christmas he was chairman of the Liberal Party.

Mr Pincham has been an SES member since he was a teenager and is chairman of the governors for the SES's four independent schools.

In Maidstone the Liberal candidate is John Burnett, another lifelong SES disciple and a member of Maidstone Council. Mr Burnett can also count on the active assistance of a number of SES members in his campaign.

SES members took an active part in both candidates' adoption meetings. At least two travelled the 138 miles

from London to Leominster to vote for Mr Pincham as candidate and several of Mr Pincham's SES colleagues booked into local hotels to help during the hustings.

A wealthy city stockbroker, Mr Pincham, 47, has fought the Leominster seat in five elections since 1970. He joined the Liberal Party in 1969.

When we first interviewed Mr Pincham about his involvement with the SES, senior figures in the Liberal Party were apparently unaware that the cult's senior members were supporters.

After The Standard began its inquiry, while Mr Pincham was Chairman of the Liberal Party, he took half a page in the Liberal News to explain to party members his connection with the SES.

Under the headline: "This School threatens nobody, neither do I," he explained his connection with the SES, and mentioned that members had helped him campaign in his constituency.

Their help, he said, had been a matter of "personal support and not at the direction of the school."

In the 1979 election three other SES members also stood for election. One was Mr Pincham's brother John, a successful businessman and member of Lloyds.

At Maidstone the Liberal candidate in 1979 was John Burnett, a Liberal councillor there since 1973 and an SES member who is standing again this year.

## 'Non-political'

Last night Mr Burnett said of the SES: "It's absolutely non-political by its constitution and by its very operation. I believe it has people belonging to all parties in it."

"The connection of myself and the Liberal Party is entirely coincidental."

"If I thought the School was in any way doing something that I thought was in no way acceptable or respon-

sible, frankly I would leave it."

Yet another Liberal hopeful in 1979 was SES member Jeremy Nieboer, a 43-year-old solicitor who stood for East Gristead, coming second with 11,102 votes.

All the candidates deny their involvement with the Liberal Party had any connection with the SES.

Instead it is claimed that economic theories preached by the founder of the school, Mr Andrew MacLaren, a pre-war Labour MP who championed land reform, coincide with Liberal Party tradition, so SES members were naturally attracted.

In fact the present leader of the SES, Mr MacLaren's son Leon, stood for Yeovil and North London in the early 1950s as a Liberal.

Mr Pincham told The Standard: "The School of Economic Science does not feel the Liberal Party should be supported. The SES does not have political views."

"There is a great difference between being inspired by what you have learned to do and do something in public life, and being put into public life to do it."

"Are you saying that a member of a church or a Jew should not have anything to do with politics because they are living out what they have been taught in Church?"

"I have been aware of people who have left the School and been unhappy after it. But of the thousands who have been to the School over the past 25-30 years—the great majority would say it has been worthwhile and they have found something of value in it."

"It's not a secret organisation, it's an organisation that does not seek publicity."

Later Mr Pincham added: "I would emphasise that my decision to enter politics was entirely at my own initiative, and in no way at the behest of the School of Economic Science or anyone else."

# Tragic case of the silent son . . .

Iain Mitchell is a chronic schizophrenic and has hardly spoken a word for six years.

After many attempts to find a cure for the illness, his parents have been forced to commit him to mental hospital under Section 26 of the Mental Health Act.

The cause of his illness is not known for certain but Iain's parents are convinced that his membership of the SES did not help. At 28 his life is in tatters—a tragic contrast

to the promise he showed before he joined the SES in 1974.

Iain was a musician with great potential. He had won a place to study music at Southampton University. His friends and relatives were confident he would have a bright career.

His girlfriend introduced him to the SES. Iain's sister said: "Before joining the SES they were lively, cheerful unconventional people with a healthy disrespect for authority."

Iain still believes in what the SES taught him. He nodded when asked if he thought the SES was a worthwhile organisation.

Mrs X is married to a devout SES member and believes it has ruined her married life. Her husband is a successful businessman.

She said: "He used to be such a cheerful person, but now we get no enjoyment out of life. I am considering divorce, but I still love him."

"I'm not allowed to cook for him

and our sex life is very poor. He has got the eyes of a fanatic, and has lost a lot of weight and looks like something out of Belsen. He has become a pathetic creature, completely controlled."

Senior SES members agree the organisation makes demands on people but argue that mental breakdowns that might occur could have happened anyway. They say people are free to leave the organisation and are not forced to go on residential courses.

# Wealth all over the world

FROM A humble beginning as an esoteric economic study group in a rented house in Westminster, the School of Economic Science has turned into a world wide movement.

Today there are outposts in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the USA, Canada, Trinidad, Fiji, Malta, Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Belgium, Ireland and Holland.

AND HOLLAND.

There are centres in some 20 British cities but, as with the overseas off-shoots, they sometimes operate under different names.

They might be called The School of Practical Philosophy, The School of Philosophy, or the Practical Philosophy Foundation—but all were started by senior SES followers.

And wherever the SES is there is money—lots of it. Worldwide, the property holdings alone amount to millions of pounds.

The accumulation of wealth comes from bequests, endowments, covenants, donations and fees charged for "philosophy" classes, and residential courses.

The process is aided throughout by the extraordinary demands made on the time and energy of members.

## Offshoot

London properties owned by the movement include three houses in Queen's Gate, Kensington where its headquarters is based: a large house in Chepstow Villas, Notting Hill, and a huge mansion on the top of Telegraph Hill in Hampstead.

Several of the buildings double as premises for the independent children's schools run by the Independent Education Association, an SES offshoot.

AN SES OFFSHOOT.

The movement also owns a large mansion in Watlington, Oxfordshire—bought with the aid of a £100,000 gift—which it uses for induction courses and retreats. The movement appears to have undergone a radical rethink since the days before the war when Labour MP Andrew MacLaren set it up. MacLaren fell increasingly at odds with his Labour Party colleagues, however, and eventually left the party. In 1945 he stood as an independent, but lost the seat in Burslem, Staffordshire that he had held for more than 20 years.

In the 1950s MacLaren's son Leon, a barrister, began to make his influence felt in the movement.

He began to move the SES in the direction of philosophy and religion.

Leon, 72, is held in such esteem that he is known as The Master.

He is regarded as a searing judge of character—but as one former member said "I don't think there is much love there."