

FREETHINKER

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

Clause Four of the Labour Party Constitution refers to the public ownership of the "means of production, distribution and exchange". In the past, though not to any extent during the recent election campaign, when Mr Wilson borrowed "pragmatism" and "consensus" from America, its leaders have referred much to "socialism". The Prime Minister may have correctly gauged public opinion concerning nationalisation, but whatever else his Government may stand for ideologically, social justice is surely at its heart.

Worldwide trends, embracing the Communist world, are today against public control of individual enterprises and family businesses but in favour of State supervision of armaments, heavy industry—especially steel, industrial chemicals and pharmaceuticals—and heavy transport. There can be little doubt that with the spread of price-fixing agreements and uniform tendering, not to mention the tendency to monopoly involved in takeovers and mergers, the fundamental capitalist principle of competition in big business is being steadily undermined. That there is not more widespread demand for nationalisation springs no doubt from dual fears that government control may be even more inefficient than monopoly capitalism and that the country cannot afford the enormous cost of indemnification.

On the first point there is no clear evidence either way. It would be unwise simply to compare the present chaos of the British telephone system with the smooth efficiency of its privately owned American counterpart; for the British coal-mining industry today is safer and more efficient than under its old fragmented ownership. In most countries essential services, and often banking and broadcasting, are nationalised, and by and large give courteous and efficient service to the community. On the question of compensation the arguments are more technical. If large sums of cash had immediately to be found there could be problems for any democratic government, but the possibilities of converting equities into appreciating bonds have not been fully explored.

INSIDE

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Otto Wolfgang

IGNORANCE AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Gregory S. Smelters

FREETHOUGHT AND FLUORIDE

Francis J. Corina

THIS WORLD

:

LECTURE NOTICES

NO COMMENT

:

LETTERS

Fair shares in industry

Many will say with justification that from a social, let alone a socialist, point of view these considerations should be secondary to concern for the welfare of employees. Suggestions are mounting, even among some, such as Liberals, who repudiate nationalisation, that there should through share-owning be greater control by workers over the industries they work in. Not that this today is so much a matter of salvation from exploitation as a psychological and economic device to give greater personal satisfaction and incentive to employees. The bad old days of Grad-grind are virtually past, and wages and conditions are often better in private industry than in public employment. Hence the alarming exodus of accountants from the Board of Inland Revenue into commercial concerns, and of the best teachers from comprehensive into independent schools. Recently Richard Findlater did a survey of writers and found that on average they were earning £12 for probably a seven-day week. Comparatively unskilled workers in automobile factories earn three or four times as much, while Fleet Street printers, key men on construction work and other favoured operatives may get more. This is not to say that there are not men—and particularly women—doing menial and distasteful work for a wage packet less than what a family man could claim from National Assistance, but simply a comment that to be a "horny-handed son of toil" today is not necessarily to be a down-trodden underling.

Considering the time and outlay devoted to training and the mental stresses and responsibilities involved, many professional men begin at iniquitously low salaries. Though not as oppressed as in the days of the *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, young apprentices still have an onerous time of work and study for pauper rates of pay. They tend to be very cynical about trade unionism, which they regard as protecting the rights of a favoured few while clinging to the word "brother" without any surviving feeling of brotherhood. They may be wrong in this attitude, but this is what they feel. It is for this and other reasons that traditional complexuses of political beliefs and social class voting patterns have never been more fluid. The floating voter has become a stream in his own right.

Nests of poverty

One of the greatest myths of the modern world is the claim that technological societies have abolished poverty. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson admitted America's failure in this regard and held out visions of a Great Society, to which young people are able to contribute through the Federal Job Corps and State Service Corps and Operation Headstart. A Labour, be he Socialist or not,

Prime Minister can afford to do no less in this country.

Professors Smith and Townsend have reported:

In 1960 nearly seven-and-a-half million people in the United Kingdom were living in poverty, defined as below the National Assistance standard.

The March/April *News Bulletin* of the Food Education Society is devoted almost entirely to "Britain's Number One Food Scandal". Scandal is no efflated word. Geriatric experts have found a substantial number of old people suffering from bone fragility, anaemia and even scurvy, not for organic reasons but through one bitter brutal fact: **THEY CANNOT AFFORD A PROPER DIET.**

The constant victim of inflation—always worst in basic things like housing, fuel, transport, postage, and protein,

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

EVERYBODY IS GLAD—says Tom Lehrer in one of his songs—that National Brotherhood Week lasts one week only, since in general the Whites hate the Blacks, the Blacks hate the Whites, and everybody hates the Jews.

For instance: the current issue of *The Ex-Service Man* carries the following item:

The Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, Mr Maslow, has resigned from the Board of the Congress of Racial Equality ("Core") because that organization had failed to suspend a senior Negro official who had made a serious anti-semitic remark in public, saying: "Hitler made one mistake when he didn't kill enough of you". Later, the Negro official also resigned.

Isaac Deutscher speaks

When in an interview with Deutscher, the famous Polish-born historian, the editor of the *Jewish Quarterly* spoke of the "Jewish community", Deutscher, as a Marxist, replied that this conception did not exist for him. He had more in common with all progressive-thinking people such as those who in the USA rallied to protest against the war in Vietnam, is a "Jewish community" made up of "racial ties" or a "bond of blood"? This would be Hitlerism with a vengeance. But if not race, what makes a Jew? Possibly religion but "I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist".

So I am a Jew solely because of "my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. . . I suppose that, if antisemitism had not proved so terribly deep-rooted, persistent and powerful in the Christian-European civilisation, the Jew would not have existed by now as a distinct community". Fascism gave him a new lease of life. Also in the USSR, his fate depended on the balance of strength in Soviet society between the nationalists, chauvinists, Great-Russian elements and the internationalist tendencies. In another interview, published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (February 23 and March 1), he explains the famous Russian Twentieth Party Congress was merely a delayed and half-hearted repudiation of Stalinism, when the bureaucracy themselves supplanted lie by half-truth. That's why the impetus of the movement is petering out.

Because Stalin demanded from his satellites, under the label of true internationalism, continuous sacrifices for the benefit of Russian nationalism, local nationalism has been growing in the Communist camp and led to an alienation

iron and calcium foods—and too proud or ill-informed to avail themselves of fringe benefits of the "Welfare" State, they struggle on, on below-the-breadline pensions and limited savings, losing battle after battle in the wages-prices spiral. Mechanisation and automation seem to be making only luxuries and *bric-à-brac* cheaper, while mass methods of preparing food in geriatric wards of hospitals and the WVS "meals on wheels" scheme render its nutritional content steadily more unsatisfactory. While there are some old folk—and the sick and unemployed—who do not enjoy even these well-intentioned if inadequate facilities.

Where have all the Angry Young Men gone ?

Writing bestsellers and film scripts every one.

Otto Wolfgang

between its integral parts. It's the natural reaction to the monolithic empire that Stalin ruled with his iron fist. Whilst he boosted Lysenko, the quack, because he required his theory, the name of Einstein could not be mentioned until twelve years ago. However, people now breathe more freely and there is hope; the Russian revolution has survived half a century—a span of time when the French revolution had been succeeded by many changes. There is still the collective ownership of the means of production there, and no half-way house like our 'nationalization' which simply replaces the individual owner by an anonymous set of bureaucrats, not interested in anything else but their pay.

"Is this true, Herr Lübke ?"

So asks a booklet sent out by the Peace Council of the German Democratic Republic. Lübke, President of West Germany, is urged to answer accusations levelled against him at a press conference on January 24 that he was Hitler's planner of concentration camps, and that he helped the Gestapo to establish those camps. The booklet puts ten questions, the last of which runs: "Is it true, Herr Lübke, that you falsified your questionnaires and consciously deceived the Federal Assembly about your past? Yes or no?"

Last year, East Germany published a *Brown Book* naming 1,800 Nazi war criminals in high positions in West Germany, both active and retired with state pensions. West Germany repaid the compliment by publishing—compiled by the Committee of Free Lawyers in West Berlin—the names of 143 former Nazis in official positions in East Germany and in addition gave the names of 53 former Hitler officials, among them 12 members of the Central Committee of the NSDAP. (Quoted in the current Bulletin issued by the *Ligue Belge pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme*). The neo-Nazi Party with 600,000 votes at the last election has doubled its seats in the West German Parliament so that the senior editor of *Look* was justified in writing ("Danger in Germany") "The veneer of democracy in Germany is thin. Says Conrad Ahlers, 'You must never forget that Germany is not a democratic country'."

At the time of writing, Spaniards working in West Germany are prosecuted for anti-Franco activity!

Religion in Bulgaria

The January issue of the Soviet periodical *Voprossy*

Filosofi contains a survey of the development of anti-religious propaganda in Eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, in the autumn of 1962, a sort of Gallup Poll was taken of 42,664 people, representing a good cross section of the population. Of these 35.51 per cent admitted having a religious affiliation; 64.44 per cent claimed none; 0.05 remained uncommitted.

Words are cheap

So far the Roman Church has kept strictly on the side of the capitalists, according to 1 Peter 2, 18: "Servants, accept the authority of your masters with all due submission, not only when they are kind and considerate, but even when they are perverse". But now the French hierarchy has begun to treat her workers to a series of siren songs. Mgr Mouisset, Bishop of Nice, made a full *volte-face* in regard to liberalism and democracy, at least in the field of human "culture". The contradictions between science and anachronistic theology—he pretends—are glaring but can be resolved when the Church accepts that scientists must have full freedom of research, bearing in mind that there are two distinct "*domaines*" of knowledge: belief and reason, which do not interpenetrate (*Nice-Matin*, March 1). After which the French Episcopate published a declaration dealing with the actual socio-economic situation with such highlights as: Under-employment is a scandal—the workers are paying too dearly for increased production—Unemployment must incessantly be opposed—the contrast between economic development and deteriorating security of the workers must not be tolerated, etc.

To vary a recent squib of Wilson's: One encouraging gesture from the Hierarchy and the French Communists roll on their backs like spaniels. Their paper, *L'Humanité*, published a call for discussion and united action with the Christians. It is a verbose declaration, a thicket of high-sounding phrases without proper meaning, such as we are used to in Papal encyclicals. It is amazing to see that the two sides are now publishing each other's declarations.

The Church and Vietnam

When the Americans restarted bombing North Vietnam because the North Vietnamese came to the assistance of their kith and kin in the South, our Foreign Secretary applauded, whilst even the RC Church was horrified. In a book on Pope John's *Mater et Magistra* soon to be published by Newman Press, Father Peter J. Riga of Notre Dame University, South Bend (Indiana), says that even nuclear war would solve nothing, because "ideas cannot be killed by bombs; it succeeds only in eliminating people, while the essential vice, social injustice, remains". And in a letter published in the *New York Times* (December 25) he nails the bitter irony that the infamous report of US rice crop spraying is followed in the paper by "endorsing the Pope's peace call" (December 21). He writes *inter alia*:

There have been many tactics of the American intervention in Vietnam which we who oppose this war have held to be morally dubious in the extreme. . . . There are certain actions which are so criminal in intent and execution that one simply cannot remain a Christian and not protest with one's whole soul.

He states his willingness to protest even if he had to go

to prison for it. In this connection the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) voiced their opposition to an amendment punishing with 5 years prison and/or \$5,000 whoever burns his military call-up card. This, ACLU says, is a gross infringement of freedom of expression and

conviction.

Be it stated, incidentally, that "Italy is one of the few remaining West European countries" which does not recognize the right of conscientious objection to military service, and even the public advocacy of it is a crime (*Catholic Worker*, January).

The Australian Government rejected a further call by the Australian Council of Churches for a "negotiated settlement of the Vietnamese issues", based on "ultimate self-determination by the people of Vietnam".

Religion and Fascism

The clerico-fascist dictator of Portugal is staging another election farce. The ballot is restricted to people not illiterate—according to UNESCO 40 per cent of the population are still illiterate—but having attained a least secondary education and a certain minimum in taxes (*Monde*, November 18).

The *Guardian* (February 10) reported that Signor Longo, leader of the Italian CP, returned from Poland where he had acted as the Pope's travel agent. These two men, the paper asserts, are the only ones interested in a visit to the Black Virgin of Czestochowa. Cardinal Wysinsky's aim is merely to get a stick to beat the government, and so he has now invited the Spanish clergy to come.

Following the purge of the state-sponsored Shintoist cult by the Allies after the end of World War II, hundreds of religious sects have sprung up in Japan, advocating worshipping of electricity or faith healing through sexual intercourse (*Newsweek*, March 7). But the most cohesive and powerful religious body at present is Soka Gakkai, or Value-Creation Society, boasting a membership of 5 million households. With its claims that prayer can cure everything "from slumping sales to tuberculosis", it is an Oriental blend of Christian Science and the John Birch Society. Members have the duty to convert unbelievers through *shaku-buku* (literally: bend and flatten), i.e. intimidation. They now have their own political wing, the Komeito or Clean Government Party, which increased its representation in the Upper House of the Diet from 9 in 1962 to 20 seats last year.

It is only now that Shin-shuren—a sort of Council of Japanese Churches—has decided to combat Soka Gakkai as a threat to individual liberty and the maintenance of law and order. The real fear is that Soka Gakkai may usurp the government and introduce Nazi rule. They claim that a thirteenth century Buddhist monk, Nichiren Dai-shonin, has commissioned them to convert the nation to Soka Gakkai as "the only true religion".

Roman Tranquillizer

"Apparently the Vatican Ecumenical tranquillizers have effectively operated on the minds of non-Catholics", says a letter writer in the *Churchman* of February, protesting against the apportioning of tax monies for more sectarian schools. The slogans have only slightly changed.

Now it is "distributive justice" and "according to their conscience", but today they are more blunt by claiming that it is the responsibility of "public power" (government) to see that subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose . . . the schools they want for their children.

If non-Catholics allow themselves to be fooled by this subtle propaganda, the money saved will increase the unique wealth of the Vatican and be used for the creation of a world-wide "only true church".

THIS WORLD

Probe into Catholic Education ?

AFTER considering its report, *The Case for Catholic Schools*, the Union of Catholic Students have decided to end its support of the Catholic schools system at least until the position is properly investigated. The students want to know whether denominational education is philosophically justified, what is the Catholic school debt throughout the country, and how effective is Catholic education, eg in the "lapse rate" of school leavers. Archbishop Beck of Liverpool, Chairman of the Catholic Education Council, is considering the establishment of a national working party to examine all aspects of education.

Easter Day Messages

ON APRIL 10 many Sunday newspapers referred to church-going trends. The *Observer* had a heading, "Church-going increases", and claimed a rise in regular attendance from 10 per cent in the 1950s to 15 today. In the *Sunday Citizen*, on the contrary, there was a heading, "Empty Churches: Shock Report". There is little doubt which version the average vicar, parson, or even parish priest in all but immigrant areas would echo.

IN the *Citizen* report we are told that, despite our inactivity, 85 per cent of us believe in God and 64 in Christ. There is no record of our national allegiance to the other Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost. No doubt an occasion for the qualified gratification of God and Christ and further frustration and uncertainty for the Holy Ghost.

THOUGH we are here told that "the person most rejected as a potential neighbour is the atheist", the *Sunday Telegraph* gives no corroboration.

This weekend a Christian festival is once again being celebrated in what has become predominantly a non-Christian, if not yet an anti-Christian community. What is in origin and in essence a religious observance has become for the majority the occasion for entirely secular rejoicings.

The editorial goes on to suggest a fixed Easter holiday unrelated to religious dating, though it envisages some opposition to this idea by the Church of England because "it could be construed as a move towards disestablishment". FOR all its good press and image, the Catholic Church is not doing as well in cold statistics as it would like people, especially MPs, to believe. In another feature of the same paper, "How the Churches Make Converts", Ion Trewin pointed out:

The number of converts to Rome is declining. In England and Wales in 1964 only 12,348 entered the Roman Catholic Church compared with 12,728 in 1963 and 13,280 the year before that.

But none of the churches is doing very well really. So that in its customary pulpitiery Beaverbrook way the *Sunday Express* urged:

But remember that there is one way to enrich the pleasures of Easter a hundredfold.
By remembering what it really means.
By an hour of quiet, grateful worship.
By going to church today.

Yet even without church attendance, one can do very nicely on finance, property, bluff and political blackmail.

Religion in Schools

IN the opening number of *South West* (Spring), journal of the South West London Teachers' Association (NUT) with address at 17 Dingle Road, Ashford, Middx, this question

is prominently raised. Eric Masters asks

How long are the mass of intellectually honest teachers going to stand by and allow the orgy of religious indoctrination to continue to be inflicted daily on the captive audiences of school-children? . . . Meanwhile should not honest teachers take full advantage of the Act's conscience clause and withdraw without further delay from this pernicious practice of brainwashing children?

BY a large majority the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland recently decided to call on the Government to reconsider the present division of State schooling on a religious basis. Delegates drew attention to the fact that this notion of segregated education grew out of an attitude of minority oppression which was no longer true. The current movement towards Christian Unity, the social cleavage of segregation, and the danger of a sectarian apartheid which was a short step from its racial equivalent were all stressed. Groups should have the right to set up schools but at their own expense.

His Worship the Computer

PROBABLY it was the CND cases which first drew attention to the fact that some pavements are more expensive than others. The same offence could attract penalties ranging from 2 to 25 pounds. Now the Lord Chancellor may come to realise the need for uniformity of sentencing practice and the possibility of installation of a central computer into which details of current offence, record, financial circumstances and other criteria could be fed. Almost immediately and at a cost to each court of £10 a week a recommended sentence would come back.

More Monkey Business

MRS Susan Epperson, a biology teacher in Arkansas, USA, is challenging a State law banning the teaching of Darwinism. From Tennessee, scene of the notorious 1925 "monkey trial" of Mr John Scopes, defended by Clarence Darrow, anti-evolution legislation spread to Mississippi and Arkansas, where *Webster's Dictionary* has been banned for hailing Darwinism as a fact. Even in California the Director of Education recently tried—unsuccessfully—to edit school textbooks in this field. Said Mrs Epperson, bringing Little Rock once more before the shocked gaze of the civilised world,

The law says they have to fire me if there is any discussion of evolution in my classroom. My responsibility is to tell my students of the evolution theory. They are under no obligation to accept it.

The Odd Wave of Robberies

UNDER this heading *Anti-Apartheid News* (April) draws attention to the recent theft of records and correspondence from the London offices of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Zimbabwe African People's Union and Amnesty International. Another sort of robbery, disenfranchisement, was featured in the publication's cartoon. Dr Verwoerd is shown walking through a forest of Bantus saying, "It's good to feel that I've got a clear majority behind me".

One and a Half Cheers for Probation

Probation Research: a Preliminary Report reveals that probation officers considered 281 out of 602 case histories successfully resolved when the orders expired. A large number of contacts, high degree of support and low degree of control were factors cited in the successful cases. Yet this excellent service is still starved for money and subject to religious bias. This is especially ironical when it is considered that pious applicants are likely to be increas-

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LECTURE NOTICES, ETC

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), 8 p.m.: MESSRS. COLLINS, WOODCOCK, and others.
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

King Alfred School (Manor Wood, North End Road, London, NW11), Day Conference, "Ethical and Moral Values in Education". Speakers: JOHN WILSON, JAMES HEMMING, JOHN WREN-LEWIS and MARGARET KNIGHT. Saturday, April 30th, 9.30 a.m.—6 p.m. Conference fee (including morning coffee, lunch and tea) £1 1s. 0d. Details from Edwin Savitt, 25 Grove Court, Circus Road, London, NW8.
Bristol Humanist Group (Kelmescott, 4 Portland Place, Clifton), Sunday, April 24th, 7.15 p.m.: A. MARTIN, "Youth of Today and Tomorrow".
Cheshire College of Education, Wednesday, April 27th: TONY BRIERLEY, "Humanism"
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London WC1), Sunday, April 24th, 11 a.m.: Dr. ERNEST SEELEY, "Some Problems in Education"; Tuesday, April 26th, 7.30 p.m.: A speaker from South Africa, "Apartheid: Theory and Practice".
West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.
Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, April 24th, 5.30 p.m.: A meeting.
Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.c. to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

THIS WORLD *continued*

ingly hard to find and, if found, to be more authoritarian than Freethinkers.

Free Speech

AMERICA is often thought of as the home of holy conformism. But in the *Age of Reason (March-April)* there is the transcript of a radio interview with Joseph Lewis, President of the Freethinkers of America and donor of the Thomas Paine statue at Thetford, England. It has some pretty strong stuff. The interviewer began with a quotation from Mr Lewis's *Atheist Manifesto*: "The Bible is a lie. It is a fake and a fraud." At the end the interviewee gives God some advice:

With all the resources at my command, if I could not make a better universe than we live in, with all the misery that is extant, I would be ashamed of my efforts.

The Liberace of Biblical Scholarship

SO John Allegro was described by a Vatican official because of his flair for publicity—a tribute, one might think, from one expert to another. He has now written a play about an agnostic university lecturer like himself. An

ex-Methodist, he believes

Most theologians, especially parsons, are preaching waffle. I know. I've preached it myself. They do it out of sheer ignorance because they haven't read the original.

All who have firsthand experience of the churches know they are preaching waffle. It is only those who have never set foot inside them and spend their lives dining with divinity dons who imagine they are preaching philosophy and psychology.

Holy Cloud

IN a Good Friday **World at One** religious special (BBC Home), there was something about a Sussex Saxon church and our lovable Archbishop of Canterbury. But the prize for indoctrination went to the actor who is to play the part of Jesus in the York Mystery Cycle. Tall himself, he was quite convinced this was in order as measurements have been taken on the Holy Shroud at Turin, "which is now being acknowledged as genuine". A claim which, sixty years ago, Father Thurston declined to make in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*. Progress!

Society of Separationists

ALTHOUGH it recognised that religious organisations benefit from tax exemptions which cause other taxpayers to pay more, Maryland Court of Appeals has ruled against Madalyn Murray and the above society. Appeal is now to go to the United States Supreme Court. Here it is likely to fare better. Justice William O. Douglas is a committed Secularist. Last January he observed:

Christianity has sufficient inner strength to survive and flourish on its own. It does not need state subsidies, nor state privileges, nor state prestige. The more it obtains state support the greater it curtails human freedom.

Catholic Freedom

WOMEN journalists were barred from the meeting between the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Asking them to leave, an Italian bishop explained:

This is for the Pope a special day. We must not allow a woman to sully the Sistine Chapel for His Holiness.

In France the Godard-Rivette film of Diderot's *La Religieuse* has been banned by the State Secretary of Information after a Catholic letter-writing campaign. In Britain a bowdlerised version of Granada's **Vatican Millions** was just allowed past ITA's religious advisory panel. Changes were suggested because the original was "too controversial".

NO COMMENT

"Here at last, to serve you faithfully as a dependable timepiece with a gentle, but persuasive alarm, THE LADY offers a new personal feature with important family benefits! . . . THE LADY will count each day in a woman's monthly cycle just as dependably as it tells the time through the day"—advertisement in *Catholic Herald*, April 8.

"The Yogi, the girl alleged, took her to Poona from her house in New Delhi on the pretext of adopting her as his daughter, and made a criminal assault on her while they were there. After a stay of six months at Poona, he brought her back to Delhi and assaulted her again. The Yogi had asked her not to disclose this as well as other secrets, and warned her that if she did so, he would not only destroy her but her entire family with his 'Yoga Maya'"—Ceylon Rationalist *Ambassador*, January.

"Cliff Richard, 25-year-old singer, explained: 'I feel I am wasting my life. . . . Religious teaching is something I want to do'"—*Sunday Express*, April 10.

IGNORANCE AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Gregory S. Smelters

HOW SHOCKINGLY IGNORANT the current debate about the Christian God is of comparative religion, even in the universities, I discovered when I read a recent Fontana paperback, *Faith, Fact, and Fantasy* (Collins, 1964), reporting four lectures held at the Cambridge Divinity Faculty: "Does Science Destroy Belief", by J. Wren-Lewis, a chemist; "Is God Real?" by P. R. Baelz, a dean; "Has Psychiatry Replaced Religion?" by D. A. Pond, a psychiatrist; "Is Christ Unique?" by C. F. D. Moule, a theologian. The most shockingly muddled (or downright deceiving?) passage occurs in Dean Baelz's lecture (pp 50-51):

The existence of God is not a scientific fact, nor even a scientific hypothesis. The scientist has "no need of that hypothesis". Yet another factor is the Biblical theologian's renewed insight into the distinction to be found in the Old Testament between "God" and "the gods". When we read that "The Lord, the Lord thy God, is one", we are not meant to understand that God is just one among many gods, or even the only actual god in the class of possible gods . . . God is not a god at all. To speak of "monotheism" and "polytheism" in the same breath, as if they were both species of a common genus "theism", is to invite the retort that if that is how you use the words, then the Biblical belief in God has nothing to do with theism at all. Furthermore, if the advances in scientific knowledge have made us thoroughly sceptical about the existence of one or more gods or godlings in the world, and in this sense atheistic, we can, if we so desire, quite happily number ourselves among the "atheists" and still profess the Biblical belief in God. The Biblical belief in God is not necessarily tied up with a belief in supernatural principalities and powers.

Fallacy exposed

Now, anyone who is even moderately familiar with the modern comparative study of Middle Eastern mythologies (as summarized in the revised Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, 2nd ed., 1963, and S. H. Hooke's *Middle Eastern Mythology*, Pelican Books, 1963) will be struck by the fact that the truth is just the absolute opposite of Dean Baelz's misrepresentation.

The existence of the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim god Yahweh is not a scientific fact, nor even a scientific hypothesis. The scientist has no need of that myth. Yet another factor is the Biblical theologian's renewed insight into the *equivalence* to be found in the Old Testament between "the god" (*ha-elohim*) and "the gods" (*ha-elohim*). When we read that "Yahweh is our god, Yahweh alone" (Deut. 6, 4; Mark 12, 29) we are meant to understand that the West Semitic god Yahweh, like the Moabites' god Chemosh and the Ammonites' god Milcom, was just one among many gods. The god Yahweh is a god after all. To speak of mono-yahwism and polytheism, which are both species of a common genus "theism", means that the biblical belief in the West Semitic god Yahweh is certainly a species of "theism" (god-ism). Furthermore, if advances in scientific knowledge have made us thoroughly convinced about the non-existence of *all* gods in the world, and in this *normal* sense atheistic, we can, if we so desire, quite consistently number ourselves among the atheists and no more profess the biblical belief in the god Yahweh. The biblical belief in the West Semitic god (*ha-elohim*) Yahweh is necessarily tied up with a belief in *all* mythical beings (*elohim*).

Mistranslation

Instead of thus correctly talking about "the god Yahweh", "Yahweh's breath-soul", and "Yahweh's incarnation into Yehoshuah the Anointed", which is the

scientific method applied to the Bible, all four lecturers use the theologian's mistranslation "God" without the definite article—which was notably lost when Hebrew and Greek articles found no equivalent in article-less Latin (Vulgate).

But English has them, and so there must be a return to a *true* translation, "the god Yahweh".

Further misleading apologetics

Another book, *Comparative Religion* by G. Parrinder, Reader in the Comparative Study of Religions in the University of London (Allen and Unwin, 1962) warrants consideration.

This theological anti-freethought book is an urgent plea by a believing Christian for a "dialogue between religions", which is his odd and misleading definition of comparative religion (p 31). It is directed to all "those who deeply care for spiritual things and who believe that religion expresses man's deepest need and profoundest apprehensions of this universe" (pp 99, 32) with the appeal to "combine forces" against "the indifference and antagonism of modern man to the claims of religion", against "the swift advance of secular humanism", agnosticism, atheism (pp 100-101).

What might especially shock us, the atheists, in regard to our attitude towards the emancipation of South East Asia, is the fact that Mr Parrinder is explicitly against "the recent standard secular attitude that the religions of Asia do not matter—that progress consists in leaving behind the shackles of the past" (p 117), thus revealing himself as not only downright unscientific but also plainly reactionary towards the emerging *secular* states in Asia and Africa.

The author's idea of religion is that it is "not a historical curiosity" as it is for us atheists, but "a faith by which men live and beings in whom they put their trust" (p 65). But he significantly hides the fact that organized religions are only the latest stages of ancient mythologies and magic and that the "beings" he refers to here are the non-existent souls, ghosts, gods, etc.

Slipshod diction

What amazes me most in this university teacher is that he is utterly uncritical about the validity of basic religious vocabulary, namely, the terms "soul" and "God". He admits that "certain of its doctrines Christianity shares with other faiths: belief in God, in forgiveness of sins, in eternal life, . . . in Christ as the special revelation (i.e., incarnation) of God" (p 61), but he nowhere mentions the scientific fact that "God" ("the god", in the original) in the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim mythology refers always to the West Semitic god Yahweh, whose alleged incarnation in Palestine was as a Jew called Yehoshuah the Anointed (Jesus the Christ, miraculously born with the aid of Yahweh's own breath-soul (Holy Ghost). He never mentions the scientific fact that this and all the other fictions of the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim mythology about Yahweh, his taboos, his Heaven and Hell eternal are only *recurring patterns* of universal, primitive fiction of "another world", already debunked by the rise of our scientific age.

Theist Unity

Consequently, the author's plea to the dwindling believing minorities to "combine forces" against the increasingly

widespread scientific world-view of secular humanism and atheism is a schizophrenic attempt to perpetuate, in a section of one's mind, the barbarous, superstitious attitude of bygone ages, and all his pious, obscurantist mouthings about "gaining a deeper insight into the value of religion" (p 127) won't obscure this obvious conclusion.

The book may be regarded as a muddled testimony to the *desperate* awareness among clever churchmen that, if their churches don't hang together, they'll soon hang separately—a hampering, dead ballast thrown overboard in the wake of scientific enlightenment.

FREETHOUGHT AND FLUORIDE

Francis J. Corina

"The present writer welcomes the Minister of Health's exhortations to local councils to step up the fluoridation of drinking water"—Contributor to the FREETHINKER ("This World"), March 11, 1966.

WHEN one reads a statement of this kind in the journal that stands for the individual's right to freedom of thought and action it becomes necessary to ask ourselves how far we, as Freethinkers, are becoming victims of the incessant brain-washing of authority.

I cannot see how any Freethinker can, with consistency, support fluoridation of drinking water. It is difficult to imagine any more absurdly wasteful administrative idea than this scheme of the Ministry of Health for supposedly benefiting the teeth of the nation's children. For example, at Kilmarnock in a five year trial period it cost £22,000 of public money to administer about £2 worth of fluoride for the purpose intended. No wonder Kilmarnock abandoned it. But idiotic spending without achieving impressive results is not the only thing that should concern Freethinkers.

Even if fluoridation were all it is claimed to be in relation to children's teeth, more vital questions are involved. Granted the "present writer" of the statement quoted above also mentioned that "Other Humanists say fluoridation is . . . an invasion of civil liberties", but his apparent dismissal of this point of view is the justification for this article.

Blessed assurance

When the Minister of Health says he is "absolutely convinced" of the safety of fluoridation he is speaking and behaving religiously rather than scientifically. And if the Freethinker contributor quoted above bases his support of fluoridation on the Minister's assurance he, too, is behaving religiously. Any Freethinker with a grain of scientific understanding or training must realise this, and reject "absolute certainty" as emphatically as he rejects the "absolute truth" of the theologian.

"Absolute certainty" would be a dangerous claim to make for even the very best-established medical techniques; but when it is made for fluoridation of water as a dental technique the claim must be treated with the suspicion it deserves, for if there is one subject on which expert opinion is dramatically divided it is fluoridation. The Freethinker's opposition, however, does not need to rest upon the scientific doubts. Even if these did not exist there remains the grave objection that by fluoridation of drinking water authority is trespassing upon the last inch of personal liberty by compelling the individual to take, by design, a substance into his body that he may not desire,

Note: The standard works for advanced readers on comparative religion still remain the Rev. E. O. James's *Comparative Religion* (rev. ed. 1961), *The Ancient Gods* (1960), *The Worship of the Sky-God: a comparative study in Semitic and Indo-European Religion* (1963), and the rest of his many books. For beginners the best recent aid is the Rev. S. H. Hooke's *Middle Eastern Mythology* (Pelican, 1963)—provided, of course, that readers keep critical of the theologian's use of "God" instead of "the god Yahweh", on which their whole fallacy rests. Readers may obtain *gratis* annual catalogues of books on comparative religion from Blackwell's, Oxford (and also from the National Book League's *Reader's Guide*).

or may strongly resent, and without practical alternative. Liberty of choice in such matters must never be surrendered if authority is to be kept within its proper bounds as a democratic servant of the public, and not a tyrannical master.

Ministerial impertinence

Who conferred upon the Minister of Health the right to assume, with Papal infallibility and priestly impudence, that because he thinks he knows beyond doubt that fluoride will not harm me he can therefore force me to have it, even though I am well outside the range of those it is supposed to benefit? No one has conferred that right upon him. He doesn't possess the right, and he knows it. But he is, in fact, trying to exercise such a right by persuading local councils, where he can, to do the trick for him.

Fortunately about a third of the councils that have so far considered fluoridation have rejected it. Mr Kenneth Robinson is very "surprised" at this. Surprised that even in this day and age there are councils still capable of thinking for themselves and reaching a decision different from the ready-made Whitehall rubber stamp? Surprised that so many councils are still willing to pay attention to the views of the people they represent rather than the views of the Great Panjandrum?

The Minister calls the opposition to fluoridation "an irresponsible and ill-informed minority". This is not merely unkind of him; it is downright ignorant, for the "minorities" who organise the opposition to fluoridation are extremely well-informed on the subject, and far from being irresponsible must be given credit for fighting to preserve the individual's right to reject compulsory treatment of the body by authority—quite as important to me, as a Freethinker, as preserving the right to reject compulsory treatment of the mind.

Freethinker's challenge

By opposing compulsory medication as vigorously as he has always opposed compulsory indoctrination, the Freethinker may be striking a more important blow for freedom than he suspects. The relationship between physical medication and mental conditioning is now much better understood. Opening the door to compulsory medication by accepting fluoride in the water could eventually lead to admitting compulsory medicators into more sinister fields than children's teeth.

To oppose fluoridation of water is not to be old-fashioned; not to be unscientific. It is to be realistic. Lincoln said you couldn't fool all the people all the time.

This is the fact that has kept liberty alive even in the darkest hours of mankind. But you can fluoridate all the people all the time—or as nearly so as doesn't matter. And such a weapon is far too dangerous to be placed in the hands of authority.

Too many liberties have been stolen by authority on the pretext of "doing good" to somebody or other. Too many mistakes have been made by well-meaning big-heads who were "absolutely certain" and wanted to impose their certainties upon those who doubted as well as those who accepted. The last bastion of my personal liberty as a Freethinker is to decide what happens to my body and mind, as far as that is possible. I intend to continue to be master of that body and mind by retaining my liberty of choice to the very end.

It is worth recalling that the price of liberty is still eternal vigilance—especially against the blandishments of those who are "absolutely certain". That is why I was proud to lead Bradford people recently in their successful fight to defeat the fluoridationists of that city.

LETTERS

Esperanto and Britic

WHILE Cyril Heyes's reminder (FREETHINKER, February 25) to the Esperantists that "no common language will bring peace or happiness to the world" is sound, I do not know of a single Esperantist that believes it will.

My point is that the world will not have peace until we set up machinery to settle disputes between nations by LAW instead of by WAR. And I do not see how we can have a democratic government to make law without the common language Esperanto. I wish Mr Heyes would read again the last sentence of my letter to the FREETHINKER of January 14.

Mr Heyes writes that Britic (sh) is already spoken by 500 million people. If that is so he should be able to furnish me with the name of one person who can do so.

While non-English speaking people have learned to speak Basic English (the language proposed by Churchill when he got his doctor's degree at Harvard), not a single person whose mother tongue was English, not even the author of the language, has ever been able to speak it.

While I know nothing of Britic I doubt whether Mr Heyes can speak the language. Where can readers of the FREETHINKER get a textbook of the language Britic?

GLEN P. TURNER (Wisconsin)

Poet and Critic on *Credo*

REVIEWERS of this work and correspondents have helped to fill the columns of the FREETHINKER for many weeks. Perhaps the author may be allowed some space to add his contribution.

Broadly speaking, poetry may be divided into three main classes, though they overlap. These are lyrical, epic or narrative, and didactic or philosophical. Each has its legitimate purposes. Mr Oswald Blakeston prefers the first, may be indifferent to the second, and has little or no use for the third. Provided that he makes his general position clear (as he has done in his recent letter, but did not in his original review) he is perfectly entitled to say so. Equally, I am entitled to say that I found his recent contribution to your columns, an imaginary conversation between a kidnapper and a priest, both boring and silly.

Mr F. A. Ridley on the other hand has, I think, over-praised the work by mentioning me in the same breath as Lucretius, Housman and others. I myself make no such claim for *Credo*.

Mr Blakeston, unlike E. M. Forster, F. A. Ridley, Mr Markley and others, finds no merit in *Credo* on the grounds that it contains no new thought and does not produce emotional uplift. By the same standards he should condemn the *Iliad*, *De Rerum Natura*, most of the *Bruce* and the *Canterbury Tales*, all of Kipling's verse, most of Pope, Browning and many others, and declare that the authors should have expressed themselves in prose, not verse.

As to content, when I wrote *Credo* I was not thinking of fully convinced Humanists like Mr Blakeston but of the much greater number of people, including the young, who may not know the full case for Humanism. In *Credo* I have expressed my own Humanist views and the incontrovertible reasons for them. Some

readers, convinced Christians, have expressed their appreciation of *Credo* while disagreeing with some of its conclusions, though they have been unable to refute them. Others who were groping have found in *Credo* what they were looking for. Still others, already Humanists (though they may not have known it), have found in *Credo* a concise justification of their beliefs, in memorable form.

Mr Blakeston refers to memorability. It is here that verse, which has rhythm or rhyme or both (unlike most modern poetry), scores so heavily over prose. As one reader has written to me, trenchant verse can have more impact, and more lasting impact, than any amount of discursive prose. And I believe that *Credo* has many lines or verses which in their context are pregnant and memorable. To quote instances would take up too much of your space.

A. A. H. DOUGLAS

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OBITUARIES

MRS ALICE CECELIA COHEN, who died recently in hospital aged 91, was the widow of Chapman Cohen, a former President of the National Secular Society and Editor of the FREETHINKER.

The funeral took place at the City of London Crematorium on April 7.

MR HARRY SYKES died on April 8, only four days after the death of his wife. He was aged 86.

Mr Sykes was a lifelong member of the National Secular Society and the Rationalist Press Association. He served on the Board of the RPA for some years.

The funeral took place at the Breakspear Crematorium, Ruislip, on April 14.

ADVERTISEMENT

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