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## *Is scientology sick?*

The cult of scientology won unwelcome publicity for itself last week when the Government banned foreigners coming to this country specifically to study it or to work at its centres. For a belief or pursuit which offers alleged improvements to adherents' personalities and which holds to the maxim, "if it's not written, it's not true," the organisers are remarkably chary of publicity and free with threats of writs for libel. It has recently opened three offices in Edinburgh, one of which tries to interest outsiders by offering a free I.Q. and personality test. Published facts about the movement in this country suggest that its claims to be scientific are nonsense, that it would appeal to people who feel inadequate or are emotionally unstable and that its elaborate organisation is proof of considerable financial backing.

The American founder, Mr L. Ron Hubbard, used *Pitdown Man* to support his theories, was a prolific fiction writer before turning to "dianetics" and is said to claim he has visited Venus and Heaven. That plus the mumbo-jumbo of the cult suggests that scientology is silly, but not necessarily evil. Yet Mr Robinson, the Minister of Health, was sure that its dangers, actual and potential, demanded Government action. Scientology, he said, is socially harmful; it alienates members of families from each other, it attributes squalid motives

to its opponents, and it may damage the personality and health of adherents. The Commons briefly debated the cult in March 1967 when Mr Peter Hordern instanced the derangement suffered by a constituent of his. He demanded a Government inquiry into the organisation, but Mr Robinson in reply simply warned people about the dangers of involvement. He refused an inquiry, drawing attention to a commission in the State of Victoria which had put on record enough evidence of evilness to persuade Parliament to prohibit practice of the cult.

Mr Hubbard brazenly says that anyone quoting the Australian report in this country will be sued. But with Mr Robinson acting against the movement and hinting that except for lack of powers the measures might have been stronger, there is need for the Government to instance evidence in this country. Otherwise, because the public lack facts, legitimate concern and action by the Government could be fairly termed intolerance by the scientologists. If a published inquiry showed that—as many people suspect—Mr Hordern, Mr Robinson and the State of Victoria are right, then the question of further sanctions could arise. But to ban the organisation might be to drive it underground; and notoriety is a powerful magnet. Perhaps the most sensible weapon is widespread ridicule.