



Gordon Kenneth Lewis

Mr Chancellor, I present to you Gordon Kenneth Lewis, Professor of Political Science at the University of Puerto Rico, socialist, scholar and indefatigable contributor to revolutionary literature.

Gordon Lewis was born in Wales in 1919, of parents who were both teachers. His was not the pastoral hinterland of 'fond climates and sweet singers', its language and culture intact, not the West's majestic coast of pristine grandeur, not the land of rushing mountain streams sparkling their crystal over a thousand rocks. His was the Wales of the industrial south, its hills bare and brooding, plundered by the ruthless wheels of industry, its terraced towns and villages resting uneasily in cold, damp valleys — the very frontier of conflict: political, social, cultural, economic. Torn and ravaged by the General Strike of 1926, the economic crisis of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930's, South Wales left a lasting impression of deep social injustice wrought by the still unbridled capitalism of the day. Yet for all that, it was a land of song, of indomitable spirit, at times defeated but never conquered.

The formative influences of his youth were predictable: Sunday Chapel, puritan in the Calvinist — Methodist tradition; politics of the left; the discipline of the home; and from all this a simple injunction — salvation through education and scholarship.

The passionate interest in radical, socialist theory which dominates Gordon Lewis' life was first stimulated by two Grammar School teachers who introduced him to the Left Book Club. Moving to Cardiff, the Welsh metropolis, he read European History at the University of Wales and, while still an undergraduate, found time to lecture to Workers Education Association audiences of South Wales miners, an activity which had been fostered by the Fabian socialists. It was also at this time that he gained first-hand knowledge of the race-colour issue, not, as he puts it, in the college classroom, but as a result of extra-curricular visits to Tiger Bay, the 'coloured quarters' of Cardiff. By the time he graduated in 1940, Britain was at war, an event which, in itself, produced intense personal conflict. He had seen the policy of appeasement towards Fascism by the British Government for what it was — a hostility to the further advancement of the working classes — and understood that this latest conflagration, and World War I before it, resulted directly from internal rivalries among the European ruling classes. Some of his socialist contemporaries had opted out altogether, choosing instead the role of the conscientious objector. In the event, a sense of patriotism prevailed, and he spent the next five years in service with the British army.

After peace was won, he returned to academic life, this time to Balliol College, Oxford, where he read for the B.A. in Politics, Philosophy and Economics and was awarded the Sir Henry Morgan Essay Prize. This achieved, he took up a teaching assignment at the University of Chicago in the United States of America, a move which proved to be a landmark in his career, for he was never again to return to settled residence in the United Kingdom. Over the next eight years his career and reputation as an academic in the field of political science grew in stature as he accepted a series of posts at American Universities, including the University of California at Los Angeles, Brandeis University and Michigan State University. A chance meeting in Chicago with the Dean of the University of Puerto Rico led to an invitation to visit the latter institution which in turn resulted in his appointment in 1951 as a consultant to the Puerto Rican Constituency Assembly for the draughting of the Puerto Rican constitution. In 1954 he received a PhD from Harvard, winning the Bowdoin Prize Essay Medal. The following year he was appointed Professor of Political Science at the University of Puerto Rico, a position which he still holds.

This marked his entry upon the third phase of his career during which his great gifts of scholarship were turned increasingly to studies of the Caribbean. In the wake of the political ferment in Trinidad and Tobago of the 50's he became a frequent visitor to these islands, contributing significantly to the intense political debates of the time through occasional public lectures sponsored by the People's National Movement.

Gordon Lewis' stature as a political scientist rests on several scholarly papers and essays. His prolonged experience of the political, economic and cultural life of the Caribbean, has enabled him to acquire a genuine Caribbean and Third World perspective of North Atlantic imperialism and colonialism. Thus his book "Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution" is an acutely perceptive discourse on the nature of Puerto Rican society and the dilemma it faces as a political dependency of the USA. His conclusions, concerning the negative effects of the American capitalist spirit, should be read as a warning to all other Caribbean societies. To use his words:

*"It is not enough to oppose the slavery of yesterday,
One must also oppose the slavery of today"*

His perception of a reformed Caribbean island society is described in detail and while opting unequivocally for the socialist model, is careful to underscore the dangers, inherent in this system, of suppressing legitimate criticism. As he states:

*"a socialist Puerto Rico that sacrifices the sanctity of individual
conscience on the altar of ideological purity or national security,
will pay dearly for that option"*

His volume "Slavery, Imperialism and Freedom" provides an illuminating account of the influence of British imperialism, slavery and expansion on the development of radical ideology and politics in Britain. It concludes with an essay on the issue of Race and Colour in contemporary Britain in which he discards as irrelevant the "Assimilation' theory and leaves us with his conclusion that the latest chapter in the history of English radical thought will be written by the new minorities of the society — the 'black British'.

In addition to the distinction he has achieved in his own research and in directing the research of others, Gordon Lewis has made outstanding contributions to public life in the Caribbean. In 1960 he was appointed adviser to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on matters relating to the West Indies Federation, while in 1967 he was Consultant to the Department of Education of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands. As external examiner to the University of the West Indies in Caribbean studies, North American history, US foreign policy in the Caribbean and Latin America and political thought, he has given us the profit of his academic wisdom. In the process he has become a Caribbean man, with a Caribbean wife (a Trinidadian) and Caribbean children.

His outstanding achievements have already been recognised: in 1980 he was granted an honorary award by the Caribbean Review and Caribbean Studies Association for contributions to the intellectual life of the region.

We owe him a great debt for his living presence, his record of academic research and public service and his tenacious writings on radical socialism.

In bestowing on him now our own honour, we pride ourselves in recognising excellence. I request you, Mr Chancellor, by the authority of the Senate and Council, to admit Gordon Kenneth Lewis to the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.