

It should be stated that the somewhat ultramontane symbol on the cover of St Peter's Dome was chosen in the author's despite. He would have preferred, we are reliably informed, a more subtle and allegorical symbol of *Ecclesia*.

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

CONTROL OR CONSENT?' by James D. Halloran; Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.

Mr Halloran originally wrote the six articles on the mass media which, with a new introductory chapter added, now constitute *Control or Consent?* for the Irish monthly journal, *Doctrine and Life*. Let me say at once—before I devote disproportionate space to adverse criticism of a particular aspect of it—that this book is a worthy addition to the enterprising new Sheed and Ward *Owlbook* series of paperbacks, and represents an important contribution to discussion on the mass media.

Though a sociologist himself, Mr Halloran rightly disclaims the label 'sociological' for his book. True, one of its chief virtues is a wide-ranging discussion of sociological evidence in this field; but no new evidence is offered, and the express aim of the book is to make a moral and social assessment of the situation. Mr Halloran's explicitly Catholic and Socialist standpoint provides a consistent basis for this assessment; his argument, though sometimes repetitive, is always lively and urgent; and, with the notable exception of the chapter on advertising (the weakest part of the book), *Control or Consent?* as a whole is commendably fair in its citation of the available data and of the data's insistent interpreters.

And yet, though Mr Halloran successfully steers a course between the extreme interpretations of the two sides in this debate, he finally falls victim to their common mistake, the belief that the mass media somehow constitute a special moral case of peculiar urgency. This leads him to various false emphases in his interpretation—to the posing of exaggerated and sometimes unreal problems, and to the consequent obscuring of other problems which, though less interesting because more ordinary, are nevertheless real and pressing.

There seem to be three distinct elements in this misplacement of emphasis. First, crucial terms are insufficiently defined. In particular, Mr Halloran's failure to define the all-important concept of 'mass medium' allows him to ignore completely at least two of the generally recognised mass media, the purely advertisement media of posters and direct mail; and to build an unnecessarily one-sided view of press mass media on the basis of an unrepresentative selection of examples (there are at least 83 newspapers and periodicals with a circulation of 200,000 or more; the index to *Control or Consent?* quotes only 16 of them, and even less are discussed in any detail).

Secondly, Mr Halloran seems to accept the validity of a utilitarian ethic whereby moral good and evil are judged as such, not from straightforward examination, but on the basis of inference from their beneficial or harmful effects. Thus, it would seem a lie is not a lie until some harmful effect (which

may, of course, never follow) is observed; and then it becomes more and more of a lie as its effects are more and more widely disseminated. A.B.C. readership figures and T.A.M. ratings are seen as multiplication factors for sin, and a single imaginary problem—that of apparently escalating and uncontrollable moral evil—becomes substituted for two real and more manageable problems: the need to condemn and combat evil whenever and wherever it occurs; and the need to circumscribe the power of any individual or group to tell any story, true or false, to audiences as large as the mass media audiences.

Thirdly, there is a recurring tendency to suppose that even causes as complex as those of the mass media contents have simple and similar effects on all people. It is this unlikely supposition which lends plausibility to the jargon of 'mass manipulation', as though the many individuals who constitute the audience for a mass medium do not in fact react to a particular stimulus in as many different ways—as variously, as rationally (or irrationally) as each would in turn react to a comparable stimulus from some other, non-mass-medium source. 'Mass' describes some media appropriately enough but does not extend to their audiences; and the individuals in those audiences are no more (or less) 'manipulated' by mass media contents than they are by normal, personal discourse.

But I do not want to end on a critical note. If Mr Halloran has failed to make a case for special or priority treatment of the mass media, he has more than made a case for the urgency of more and better sociological evidence. *Control or Consent?* amply demonstrates that far too many of the important questions have not yet been asked, let alone answered; and that fruitful results more often follow when sociologists use the mass media as tools for the fashioning of more sophisticated models, rather than as a collective scapegoat for the sins of everyone and no-one.

MARTIN REDFERN

THE PEACEFUL ASSAULT, by Douglas Hyde; Bodley Head; ios. 6d.

Douglas Hyde is concerned to persuade us that Communism, for all its apparent disintegration, is still a highly organised and sinister world-force, intent as it always was on burying capitalism. What is new about the assault is that it is now 'peaceful'; but only in the rather negative sense that a major armed conflict between East and West, or among the capitalist countries themselves, is no longer 'inevitable'. The danger is that we should so much welcome the switch from 'violent assault' to 'peaceful assault' that we should forget that the second word is still the same.

Everywhere the same communist policy is proclaimed and followed, if we only take the trouble to read the Marxist international literature carefully enough. The policy is to break capitalism at its weakest links—where it is least well-established, that is in the 'third world', the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America. The links are to be broken by a deadly pincer grip;