

Freethinker

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A MATTER OF CHOICE

A MOST enlightened man has suddenly emerged from the ranks of Britain's state-school principals, and made the first positive move against the strangle-hold, which the 1944 Education Act places upon the development of a child's mind. He is Mr C. R. Rivers-Moore, Headmaster of Havant Grammar School. He has instituted in his school a secular assembly, which is held at the same time as and as an alternative to the religious assembly required by law. Before putting this idea into practise Mr Rivers-Moore discussed the problem with his teachers and then sent a letter to his pupils' parents asking their opinion. In this letter the Headmaster said:

"It is clear that one of the principal difficulties about the school assembly is the fact that for many senior pupils its religious aspect has—and in sincerity for them can have—no significance or validity."

"We have of course, long been aware of this fact and much care and thought has been given to trying to prevent our assemblies becoming a monotonous routine, and to offering something which could be of value also to the sincere non-believer."

"It remains the case, however, that 'compulsory worship' is in its very nature meaningless and impossible."

The result of this letter was that on the first day of the new system 25 per cent of the pupils dropped out of the religious assembly and attended the secular assembly, which was conducted by Mr Rivers-Moore himself. By law these children must have had their parents' consent to do this. It has also been stated that the children of those parents who did not reply to Mr Rivers-Moore's letter would continue to attend the religious service.

Mr Rivers-Moore's attitude must be shared by the majority of state-school principals. He is to be applauded for openly stating his opinions and above all for acting upon them. The significant size of the initial response serves as a tribute to his good sense.

Working within the ethically unjust restrictions of the 1944 Act, Mr Rivers-Moore has done as much as he can to obtain for his pupils an education free from arbitrary bias. Although the 1944 Act permits parents to withdraw their children from religious assembly, many parents have been, and are, reluctant to do this, because the child usually feels, and is regarded as, odd. Mr Rivers-Moore's system overcomes this difficulty by creating an alternative sanctioned by the head himself.

However, this idea is no more than an effective counter-measure to one of the limitations of the 1944 Act. The first sentence of the letter quoted above well illustrates the harm, which this Act continues to foster. Mr Rivers-Moore states that many senior pupils find religion to have no significance or validity. Those seniors were once juniors, who, one would surmise, accepted religion. Thus children are first indoctrinated with religion. Then they learn to think for themselves and many, *not all*, reject that religion. Is this not a ludicrous way to educate children? It has been said a thousand times, but must be said again as many

times as are necessary to get the law put right, that the prime aim of education must be to make a child think for himself—to make him an aware individual. It is a travesty of the whole purpose of education to try to brainwash our



children with one arbitrary sect of one arbitrary religion. Ethically there is no more justification for ramming the Church of England down our children's throats, than there is for indoctrinating them in Zen Buddhism.

Secularists are no more in favour of indoctrinating children with secular ideas than they are in favour of any other form of indoctrination. Comparative religion and non-religion must be taught and taught fairly. The history of all the major world religions should be taught, reference being made to the bad points in their history as well as to the good ones, and above all it must be made clear just how much historical and philosophical evidence there is

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Freethinker

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Editor: David Reynolds

(Continued from front cover)

to support the various religious claims. Alongside this, of course, children must be shown the development of atheism and humanism and told why there have been and are large groups of people who do not worship any God.

This may sound a tall order to impose on our educational set-up in its present condition. However, a course in 'beliefs and non-beliefs' would be not unlike a course in history. Obviously small children would start with very basic lessons, and understanding would grow steadily through the years. Many children would not reach a very high standard. At the moment it is questionable whether anyone who has not reached a certain standard of education can be regarded as an aware individual. Thus, admittedly, even were a boy to undergo a course, such as that outlined above, one would not expect his philosophical position when leaving school at sixteen to be particularly valid. But, at least his mode of life would have been moulded by truth, however few actual facts he had assimilated.

A man's way of life is to a large extent determined by his religion or lack of it. In forming his opinions, whether he forms them consciously or not, his criteria must be the truth. It is the truth that secularists are concerned with and no doubt Mr Rivers-Moore is concerned with.

As a secularist I think that were a course in beliefs and non-beliefs taught in all schools, religion would gradually

ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and McRAE.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

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.

INDOORS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Regency House, Oriental Place, Brighton, Sunday, November 3, 5.30 p.m.: "Religious Instruction in State Schools", MAURICE HILL (author and lecturer).

Leicester Secular Society, 75 Humberstone Gate, Sunday, November 3, 6.30 p.m.: "Humanism As I See It", MICHAEL LINES (General Secretary, BHA).

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, November 3, 7 p.m.: "Two Years Teaching in East Africa", PAUL ROBINS. Illustrated with slides.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, November 3, 11 a.m.: "Gandhi Centenary", JOHN GRIGG. Admission free; Tuesday, November 5, 6.45 p.m.: Discussion—"Problems in the Middle East", a Speaker from The League of Arab States. Admission 2s (including refreshments), Members free.

die away, and make time for a fundamentally more important course in 'comparative morals'. Religion would take on the same significance as, for instance, the Feudal system and become history to be studied for its social effects. But, whatever were the results of such a system, their validity would be unquestionable, instead of, as the results of the existing system are, severely suspect.

Mr Rivers-Moore has created an excellent counter-measure, which one hopes will be copied, but more important let us hope that the need for it is removed—and soon.

SPEAK OUT

THE National Council for Civil Liberties hit back at Powellism in a Press Release on October 24. While condemning as all exponents of Free Speech must, the attempts to shout him down recently made by students at Exeter university, the Council points out that "Powellism can only be dealt with by placing the facts on race and immigration before the public and by mobilising significant sections of public opinion which stand firm for racial tolerance and respect for minorities."

The Council have backed their words with action and brought out a broadsheet entitled 'Speak Out'. The first edition, which deals entirely with 'Race' is the first of a series, and has been published as the NCCL's contribution to Racial Harmony Week, which is being organised under the auspices of the Human Rights Year Campaign. The broadsheet is being published immediately before the Race Relations Act comes into force at the beginning of November and it is hoped that it will serve to remind the Home Secretary that all those working in the field of race relations are expecting the new legislation for an appeals system against the decisions of immigration officers, recommended by the Wilson Committee, to be announced in the Queen's speech.

The near-sightedness of Powell's outlook must be the chief argument used against those who support him. Those to whom Powell's ideas seem right at the moment, must be made to realise that they are a complete negation of progress. Can wars ever be stopped if people are denied equal rights for any reason, let alone something as unimportant as the colour of their skin? If the secular-humanist ideal of one world is ever to be attained the canker of racialism must be eradicated.

Even if an immigrant does obtain a job that would otherwise have gone to a Briton, it must be realised that not only will he do that job better, but also that in the long run we will be compensated by the steady progress made towards harmony and away from conflict that will come from a policy of equal rights for all.

As Lord Harlech, the one-time British ambassador in Washington, said at the NCCL rally on June 27, "Either we make a multi-racial society work, or else human society will begin to break down in violence and in hatred." For this reason the ideas expressed in 'Speak Out' must be spread. Single copies can be obtained from the NCCL, 4 Camden High Street, London, NW1 by sending a stamped addressed envelope. To encourage wide distribution copies are being offered at 1s for 10, 8s for 100, and 70s for 1,000.

A DEMOCRACY IS A DEMOCRACY . . .

G. L. SIMONS

DEMOCRACY is fashionable—or perhaps we should say that “democracy” is fashionable. The word is used by many nations to define their political systems: plutocratic Americans, English Lords, authoritarian Gaullists, neo-Nazi-Germans, racialist Afrikaaners, patriarchal Swiss, Russian commissars, and religious Maoists all claim that their countries are “democratic”. Capitalists talk approvingly of the “Western democracies”; communists refer, equally approvingly, to the “people’s democracies”. But what is essence of democracy and is it worth having?

Greece (ancient not modern) is usually cited as an example of democracy in practise: for a time leaders of the city-state were elected, and public offices were filled on a rota basis or by lot. At the same time Greek women, foreign residents and slaves had few political rights and little political impact—from which we learn our first important lesson, that democracy is a matter of degree. Today, most adult citizens in most developed countries are allowed to vote in regular elections. Switzerland is the only advanced country I know where women are not yet allowed to vote.

As is well known our electoral system has a number of defects when viewed from the point of view of democracy: for example, we do not have proportional representation; constituency sizes vary enormously; and owing to the counterfoil system our ballot is not secret. However, if these and other similar points were tidied up it would not follow that our political system was necessarily democratic. To me the electoral system is only one of the requirements of a democracy.

Democracy—which we may define generally as the system whereby people can have a say in decisions affecting their lives—must be embodied in the very institutions of society. The Western democrat immediately thinks of a parliamentary system in which the voters can elect their political leaders. When pressed, he will of course maintain that democracy also demands such things as a “free press”, independent of government control. But there is rarely any attempt to examine what this concept entails. The vested interest of capitalist newspaper owners is no less real than that of a Stalinist bureaucrat in a communist country. We do not make the press free by transferring its ownership from one vested-interest group to another. What is desirable—if we are democrats—is that *in some real sense* the news media and propaganda channels are controlled by the bulk of the people, not by the self-perpetuating bureaucracies in communist countries. And what is true here is true also in industry and economic planning. We cannot claim to be democratic if industrial decisions are taken with the exclusion of the bulk of industrial workers, or if important national finance decisions are taken by hereditary finance houses or by the closed old-school tie club.

In the August *Fortune*, an American journal, an article starts with the words “The hard financial core of capitalism in the free world is composed of not more than sixty firms, partnerships, and corporations, owned or controlled by some 1,000 men. . . . Among them they raise, directly or indirectly, an estimated 75 per cent of the \$40 billion in fresh capital needed each year to fuel the long-term growth of the industrialised nations”. A recent BBC 2 programme, based on an American report, spotlighted the depths and

extent of poverty in America: one conclusion was that *ten million Americans are at this moment suffering from chronic malnutrition*. At the same time wealthy Americans are paid for *not* cultivating their land: for example, in 1967 Roy Flowers, a plantation owner in the Mississippi Delta, was paid \$210,832 for not cultivating 4,000 of his 16,000 acres. A political and legal system that so totally neglects the well-being of the many and safeguards the gross privilege of the few to this extent can scarcely be described as democratic.

Genuine democracy involves a number of things. In the political field there must be no hereditary or financial bar to the public nomination and election of delegates independent of party affiliation: the propaganda media should be *equally* open to all contestants—money, connections or tradition should not favour one political grouping against another. In the industrial field, decisions should only be taken after and on the basis of mass discussion; managers should be elected by workers, as political leaders are by the electorate. In the propaganda field, papers—local and national—should be run by people elected by the public for such a purpose, much as local councils are elected.

In all fields, mass discussion, mass participation and mass responsibility should be regarded as essential to the preservation of democracy, and the prevention of the emergence of a self-seeking and socially isolated bureaucratic class. It is clear that such a scheme would involve the public ownership of the means of generating wealth, the abolition or serious modification of the monarchy and House of Lords, and the elimination of serious wealth and status disparities.

Space does not permit the qualifications and explanations which are required to make the above scheme consistent and practical, but the scheme outlined is the essence of democracy. You may not like the scheme, but if so then you are not a democrat. And if you are a humanist then you should also support democracy.

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RISINGHILL: DEATH OF A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

ANN ROEST

FASCINATING, worrying and yet, very odd. This book¹ bothers me. It is compelling reading and once started quite impossible to put down. You will read it as you live your day, on the train, at the sink, in the bath, at the bus stop, according to your way of life. Your anger may increase as did mine as you read through. I found myself intrigued, sometimes appalled and finally, sceptical.

The book concerns itself with a teacher and a school. The school is Raisinghill which was built in Islington, London, and the teacher is Michael Duane who was appointed Headmaster. There seems little doubt that Michael Duane is a very gifted and special teacher. He cares deeply for the welfare and happiness of children. He was asked to take the headship of a school which would cater for secondary children from a poor and slum area, deprived and socially difficult children.

London County Council² started Comprehensive Schools and are in the forefront in this field of education. They are proud of their achievements in these very large schools. I could not discover from the book exactly the number on roll at Raisinghill but in 1954 eighty children entered for GCE O level examinations. This would indicate that the school may have had a fifth form of over 100 pupils and therefore a total roll of over 600 children. The number on roll seems one of the important facts omitted in the information we are given.

Throughout the book the reader seeks for the true reasons for the 'death' of the school in 1965 and the tragic dismissal of its Headmaster. We are given information, quotes and every sort of evidence that Michael Duane was loved by the children he cared for so well. We learn that parents appreciated his work. We know of his academic and social successes with these children. What intrigues is what the book omits.

Heads of Comprehensive schools tend to become administrators rather than teachers. Of course such Heads must be teachers but the nature of the work means that they have to organise large staffs, vast accommodation and equipment. There can be little time for actual teaching work. This is generally known and accepted and is one of the reasons that some fine teachers refuse such headships. So it was known in 1960 when Michael Duane began his work at Raisinghill. Was he aware of the difficulty of trying to administer a large school and still retain the ability to take a personal interest in individual children? It is not clear in the book to what extent this difficulty meant that something would suffer. The book also tells us that Mr Duane was in considerable demand as a lecturer all over the country. Did this abundance of work affect his relationship with authority? Might it perhaps be that his subsequent conflict with authority, the LCC, was the result of his making the children, both individually and in groups, his prime consideration? Nobody should challenge this priority, a priority which brought mothers, fathers, and grandparents into his study at all hours, except to say that physical limitations of all these aspects of his work were such that to deal with all of them satisfactorily may perhaps have been an impossible task. In this particular case was it lack of due attention to authority and organisation that suffered, with consequent resentment by that authority?

¹ *Raisinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*, Leila Berg. Pelican.

² Later Greater London Council.



Duane with some of his pupils.

Michael Duane and Raisinghill versus the LCC is the theme but it is not entirely clear whether we have all the facts of the case for the LCC. It can only be assumed that they refrain either because they are ashamed and want to hide gross errors, incompetence and bad judgement or they are silent for quite another reason. A reason about which we have been given no information at all. My scepticism was aroused. (I know the LCC, I have worked for them in Hackney, teaching.) They are not that bad!

Undoubtedly Michael Duane understood and liked his children. He devoted his energies to their welfare. He minded about them, intensely. His results with them were remarkable. He was able to tolerate and understand children but was the same toleration and understanding always given to adults, to authority? He could work with children who were slow, bigotted and ponderous but could he work with adults who suffered from the same afflictions? The reply might be that adults in charge of education should be perfect! If this is the only reply forthcoming then it is a naive and stupid one. We all have afflictions and if we can tolerate them in children why should we be any less tolerant of adults? Michael Duane would be the first to admit that we have to tackle life as it is, not as we might wish it to be.

The book gives us much information about the attitude towards corporal punishment which Mr Duane and some of his staff held. Also we read about his attitude to sex instruction. We hear about how the school tackled children who needed shelter before and after regular school hours. It is not necessarily that these were new concepts. They are undoubtedly shared and practiced in other schools. The difference lies in the fact that these methods were a novelty when applied to the particularly difficult children of this area. They were unused to having their sins forgiven.

Certainly we must all hate and abominate cruelty. To take a stick to another person seems a disgusting thing to

do. Nor can indiscriminate slaps, pokes and hitting be allowed. Nevertheless there are times when we human beings seem to react to each other with violence. This is a subject which requires deep consideration and I do not think the answer to it is to pretend that simply because it is wrong, it must stop. Michael Duane did not expect his children to cease beating each other up, instantly upon request. He knew such a desirable change would require more than just an order. He knew too that it would take time. Mothers slap their children and in so doing sometimes preserve the happiness of the entire family by releasing pent-up emotion quickly. Children do not seem to resent this from those they love. Anyway, in this sort of home situation, it is also a matter of degree. Teachers may be expected to show perfect self-control at all times but they too are human and can be tired and irritable. I do not wish to defend such punishments but rather to beg for tolerance, more understanding and time.

Over and above these important progressive attitudes comes another. Risinghill had children of nineteen different nationalities. 'Cyprus' High Commissioner's Cultural

Attaché visited the school and later said, "Risinghill has succeeded in doing something the United Nations cannot do . . . He (Michael Duane) has children of all nationalities in his school, living together in harmony." No words of mine can improve on this.

I hope this book will promote violent and active discussion on many educational matters. If it succeeds in only this it will have done wonderful work. Teachers are hampered by authority. Authority is hampered by higher authority. Higher authority is hampered by what the papers may say, how the papers may interpret. . . . The tragedy of Risinghill is that it was doing the right thing. It was giving the best teaching methods to the most needy. The contribution of Michael Duane which would appear to make him unique in Comprehensive Schools (because their size is so large) was his ability to weld together into a single happy and progressive group, children from a variety of nationalities and religions, set against a background of the worst possible environmental conditions. We must all hope that he will rise up yet again, like a phoenix, to lead us forward.

THE HUMANIST NURSES' ORGANISATION

THE ORGANISING SECRETARY

At a meeting of the Humanist Health Council (an advisory panel of the British Humanist Association), held on December 15, 1966, nurses present suggested the formation of an organisation which those of agnostic or atheistic persuasion could join. This would be complementary to the Nurses' Christian Fellowship and the Catholic Nurses' Guild. The idea was viewed favourably by those present and it was decided that nurses should run such a project as part of the activities of the Council. Twenty pounds was donated by a well-wisher with practical instincts and the nurses found themselves faced with the question of how to start?

Although there must be people all over the country who would be interested, it was felt that London was the most likely place to support the first group. It was therefore decided that a meeting would be held in London and that, at the same time as this was publicised, an attempt would be made to see if there was interest elsewhere. Four hundred and twenty posters were sent to hospitals and local authorities in the London telephone directory, and the nursing press and *Humanist News* carried notices of the event. (As we addressed the posters we wondered how many of them would go straight into waste-paper baskets and never be displayed on a notice board as we were requesting. We still would like to know the answer to that question.) Be that as it may, the meetings could hardly be described as having been a great success, although three members of the Nurses' Christian Fellowship took up a great deal of our time. However, in the next few months slowly our numbers were added to until we felt able to call the inaugural meeting on September 21, 1967. Then the Humanist Nurses' Organisation came into being with a London Group and Corresponding Members with the following 'Aims':—

1. To provide an organisation on which nurses of no religious belief can meet.
2. To discuss ethical problems.
3. To meet colleagues with varying beliefs for discussion.
4. To organise open meetings and to invite speakers.

All members pay five shillings subscription. The London Groups meet monthly on the third Thursday in the month (not in December or August) at 7.30 p.m. at the British Humanist Association Headquarters, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8. Now all members are to be sent a *Newsletter* which is issued five times during the year.

Membership has grown, if slowly. On September 19 the first Annual General Meeting was held. When the business part of that meeting was concluded it was felt that a year of modest achievement had been reviewed. Brisk discussion about the future immediately followed. With the need to increase our membership before us it was decided that we should, during this second year, pursue a policy of seeking publicity in all the humanist press. We are delighted with the response we are receiving from this quarter and also the results it is already having. The *FREETHINKER* is the first magazine to ask for an article but we do hope that it will not be the last as the years roll by.

Some find it difficult to understand why such an organisation should be brought into being. If one is a nurse in this country it is presumed that one is a Christian caring for patients who are also Christians. That both of these statements are obviously untrue in our varied society needs to be before the minds of a profession which now has those of most shades of belief and non-belief in its midst.

It is hoped that any reader of this article who is a nurse (trained or in training) will think about joining the HNO. He or she need only write to our Secretary at the British Humanist Association the address of which is given above.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Annual report of the
National Secular Society

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PLUS CA CHANGE . . . ?

KIT MOUAT

Some more extracts from Bradlaugh's National Reformer. These come from the editions of 1888.

Anarchists and Socialists by 'D': "The Anarchists are curious people, with much that is good in their view of life, but with a great capacity to stretch every truth which they touch into falsehood. They have just been expressing, through their organ *Freedom*, 'an increasing doubt of the rightful supremacy of reason as the autocrat of human life and the determining factor of human conduct'; and, as a summary of the Anarchist position, this increasing doubt is a fact of increasing importance . . ." (February 5).

Daybreak: "A new trap has been laid by the devil in the apparently harmless form of the automatic sweetmeat boxes at railway stations. It appears that 'children who find the shops closed on Sundays go to the stations to obtain sweetmeats, and thus contract a habit of neglecting the sanctities of the Lord's day' . . ."

"The New York Assembly has taken a step forward, passing a bill to substitute death by electricity for death by hanging in capital cases. If Society can make no better use of a man than to kill him, it is as well that the killing should be as decent and as painless as possible. Is it too much to hope that before very long Society will show itself more careful of human life than the murderer whose example it follows? Human life will never be regarded as sacred while its sanctity is trampled on by the law. 'A life for a life' must follow 'an eye for an eye' . . ." (April 26).

The Affirmation Bill: "The following paragraph has been communicated to the press:

'Cardinal Manning and the Roman Catholic Bishops of England have signed a protest with reference to the Affirmation Bill, in which they state that it is brought forward to accommodate a few who deny the truths of natural religion and the existence of God who is the lawgiver and the judge. They do not regard as fit or proper persons to make laws governing the homes and domestic life of this country men who do not believe at least in natural religion and natural morality. In their opinion the effacement of the recognition of God in our Legislature would be an act which will surely bring evil consequences.'

So that once more the Protestant Alliance and these dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church for brief space united to oppose an enabling measure." (May 6).

Rough Notes: "*The Inquirer* prints a paper on the position of Unitarian students at Oxford and Cambridge, by Dr W. Blake Odgers, read at the Unitarian Conference, in which we find the following passage: 'There is yet the greater danger than the seductions of the Broad Church. The young Unitarian, who finds himself in antagonism with his Church friends on all religious matters, may be driven to take refuge with the Positivists or the Secularists. There are several such now at both Universities . . .'" (May 6).

Constructive Secularism by 'D': ". . . I anticipate that Freethinkers will differentiate into various sections; and there is nothing to regret in this. It means intellectual and moral life. Let supernaturalists make the most of our

divergencies, as the Church of Rome does of the multitudinous sects of Protestantism. The vigor which comes of active use of our faculties will be ours; and if we differ, we shall, I hope, not allow this to weaken our sense of agreement, where we do agree, or to lessen our desire for good fellowship and co-operation with all who desire to make nobler and happier the life of man on earth". (July 29).

The Work of Secularism by J. M. Robertson: ". . . between Secularists and inactive unbelievers, of course, there has always been discussion of the old issue whether or not the popular religion ought to be discredited by wise men who are aware of its falsity. The problem dates from the beginning of rationalism; and it is only in our own day, roughly speaking, that the affirmative answer has been given with decision and persistence. . . . Men know but do not act. The decaying frame of old faith corrupts the intellectual atmosphere, and they drowse and loiter in the lethargic vapours, folding the hands yet a little while to slumber, losing the best hours of life in languid or timorous compromise, and merely resenting the wind of forthright doctrine which alone can clear the air. The more need that it should blow." (August 19).

Daybreak: "Freethinkers who oppose the demand that all schools helped by public money should be placed under public control, should note the view put forward at the Church Congress by the Rev. Mr Diggle, of Liverpool, that the most hopeful of all the plans proposed for the support of the denominational schools was the increase of the Government grant, and that 'the church school was chiefly worth maintaining for the sake of Church teaching'. This remark was warmly endorsed by the Congress . . . we see pretty plainly that the taxpayers of all denominations are being compelled to contribute to the teaching of the dogmas of the Established Church, while the Church smile blandly at the gullibility of the general public . . ." (October 21).

FILM REVIEW

QUENTIN SEACOME

A MAN CALLED JOHN.

PRECEDED by a singularly nauseating film about a young priest in the *Valley of the Fallen*, *A Man Called John* did little to raise the evening's supposed entertainment value above boredom. Based on Pope John XXIII's writings *Journal of a Soul*, it did not lend itself to adaption for good cinema. Even the presence of Rod Steiger, who to my mind can do no wrong, failed to bring life to this poorly scripted, inadequately directed and generally insipid film.

The young peasant boy's rise to the head of the Roman Catholic church is to some, no doubt, a romantic story of devotion and faith. Yet in his early life we see the brain-washing, narrow-minded doctrines of his seniors being expounded to turn a potential free-thinking human being into the Roman Catholic's equivalent of a totem pole worshipper.

Presumably the reason for the film (Italian made) is to immortalise a universally popular Pope, who, with only a short term in office, endeared himself to the world with his broad-minded and human image. However its commercial value is zero. Had it been a second feature documentary instead of an attempt at an artistic piece, one could forgive it. For me it was a total washout.

BOOK REVIEW

PETER CROMMELIN

MARX: A BIOGRAPHY, Robert Payne (W. H. Allen, London, 1968. 70s).

DESPITE having read most uncomplimentary reviews of this book, I found it absorbingly interesting, and as easy to read as a well-written novel. I have no reason to doubt or question the sources of its factual information, and the presentation of the facts has greatly enlarged my knowledge of the man as he was during his lifetime, and also the relationship of this unique individual to the revolutionary movements of our own age.

If the thoughts of Karl Marx have contributed to the building of communist societies in the twentieth century, they have also contributed to the consolidation of capitalist societies by compelling capital to finance social movements foreign to the nature of capitalism. There could be no greater error of judgment than to imagine Marx as someone belonging exclusively to the communist world. To an extent that would surprise many, the English Welfare State was born in the brain of Karl Marx. Marx did not hate capital or capitalists or capitalism. He hated social injustice. It was this hatred, this anger, this almighty fury that has made the Founder of Communism a more powerful figure in our age than the legendary Founder of Christianity.

The gospel of Karl Marx is enshrined in the pages of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. "These two books were to be his passport to the future, but it was not their substance so much as their passion, their savage indignation, which was enduring. He left no clear-cut system, no programme of action, no large body of followers. Others would come after him, choosing among his ideas as they pleased, selecting whatever was most useful for a revolutionary occasion, employing his voluminous thoughts with a fine disregard for his essential humanity. He was a man whose deepest concern was the loss of human freedom in an industrialised and alienated world, and by a supreme and terrible irony he became the legendary founder of a form of government which denied to men their most elementary liberties."

The Communism of Karl Marx must not be identified with Russia, China or any other so-called communist country. The wisdom of Marx was and still is ahead of the age. Since he was well aware of this fact, he remained, despite all personal adversities philosophically optimistic about the future of mankind. The optimism of Marx was not due to any subconscious clinging to a faith in Divine Providence. Marx was an atheist. But he saw far more clearly than most people that the coming of science and the coming of socialism, and the coming together of both science and socialism, must in the course of time bring great good to all mankind. He never allowed poverty or pain to become the masters of his life. He remained happy in his vision of a dialectical materialism, that for a long time to come remains pointing in the right direction for the human race.

Any biography of Marx must give considerable importance to Friedrich Engels (the wealthy industrialist with faith in the future of socialism) without whose support Marx would have been unable to survive long enough to leave anything to posterity. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that without Engels there would have been no Marx.

BEWARE AMERICAN POISON!

OTTO WOLFGANG

THE demonstration by the German Students against the Springer Press calls to mind the existence of an even more obnoxious press reptile, *Reader's Digest*.

Like another US money spinner, Coca Cola, the *Digest* with its arch-reactionary mass circulation, has the whole globe in its venomous tentacles. Congressman Rhodes, of Pennsylvania, shed some light on the *Digest's* shady tactics and we quote a few passages from the *Congressional Report* (House), of September 1, 1966—the counterpart to our *Hansard*:—

"*Reader's Digest* opposes Federal spending for progressive and humanitarian legislation that helps the average citizen. Yet RD is one of the nation's largest beneficiaries of Federal subsidies."

The speaker proposed to award this press skunk a

"Goebbels prize" for the most slanted and distorted information on current political and economic questions. It has "over a long period demonstrated a dedication to reactionary right-wing political and economic ideas and proposals". Of particular interest is the following quotation:

"The fact that the *Digest* includes reprints of many articles from other magazines is no indication that it offers readers a true cross section of magazine opinion. Actually about 70 per cent of its articles, including a high percentage of those dealing with public affairs, are either staff written for the *Digest* or planned and planted by the *Digest* in other magazines, then reprinted. . . . I say, it is the height of duplicity and cunning to give readers highly coloured and one-sided reports . . . under the guise of a generous and open-minded impartiality."

But in this way it "helps to foster the false impression that it is a reputable magazine". In fact it is a "centre of right-wing propaganda" and its publishers, DeWitt and Lela Wallace, have been leading financial angels to several right-wing organisations".

America, the centre of world reaction, can afford to wage a cruel but undeclared war in Vietnam, using poison, bombs and napalm even against non-combatants without sanctions being taken against this aggressor; the least we can expect from self-respecting people is a boycott against films, records, etc., from USA, first of all "Coke" and the *Digest*. They are unwanted imports, specially in a time of economic stress.

1868

1968

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LETTERS

Dons and Students

MR MEULEN (letters, October 19), nostalgically recalls the university system of the Middle Ages, and charges of university dons, "The mistake they made was in accepting government grants". With the ever-increasing costs of buildings, equipment, etc., it is ludicrous to think that our university system could function on the "legacies" of ex-students, and the generosity of "benevolent people". And apart from the government, who else could be benefactor but the large industrial concerns? And they, inevitably, would have a "value for money" bias, which would encourage the sciences at the expense of the arts, and lead to the intellectual impoverishment of the whole of society.

With regard to student agitation over representation, I have a retrospective personal interest, having been sent down three years ago for "disciplinary" reasons. I asked to address the Senate on my own behalf when the subject of my expulsion came up; the answer was no. I could, however, submit a short written statement—a generous concession. If a judge were to inform an accused man that neither he nor his representative would be permitted to attend the trial, but he could plead his case in a "short written statement", one can imagine what an uproar there would be. So why should a decision which can affect an individual's life in a drastic way be taken in this manner?

Or is this secret conclave behaviour to be an integral part of the dons' right to run their universities in their own ways?

MICHAEL CREGAN.

Active Argument

I HAVE only one fault to find with the atheism of G. L. Simons, etc. This kind of atheism, if accepted, must bring to an end any further discussion about the existence or non-existence of one or many gods. This, in my opinion, would be a pity. One of the main objects of the FREETHINKER, must surely be, to keep alive and active the argument against the acceptance of a supernatural government of the world, by some divine person or persons unknown. Christians try to avoid the argument. Freethinkers must not permit them to do so. Our mission is to be stinging gadflies or wasps to all who attempt to live by dogmas the truth of which they make no attempt to demonstrate.

PETER CROMMELIN.

The fear of death

SURELY Ann Roest has unduly exaggerated the fear of death. I do not think fear is the right word. For myself and I think most people take it as an acceptance of the inevitable, hope it will be a long way away and then forget all about it. It would be stupid to worry about it.

Of course the shock is great when one's loved ones go, but this causes sorrow not fear. I do not think the ordinary person is obsessed by this "fear" as she suggests. Mothers are anxious about their children because they know that through inexperience they may do foolish things that may put their lives in danger.

It was religion that put the real "fear" of death into our minds with their awful Heaven and Hell, where we might find ourselves in torment for ever, which was enough to make anyone afraid of death. But we Humanists know that death is the end and so we are determined to make the most both for ourselves and others, of what time we have.

Fear of any kind should indeed be "cast out". No Humanist should harbour it. Fear and greed are the two emotions responsible for most of the terrible things that are happening in the world today. So we must do all we can to teach our children to cast out

LILIAN MIDDLETON.

Racial Hatred?

YOUR predecessor published a letter from A. Blood on April 26 last and a reply from me on May 24. On October 5 another letter from A. Blood appears in the columns of the FREETHINKER.

How right is the argument so sacred to most secularists that all censorship is wrong?

If Enoch Powell had been denied all other vehicles for his notorious speech then, it appears, the letter columns of the FREETHINKER if not its editorial would have been open to him; space would have been the only criteria. The same could be said of a hypothetical neo-Nazi group should this appear.

No responsible journal would I think have published A. Blood's letter. His strange tales of wicked republican Jewish imperialists and his equation of the Israeli treatment of the Arabs with Nazi genocide is hardly the sort of information or ideas that one takes the FREETHINKER to exchange. Nor, unless I have misjudged the position, is the FREETHINKER a vehicle for incitement to racial hatred. His comment, "English people have heard them say . . ."

is on a par with Powell's elderly white women terrorised by immigrants out of her home.

We must all want to give a fair hearing to those who do not share our view but I remain unconvinced that the cause of secularism is advanced by giving its limited space to ill-informed malicious gossip, and half-baked arguments which are only worth considering as sociological curios.

Now that the Catholic Church has abandoned traditional teachings in favour of a commendable Humanistic attitude towards the Jews and Judaism it appears that the mantle of xian misrepresentation and malice towards the Jews has been picked up out of the gutter by freethinkers and in particular by the FREETHINKER. Do you and your readers intend to wear it? GERALD SAMUEL.

'Hair'

I SAW 'Hair' at the Shaftesbury on October 1 and after the show went up on stage.

I have not tried to dance for years but, following the others. I began to execute a kind of primitive war dance, hopping first on one foot, then on the other and clapping in time with the music.

Hardly had I started when my hands were seized by those of a dusky young woman and we continued the dance facing each other and slowly gyrating. After a minute or two we separated and my hands were grasped by a white girl, whom I took to be the leading lady. We continued alone together for a while and then formed a rotating circle of dancers holding hands, which steadily increased in numbers.

When the dancing ceased, the young men came to kiss my partner and so did I, receiving a kiss on the cheek in return. I felt years younger and completely at ease.

Thus, in the dance, old age (75) and youth, and black and white were united. More 'happenings' like this might help to remove the age and racial gaps and misunderstandings. G. F. WESTCOTT.

[A Review of 'Hair' will be appearing shortly.]

Francisco Ferrer

ELIZABETH COLLINS, in her article on Francisco Ferrer, mentions that there stands in Brussels a memorial to this great man. But she did not say that he is remembered even more appropriately in Ostend, where young humanists have founded the Francisco Ferrer Club. Membership is not restricted to those who regard themselves as humanists, and the numbers have doubled in the last three years. The club is fortunate to have the free use of its premises from the municipality, and the members do all the maintenance and decorating work. They have a bar, a discotheque, and a system of decorative lighting.

Recently, a group of young humanists returning to Britain from the IHEU Congress in Hanover were given a very warm welcome by club members.

Francisco Ferrer's influence lives on.

MICHAEL LINES.

General Secretary, British Humanist Association.

Olive Branch

THE olive branch, held out by the Vatican to the non-believers of their fairytales, is purely theoretical and jesuitical, in an endeavour to surround themselves with the halo of "brotherly love".

No doubt, their delegates would be urged to take with them exorcising implements, like crucifixes, rosaries and catechetical tracts, to protect themselves against the machinations of Secular Humanist "devils".

The proposed dialogue would be quite abortive, because it lacks the basic principles of such a confrontation, viz. a common ground, be it ever so small, on which the two sides agree.

GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

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