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# Freethinker

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## STUDENT MILITANCY

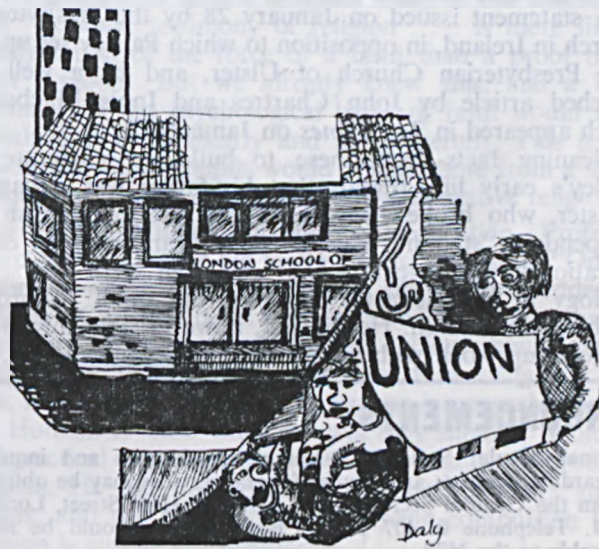
"IT IS HIGH TIME that one or two of these thugs were thrown out on their necks." Similar words have often been seen or heard over the last year or two when university students are being discussed. Normally they have been read in the Letters columns of such newspapers as the *Daily Express* or the *Evening News*, or heard on television coming from the lips of gentlemen with phoney fruity accents. The above words, however, were spoken in Parliament on January 29 by Mr Edward Short, Secretary of State for Education and Science after the most recent LSE debacle. His words were applauded by MPs on both sides of the house, with very few exceptions. But one wonders whether these words reached the ears of the militant students of whom he was speaking, as the gloomy death-knell of their activities or whether in fact they came as sweet music on the breeze. One is inclined to suspect the latter and that Mr Short and his colleagues have unwittingly played right into the hands of the militants.

In addition to this attitude towards the student trouble-makers, two of the LSE's junior lecturers are to face a committee, which will decide whether their contracts are to be terminated or not. Now, one does not in any way condone the activities of the hard core of trouble-makers, which is estimated to number around twenty. Even if they are justified in undemocratically forcing their policies on their fellow more moderate students, one cannot see what they hope to achieve. They may disrupt the LSE, and possibly even in turn all the other universities in the country. Even this though would not bring about the nation-wide revolution, which seems to be the absolute aim. Simply because the workers are by no means with them. They are the kind of people who write to the *Evening News*.

All the militants can hope to bring about, even in their wildest dreams, is a large amount of disruption, which will produce nothing except a severe reaction. This is born out not only by the events in Paris last May, but by the reaction that has already set in at the LSE itself. On the evening of January 29 a petition deploring the use of force by militant students on the 24th, had been signed by 350 moderate students and many more were expected to sign, before it was to be handed in to Dr Walter Adams, the director of the school.

Despite the disruption which these people have caused, either because they are ignorant or because somehow they see disruption as an end in itself, the government's attitude will surely aggravate the situation. Students, who are willing to censure the violent destruction of the infamous gates, may flinch if two of their lecturers are dismissed even if they see the removal of the militants as justified at this stage.

The moderate students are in the majority, and no one would suggest that they have not got a number of genuine grievances, nor would one condemn their passive peaceful protests. The militants, hitherto, have got pseudo-democratic support by manipulating the union procedure to suit themselves. The moderates must be encouraged to assert their majority both to stamp out this manipulation and to establish peaceful forms of protest. One feels sure that having now learnt their lesson the moderates should be able to contain any further militancy. If, however, the militants cause havoc again by taking action regardless of the majority ruling, then the majority would be justified in



petitioning the authorities for the expulsion of the militant leaders. This is what is meant by student democracy and there seems little reason why, if given a chance, it shouldn't work. For Mr Short to step in and sanction the growing reaction against the rebels is only likely to make matters worse.

## PAISLEY

CAPTAIN TERENCE O'NEILL'S attempt to remedy his increasingly unstable position as Northern Ireland's prime-minister by holding a general election is by no means certain to pay off. It seems likely that after the election O'Neill's Unionist party will be as split as it was before if not more so. The Rev Dr Ian Paisley is revelling in this tense atmosphere and is making a fool of himself in the eyes of all, but those most irrational creatures, who somehow manage to enthuse over the combination of hysterical evangelism, loud-mouthed hatred of the Papacy and extremist politics. It is interesting, and indeed, useful, for Freethinkers to try to understand what motivates men such as Paisley, for his is surely in reality only a refined version of any person, religious or not, whose emotions consistently dominate their reason. Billy Graham is another, who seems to have so little reason, that the second big question

(Continued on next page)

# Freethinker

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(Continued from previous page)

comes into play. Why does anyone regard such a man as anything other than a rather malicious brand of crank?

Until recently few details of Paisley's personal background have been brought to light, mainly due to Paisley's own reticence and his insistence when interviewed by journalists that they sign an undertaking to publish his words verbatim and in full—something few editors would be prepared to endorse even if a journalist is willing to give such an undertaking.

A little light has now been thrown on his past life, both by a statement issued on January 28 by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, in opposition to which Paisley set up his Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, and by a well researched article by John Chartres and Innis Macbeath, which appeared in *The Times* on January 29.

Gleaning facts from these to build up a picture of Paisley's early life, reveals that his father was a baptist minister, who broke away from this sect to establish an independent "station". Paisley received an orthodox early education at Ballymena School and then sat a course of theology at the Belfast College of the small Reformed Presbyterian Church. He did not, however, join this order but took up work with an "Evangelist Mission Hall", an

## 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

Bristol Humanist Group: Folk House: Tuesday, February 18, 7.30 p.m.: "Witchcraft", Mr Hobday.

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group: Saturday, February 15: AGM followed by Wine and Cheese Party.

Glasgow Humanist Group: Friends Meeting House, 16 Newton Terrace: Dialogue with Quakers.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, February 16, 6.30 p.m.: "An Introduction to Scientology", Douglas Joyce (College of Scientology).

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8: Sunday, February 16, 7 p.m.: "The Evolution of Humanism", H. J. Blackham.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, February 16, 11 a.m.: "The Novelist as Prophet", Ronald Mason, BA. Admission free. Tuesday, February 18, 6.45 p.m.: Discussion, "Pakistan Today—Art and Culture", Begum Razia Sirajuddin. Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

independent body established fifteen years earlier by individuals from one of the Belfast Presbyterian congregations. It was from this that Paisley obtained his title 'Reverend', for he was ordained there in 1946. This ordination is not recognised by the traditional Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He formed his Free Presbyterian Church in Ulster in 1951, when he was 24. He has also studied at the Barrie School of Evangelism, a theological college of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in South Wales, and has taken degrees at the Pioneer Theological College in Rockford, Illinois, and the Burton College and Seminary at Manitou Springs, Colorado. His title Doctor (Divinity) was conferred on him by Dr Bob Jones, the president of the Bob Jones University of Greenville, South Carolina. This is a non-denominational university, which means in effect that no major religious order recognises its divinity degrees.

All this points to a strong evangelical outlook, coupled with a tendency toward rebellion. Knowing what we do of Northern Ireland, with its strong affiliation between religion and politics and the lack of integration between protestants and catholics, particularly in the sphere of education, we can conclude that Paisley adopted the religion in which he was brought up. No doubt his evangelistic tendencies were instilled by his father, from whom it can also be conjectured he inherited his rebellious nature.

There thus seems little evidence of either his having experienced any mystical divine calling, or his having exercised any degree whatsoever of logical choice over his career. In fact it seems a clear case of indoctrination from the cradle, a trait which was also revealed in the late Pope John, by the recent film *A Man Called John*. The film showed clearly how easily a child can be conditioned from birth if born into an environment in which there is never a doubt shed on the family faith. This primitive type of upbringing is widespread throughout Ireland and one does not hesitate to suggest that the internal strife of what is a unit geographically will not end until a halt is brought to this indoctrinatory conveyor belt.

Paisley's individualistic tendencies are characterised not only by the rebelliousness inherited from his father, but also by the fact that his policies constitute extremism. The well-established Presbyterian Church in Ireland claims that the name he chose for his church was dictated more by his desire to gain a following among orthodox Presbyterians than anything else. Referring to Paisley's church, the statement from the established Presbyterian church says: "This body has repeatedly sought to take advantage of local dissatisfaction or disputes arising from time to time . . . not only in Presbyterian congregations but in other churches. . . . A virulent campaign has been sustained against our church, and the other major Protestant churches, for advocating moderate policies and better ecumenical and community relations. Considerable appeal has been made also to political as well as theological fears, by mob oratory . . ." The statement goes on to point out that he has gained a recognition out of all proportion to his original following because of the publicity his outrageous behaviour has drawn from news media.

It is very difficult to gauge the extent of his following. There are 12 "Free Presbyterian Churches" in Northern Ireland, and in 1961 a census showed that these churches had only 1,000 members. But this has to be compared with a more recent survey, carried out by the Peach Centre at Lancaster University, which concluded that Paisley could count on the support of some 200,000 out of Northern Ireland's population of 1,500,000 in a political clash with Captain Terence O'Neill, the prime minister.

(Continued on back page)

# SECULAR EDUCATION AND THE LOGIC OF RELIGION<sup>1</sup> MAURICE HILL

THE TITLE is extraordinary. The book deals not at all with secular education, and the use of the word 'Logic' must be a joke. Education, says the author, is "a field with which I am all too unfamiliar", and it is nice to be able to agree with him.

Although Professor Smart calls ours a "a secular or religiously neutralist society", the first assumption of the book is that religion should be taught; all he is concerned about is its content. Having thus evaded the problem of whether it is logical to make religion the compulsory core of a 'secular education', he suggests ways of making it more effective; but everything he advances as an improvement seems only to make it more clear that religion should never be taught in school at all.

For example, Professor Smart favours comparative religion, pointing out that even within Christianity there are wide disagreements, and that Buddhism has its revelation as well, even if it doesn't have a God. Religion, he says, has six dimensions. Not one of them, unfortunately, concerns the psychological and social sources of faith and worship, which would be the most useful area of study. If the Christian faith has a God and the Buddhist does not, this does not mean that both are equally valid, nor that one is right and the other wrong; it is simply that they are two ways of escaping from reality, suffering and death. It might be useful in schools to discuss flight from reality as a mainspring of religion, but not to multiply details of the rituals and doctrines of various sects.

There are two amusing bits in the book. One is an anecdote illustrating the difference between doctrinal and historical teaching, between inculcating a faith and teaching about religion. (The doctrinal kind is "entrenched in school education by virtue of the 1944 Act", but the justice of this is not questioned.) One man says to another:

"Do you believe in baptism?"

"Believe in it? I've seen it done!"

Very funny, and a vital logical distinction. Alas, Smart later falls into the same error by discussing whether it makes sense to "believe in revelation", by which he means accepting it as evidence of the existence of God.

The other bit is the theory that Barabbas and Jesus were one and the same person. The whole question arises from the discrepancies and improbabilities in the various Bible accounts of the crucifixion—a confusion amazing enough in itself, if a God were really being executed. By textual analysis Smart reaches a new hypothesis which demonstrates, if correct, that the Bible has been wrongly taught all these years in yet another respect. One can only suggest that Christians should at last give up teaching children religious stories and doctrines as if they were true.

Under pretence of a neutral view, and of taking the non-believer into account, the whole book is question-begging and doctrinal. "Jesus' death on the Cross illuminates the meaning of Christian love", "The sense of the birth of Christ in the soul . . .", "religious truth . . ."; what do all these words *mean*? Smart champions "mainstream religious-style language", which is no more than an excuse for ratiocination about the undefined. The effect of such meanderings on young learners must be harmful.

Since "it is not possible to base theology upon an exclusive appeal to revelation", and since the Bible is so unreliable, much space is devoted to the problem of "interpretation". Contradictory descriptions of doubtful events are now taken as evidence of something else! "The Chris-

tian penetrates by a kind of induction through the sentences of the Bible to the events which constitute the revelation." A nice circle: if you have faith, you can interpret the Bible in such a way as to confirm your faith. The gap between this sort of thing and reality is crossed by wild leaps into assumption or into that special language which does not have to follow the normal rules. This enables the Christian to show that God is a person, but is not a person. Extraordinary analogies are used to explain this: "Is inertia inertia? Is force force? (The answer is of course 'Yes', but "Is God a person?" remains unanswered.) This ludicrous attempt to make faith scientific goes so far as to equate theories about God with theories about the stars. In the same way, "Creation" is given the OK by being compared with "a new idea", which Smart calls "something from nothing"; and that proves, you see, that God created the universe! "We can resume boldness in the affirmation of the doctrine of Creation." The Logic of Religion has struck again.

A summary of Indian religions leads to the conclusion that "personal testimony of religion . . . is more like a manifestation of the force of a faith than a proof of its truth". Good! But we already knew this, and a brief summary of the psychological bases of faith would have explained it more clearly and more usefully. This is one reason why senior pupils would benefit more from a study of their own psychology than from comparative religion.

In the concluding chapter, on education, Professor Smart makes another bid for Humanist sympathy. "Ours is a society where only a minority are firmly wedded to orthodox Christian belief and practice." "It is odd that an open and religiously uncommitted society should yet attempt, in its schools, to purvey some form of faith." Yes, it is, isn't it? Alas, he shows complete incomprehension of the Humanists' case when he says they should "rejoice in the practical effects of the 1944 Act" because it produces atheism. He has not begun to understand what "open" means; and the possibility of removing compulsion from religion is simply not mentioned.

His "open" approach to religion in schools involves study of "the meaning of worship, the idea of Creation, the history of local churches . . ."; his aim is to "present a faith sympathetically". This is the old indoctrination, and it is not open.

His suggested reforms turn out to be after all a plea for the status quo. "If a majority . . . wish their children to be given religious and moral instruction, it seems that a democratic society is committed to some version of the evangelising view (though with due safeguards . . .)". But what if the safeguards have been seen to be unworkable? What then of democratically compulsory evangelising? What if this majority does not exist at all? What if most parents want not religion but morality for their children? Why should any faith, however many people hold it, be forced upon even one child? Since when has it been right for religious beliefs and practices to be decided by a vote? There is no evidence that Smart has even considered such questions.

His fatuous and ignorant conclusion is that "It is a happy world". It is nothing of the sort, and religious obsession, unreason and indoctrination are partly responsible for the fact. This book is an unhappy contribution to the perpetuation of those evils.

<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart (Faber and Faber).

## THE DAY A NUN SAW RED.

DAVID TRIBE

SOME LITTLE TIME AGO Nigel Sinnott and I represented the freethought-humanist view at a symposium on 'Matters of Life and Death' at the Bexley Technical High School for Girls. It was organised by the Christian Education Movement for interested sixth formers in the Bexley area, and the principal Christian speaker was the Rev Kenneth R. Greet, a Methodist, best known as chairman of the Working Party on Sex and Morality which produced the controversial report *Sex and Morality* for the British Council of Churches in 1966. The venture was an imaginative one, for which full credit must be given to the organisers, and was well reported in the educational and religious press. I shan't bore readers with details of arguments with which they are already familiar. No holds were barred no topic was tabu, and practically everything but necrophilia came up. To some of the students the occasion must have been unsettling, even bewildering. Many of them seemed quite unfamiliar with the theory of evolution in the biological sphere, let alone in the more complex world of anthropology and ethics. What others found most disconcerting was that, when we got away from discussion of the 'natural law' and such-like, Dr Greet, Mr Sinnott and myself advanced remarkably similar views on family planning, abortion and divorce law reform, suicide and other, though not quite all, social questions. But there was one interlude in the afternoon session, unconnected with the central theme, which made the liveliest impression on me and which was virtually ignored in the reports.

One of the participating schools was a convent school, three of whose sisters came along. I didn't have an opportunity of speaking to them, but, although they stayed together during the food breaks, they seemed approachable enough. Yet I couldn't help wondering what they thought as the speakers raced through all the subjects which would not have amused Queen Victoria, and expressed certain permissive views which would not have amused Charles Bradlaugh. Whenever there was a rustle of bombazine, what internal drama was taking place? Were they quivering with speechless outrage that such themes could be aired in public among mixed minors; was some surge of illicit oestrogen flooding through their arteries and inundating their minds with impure thoughts; or were they simply crossing their legs? I shall of course never know. On the face of it they were calm and beatific. They had good reason to be.

Their charges soon distinguished themselves. They were all neatly dressed. At each session they took their places promptly. They listened carefully, took notes where necessary, were first to raise their hands at question time and thus dominated the discussion. Their observations were well framed and clearly enunciated, and in a hall with poor acoustics they seldom had to repeat a question. When everyone else had gone home they were in the corridor putting informal points, and if the organisers hadn't rescued me I might still have been there. To them it wasn't a day off to be idled away but a serious part of the business of education and life. They displayed, in other words, those qualities which sometimes tempt non-Catholics to entrust their daughters to the nuns.

They also displayed those qualities which make convent schools the glory of Catholic education. They seemed to have no doubts, intellectual or spiritual. Their views were blessedly unanimous. Abortion and some forms of contra-

ception were murder, and that was that. Marriage was for keeps, whatever the circumstances, and adultery was a death worse than fate. The antenatal and postmortem journeying of the soul could be charted more accurately than a sputnik on a radar screen. Apart from any intimations of natural theology the pill was wrong because the Pope said so. Yes, they knew or suspected many of their mothers took it, but this was a betrayal of the faith. They were particularly angry that the Catholic on the platform held liberal views and didn't echo the Holy Father's pronouncements. Such a man wasn't a true Catholic or a fit spokesman and there should have been an orthodox mouth-piece there too. On every subject their minds were firmly and triumphantly closed. No wonder the nuns could sit back, calm and beatific. Their pupils were a credit to them!

Towards the end of proceedings the subject of the affluence of the Christian churches, especially Rome, came up. I sat there silent as the arguments raged. Apart from the convent girls—who said, predictably, that churches were erected chiefly to the glory of God—there was surprising indignation at this position from believer and unbeliever alike. Most of the Christians on the platform joined the general censure in more moderate language. As the theme was dying away I asked if I might comment briefly. The question, I said, didn't really concern me; I didn't mind what Christians did with their money, so long as it was their own and not public money. Suddenly we were aware that in the outermost corner of the semicircle a holy lady was on her feet shouting. How dare I make an attack on Catholic schools: Catholics paid taxes and had the right to get some of it back. Humanists, I pointed out, also paid taxes and got none of it back. Only 80 per cent of church school costs came from public money, she shouted, still on her feet, more loudly than ever. The figure, I said, was much more like 99 per cent, for the entire maintenance costs were met by the rates and this was a much larger sum every year than building costs. At this even the liberal Catholic on the platform looked agitated and started to shake his head furiously. Now the holy lady sat down, partly because she could think of nothing more to say, partly because there was clamour round the hall to participate. In answer to further questions I quietly put the basic secular proposals for a plural society. At every fresh answer the hubbub, by some strange, unpredictable chain reaction, increased until, for the first time in the conference, the place could be described as in uproar. The chairman looked helplessly round. I sat immobile, the innocent centre of the cyclone. Gradually the storm abated.

No doubt it was the intervention of the holy lady, the only one from a member of staff throughout the proceedings, that injected the drama. Evolution, wife-swapping, divorce, euthanasia, the pill, drugs, brain transplants, suicide, premarital sex—the entire arsenal of *avant garde* journalism—had failed, at least macroscopically, to stir her. I had attacked God, the Holy Ghost, Jesus (the Blessed Virgin hardly seemed relevant), the soul, the natural law, the moral law, dogmatic theology, the Pope, the teaching Church—and she had failed to defend them. But when the real estate was threatened, if only by implication, the good lady was in there battling.

This hypersensitivity was a little surprising from another viewpoint. Practically nothing is heard, outside the NSS,

against these maintained church schools. The British grumble about rates, taxes and prices but it isn't good form to talk about income and expenditure. This applies to public money as well as one's own. Huge sums are voted through parliament on the nod in houses just full enough to avoid being counted out. Even in the humanist movement, especially on the 'ecumenical' wing, there is strange reluctance to talk about 'voluntary' schools. I recall putting a reference to this subject into the first draft of a statement 'Religion in Schools' ultimately issued jointly by the British Humanist Association, Humanist Teachers Association and the NSS; but this had somehow vanished by the time the final draft appeared. My colleagues presumably decided that the issues of religion in county schools and of religious schools were unrelated or that a questioning of the role of the church schools would look 'negative'. They were prepared to defy the archangels but not the archbishops.

Now, this attitude is in my view unrealistic, irrational, and in the long run antihumanist. Voluntary schools, especially of the 'aided' (fully sectarian) type, were part of the same carve-up as produced 'undenominational' worship and RI in county schools. It is a well known theological fact that most Anglicans and the big Nonconformist churches have been able to 'agree' what are the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Rome has, on the other hand, traditionally believed that *extra ecclesiam* (i.e. the Roman Church) *nulla salus*; and has been joined by Anglo-Catholics in its attitude to sectarian differences: *vive la difference*. Rome was also better able than its competitors to coerce its flock into providing that ever-diminishing sum the State expected churches to find for school-building costs. So the Catholics and the Anglican National Society went their own way, while mainstream Anglicanism-Nonconformism traded denominational independence for complete public finance. One can hardly expect Catholics to step blithely into county schools where Protestant

## BEWARE THE CHURCH OF GOD

BARRY HOBSON

MOST PEOPLE know of those religious sects which claim to be the 'one true church', but how many have heard of the 'Radio Church of God' which has gained many converts in Britain over recent years with its daily broadcasts and luxurious publication *The Plain Truth*? For several years I was a member of this church, and I wish to expose its teachings, since, like many churches of this nature, they are very subtle in their methods.

Their headquarters is in California (the home of many strange sects!) and they operate three colleges, including one near St Albans. The man behind it all is Mr Herbert W. Armstrong who broadcasted with his son on 'The World Tomorrow' programme, until recently by way of 'pirate' radio. Their voice has been silenced for a while, but *The Plain Truth*, a high class colour magazine, still circulates.

The basic teachings of the 'Church of God' are that the Bible is divinely inspired, all of it, that many of its prophecies are now coming to pass—earthquakes, famines, droughts, etc., that Saturday is the true Sabbath, and that the world will shortly come to an end, unless God intervenes to save the 'elect'. They say that God will soon send "plagues upon the sinners of the earth!" and Christ will return and wreak "Horrible vengeance and pour out agonising plagues on those who insist on going their own way". They blame much of today's mental illness on evil spirits and Satan (when in fact it is the teachings of the Bible and the Church which is partly to blame).

religion is established, but if this could be removed, what possible justification have they for remaining segregated at the ratepayer and taxpayer's expense?

Of the little group of convent girls who clustered round me at Bexley, one was struggling with her tears. She felt personally hurt that I had criticised her faith, particularly because I had demonstrated a real knowledge of it. She was, no doubt, a victim of that apologetic which states that Catholic truth is so self-evident that merely to bring it to man's awareness is to convince him; that opposition springs entirely from ignorant prejudice. I told her how sorry I was she should feel like that, but that when she emerged from school she would see that different people have different views of the world which they hold sincerely and this needn't spoil interpersonal relations. The other girls then felt sorry for me and explained that Mary was 'very sensitive' and worried too much about things.

I haven't been able to forget that convent school, which in my recollection dwarfs all the great problems of life and death the conference was convened to discuss. Why has Mary to wait till she emerges into the world (assuming she ever does and isn't persuaded to take the veil) to discover this simple truth of a plural society? How much suffering will she experience in the process? How many other Marys are there? What is the cumulative effect on the social and political life of the country of these thousands of brain-washed young people who know only one side of every question annually entering the world of affairs? Every time there is some new outbreak of sectarian strife in Northern Ireland—an almost daily event—I think of these segregated communities in their segregated schools, and feel very angry. I cannot feel anger against the holy ladies, who are equally victims of the same system. But I feel angry with those who will not bring this important social issue into the arena of public debate.

Satan is now planning "the greatest deception mankind has ever seen!" All will be deceived except the 'elect'! This deception includes the Pope sitting in the temple of God calling himself God; miracles performed by this 'great false prophet', and all Europe going fanatically religious! According to this church, God will allow Satan to inspire men to perpetrate the world's greatest 'Holy War' against 'saints of God'. A "monstrous hoax"; the most "sinister, diabolical lie", is now being spread by unseen forces. "Devilish false prophecies will be read from the pulpits into the ears of gullible people." Britain and the United States will be bombed, and ships will carry survivors to concentration camps in Europe! All this is supposed to happen in less than ten years! There will be signs in the skies; God will 'turn off' the sun and the moon. World War III will be concentrated around Jerusalem, Communist hordes from the East will fight the Fascists of the West! You don't believe it? You must, it's all in the Bible!

I could go on and on with the fantastic beliefs of the 'Church of God', how, that if there were not some of God's elect—who cannot be deceived—God "would not intervene to save humanity", that Jesus Christ is going to rule the world with a 'rod of iron' within ten years, etc.

This church attracts those discouraged with the established churches, especially young people (I was about 19). It was mainly through reading Tom Paine that I finally broke with this church. The people in it are good, kind folks, but their naive and fantastic beliefs are not for the Age of Reason.

# THE FUTILITY OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

G. L. SIMONS

THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY is in difficulties: its funds are low and its membership is dropping; it is estranged from its working-class support at home, and from progressive opinion abroad; even according to many of its own pre-election pledges it is failing. Why is this?

Any social democratic party—of which the Labour Party is a typical European example—finds itself in an impossible dilemma when it gains political power. It is characteristic of social democratic parties that they profess “socialism”, by which is generally meant broad economic and political egalitarianism; adequate social policies in welfare, housing, education and the like; and progressive foreign policy. The mechanism by which society is to be transformed is universal suffrage acting through parliamentary democracy on the Western model. This doctrine involves the belief that electoral democracy and capitalism can coexist in a society that is progressively evolving towards socialism under the impact of the mass vote on parliamentary legislation. And it is this belief that presents an empowered social democratic party with its impossible dilemma, for the belief rests upon the notion that in a capitalist society political power resides in parliament, in the elected representatives of the people—which, upon reflection, is patently absurd.

The first lesson that we have to learn is that *political power depends upon economic power*. The capitalist/financier class can create an economic crisis whenever they wish: by organising a mass flight of capital from the domestic market, unemployment can be increased and sterling put under pressure. The same people who can do this also control the national means of propaganda, i.e. the Establishment BBC, and the nakedly capitalist press and Independent Television Authority. Thus at the same time as creating the economic crisis they can “inform” the masses that the crisis is due to inept and shortsighted government policies. In such a way an intolerable industrial situation is brought into being and an irresistible mass demand created for the resignation of the government and a General Election.

This is one way that capitalism can eject a social democratic government or bring it to heel, and the method was employed in Britain in 1950. Another way is through the use of military force.

There is no capitalist country in which there are not the closest possible links between the capitalist/financier class and the top ranking officers in the armed forces. Indeed in some cases the two groups are virtually indistinguishable—consider this quotation from Bertrand Russell's *War Crimes in Vietnam*:

“This immense world concentration of power and wealth is directly linked to large scale capitalism in America. The billions of dollars in contracts are awarded by the Pentagon and filled by large industry.

“In 1960, 21 billion dollars were spent on military goods. Ten capitalist corporations received 7½ billion dollars, three received one billion each and two others 900 million dollars. In these corporations there are more than 1,400 retired officers of the army above the rank of major. This includes 261 Generals and flag rank officers.

“The largest company, General Dynamics, has 187 retired officers, 27 generals and admirals and the former Secretary of the Army on its payroll.” (My italics.)

The military forces have been used repeatedly in capitalist countries to curtail the activities of social democratic parties which were democratically elected to government and which intended progressive reform: a few examples are Austria and Spain (in the thirties); Guatemala and Guiana (in the fifties); the Congo, the Dominican Republic,

Argentina, and Greece (in the sixties). This teaches us our second lesson—that *military power depends upon economic power*.

Thus as social democratic parties do not have a militant class orientation they are bound, when elected to government, to acknowledge their relative impotence in the face of organised capital. This means that despite earlier intentions the social democratic leadership is forced to pursue policies that are broadly in the interest of the capitalist class. Sometimes social reform is consistent with this interest and improvements can be achieved. But wherever there is a conflict between the interests of the mass of the people and the interests of the capitalist class then the social democratic leadership will legislate to protect capitalist interests. Historically, concessions have been wrought from capitalism by militant working class organisation, not by the pious appeals of social democratic governments.

It is for these reasons that the British Labour Government is becoming divorced from its traditional working class support. In the fields of incomes, health, education, housing, etc., the government is pursuing policies that, from the working class standpoint, are either retrogressive or simply inadequate. For the same reasons Labour finds itself tolerating racialism in Rhodesia, fascism in Portugal and Greece, and aggression in Vietnam. Naturally the Labour rank and file are becoming disillusioned with what they imagined to be their own government. But the course of the Labour administration could have been predicted if the nature of a social democratic government in a capitalist environment had been analysed early enough.

Hence, because political and military power are tied up with economic power the genuine democrat recognises that if the broad mass of people are to enjoy genuine democracy then the “commanding economic heights” must be owned by the people. Here the public ownership demanded is far removed from that practised in such capitalist countries as Britain, France, Austria and Italy. In all these countries nationalisation involves running state industries by a bureaucratic elite drawn, in the majority of cases, from free enterprise: this leads to the inevitable consequences that the bulk of people working in the industry are as excluded from its running as they ever were, and the industry is simply milked by free enterprise.

When a party comes to power in a capitalist society it has to decide immediately whether it is going to assume economic power at once, before its intended reforms are vitiated by capitalist action, or whether it is going to work on the same side as the holders of economic power—the industrialists, financiers, bankers, newspaper-owners, etc. For a genuinely Marxist Party or a genuinely Tory Party there is no theoretical difficulty. But the social democratic party is involved in the paradox that it wants to implement necessary social reforms but lacks the analysis of capitalism that alone would allow it to do so. Thus social democratic parties in power find themselves struggling to reform society and make capitalism work efficiently at the same time—and this is a contradictory situation.

Modern Britain is one of the half-dozen richest countries the world has ever known. It has a highly developed technology and vast resources of trained manpower and overseas wealth. Despite gigantic loans it is a creditor nation when all assets are considered. And yet the economic organisation of British society is such that over half the nation's wealth is owned by two per cent of the population, that nearly two million homes are acknowledged slums,

that long-term mental patients are housed in work-house corridors, that some people have to wait a year for a needed surgical operation, that some primary schools have no indoor lavatories and over fifty children to a class, and that *over seven million people live at or below poverty level.* (See *The Poor and the Poorest* by Abel-Smith and Townsend.) Our Queen is one of the half-dozen richest women in the world; some British businessmen and landowners possess *individually* wealth amounting to tens of millions of pounds. Whilst we have the Gorbals, and the slums of the East End, Birmingham and Liverpool, whilst our hospitals and our health scheme decay, whilst we cannot give old people a living pension, whilst we feel obliged to stop poor children having free milk in schools—whilst these things are so, vast personal wealth is an obscenity.

Thus social democracy is an affront since it debases the concepts of socialism and democracy. It calls itself socialist and props up capitalism with the taxpayer's money—by giving grants, loans, "inducements", to "private" enterprise, by financing research, by lubricating mergers: the private shareholders enjoy a profit created by an exploited working-class (seven million in poverty), exploited overseas territories, and by the taxpayer's contribution. Paul Foot, in his recent excellent *The Politics of Harold Wilson*, summarises well the impotence of social democracy:

"Faced with ten men, one with £91 the other nine with £1 each, the Labour pragmatist quickly arrives at a solution: share the money out £10 per man. When the man with £91 balks at the suggestion, when he refuses to give up his money, when he buys newspapers to propagate his 'right' to the money and hires gunmen to defend it, *the pragmatist is shocked, perplexed and impotent.*" (My italics.)

The inescapable conclusion is that policies to benefit the broad mass of the people will only be implemented when the people have taken economic power into their own hands.

## THE LESSON OF PRAGUE

I. S. LOW

LAST AUGUST Russia overran Czechoslovakia. At once a chorus of fury and sympathy rose. But no-one said the really important thing. Which is—as long as the world is divided into nations there will be aggression, power-politics and war. Why? Because while nationalism and national sovereignty is in force, and there is no World Government, each nation must rely on itself. It must defend itself against other nations. It must feed its people. So it—or rather its government—must build up armed forces, get control of strategic points, and try to conquer territory which will supply raw materials, labour and markets.

Britain is an island. So Britain built up a powerful navy and, as Bernard Shaw pointed out, opposed any power which tried to get control of the Straits of Dover. Also it conquered countries like India. Germany, in the middle of Europe, raised a great army and (under Hitler) tried to get control of the economic resources of Central and Eastern Europe. After the Second World War, the USA set up military bases all round Russia, and Russia set up a sphere of influence in the Communist countries of Eastern Europe.

In conditions like this, Czechoslovakia can never be independent. It is too important a power point. It's surrounded by a great mountain range, it controls important communications, it has a great industry. Bismarck once pointed out that "he who is master of Bohemia (now Czechoslovakia) is master too of Europe".

Changes in strategy and armaments have modified the position of course; for instance the Sudeten mountain range is not quite such a formidable military obstacle. But Czechoslovakia is still a vital centre of communications

and industry. And, of course, if statesmen and generals think a place is an important strategic point it will be an important strategic point (as regards motives for grabbing it). So Czechoslovakia has been grabbed three times in thirty years—in 1939, 1948 and last August.

It's possible President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia realised this; he is reported to have said that Czechoslovakia might last a hundred years—if it was lucky.

But to understand the recent grabbing of Czechoslovakia you must think of the world situation as a whole. Tension has been building up (unnoticed by the public) between Russia and USA. The Vietnam war is one cause. The increase of Soviet naval power in the Mediterranean is another.

How can this sort of thing be stopped? By one thing only. There must be a World Government.

The World Government must be democratically elected. It must possess the only armed forces in the world. It must deal with matters that affect the world as a whole while local governments deal with matters that affect certain regions only. It must have the power to organise the economic life of the world so that there is nowhere any poverty or unemployment or frustration. It must educate people to be citizens of the world.

How do we get this? Answer—by trying. And we must stop splitting up the world into more and more nations.

Again and again we have had the chance to do something about uniting the world. Again and again we have lost that chance—because of nationalistic emotions and ideologies. For instance a start could have been made after 1918. Instead Europe was split up into a host of little nations, who started scrapping with each other and were all gobbled up within twenty years. Nationalism therefore is Public Enemy No. 1 of the twentieth century.

To get World Government we must start thinking about it. And doing things about it.

If not—we can start thinking about a war for the Moon.

*National Secular Society*

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## BOOK REVIEW

LUCY DANSIE

THE NECESSITY OF ATHEISM: Percy Bysshe Shelley—Foreword: David Tribe. (National Secular Society and Oxford University Humanist Group, 1s 6d.)

AS DAVID TRIBE points out in his foreword to this essay, the publication of which caused Shelley to be expelled from Oxford, "The Shelley of the suburbs is a sky-struck dreamer hailing blithe spirits in spring. . . . How many know that his most passionate dreams were not of rusticity but of revolution, that beyond the heavens he saw not the Great White Throne but the great black void, that like most of our leading poets he was a staunch freethinker and humanist". Having read this booklet none could have any delusions over Shelley's position towards religion. David Tribe's foreword contains a brief sketch of Shelley's sadly foreshortened life, including the great injustice his publication and attempted sale of the pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* brought upon him, both from the authorities at Oxford and his own family.

The essay itself follows the foreword. One cannot but agree with Tribe that it "bears few marks of a man, who had he lived, was most likely to become a second Shakespeare". Nevertheless, it puts forward an adequate case for atheism, which even now could only be argued with by the Woolwichs rather than the Billy Grahams. It is a well organised progression of logic based chiefly on Locke and Hume. Perhaps the best point Shelley makes is that merely because one proposition is incomprehensible to the mind, is no reason for heaping a proposition still more incomprehensible on to it. It hardly needs to be said that the propositions he alludes to are respectively that "the universe has existed from all eternity" and that God created the universe.

The essay is followed by poems and extracts from poems, which demonstrate Shelley's disbelief more eloquently but less inarguably. It is here that Tribe's claim that the poet was a humanist is substantiated. And perhaps best is the short fragment:

O thou immortal deity  
Whose throne is in the depth of human thought,  
I do adjure thy power and thee  
By all that man may be, by all that he is not,  
By all that he has been and yet must be!

One hopes that this publication will be widely read. To learn that Shelley was more than a dreamer and aesthete must surely add to an appreciation of his poetry.

## LETTERS

J. M. Robertson

WHEN I READ Mr Martin Page's first article on that titanic and brilliant intellect, John M. Robertson (*JMR: The Radical*), I was most pleasantly surprised that there evidently still are some freethinkers in England who are duly appreciative of this remarkable man whose magnificent works, alas, have, comparatively speaking, quickly sunken into oblivion.

My admiration of Mr Page's second article (November 9) captioned, *J. M. Robertson the Literary Critic*, was heightened by his extensive acquaintance with the corpus of Robertson's works which ranged far and wide. As one who has spent more than a half century actively in the Freethought movement, I regret that few American Rationalists are aware of the cultural and scholarly heritage JMR left behind. I trust this is not characteristic of our English cousins.

For those who are acquainted with Robertson's contribution to knowledge, it is evident that what current times call for is a comprehensive work on this most unusual genius . . . and I am using the term "genius" critically.

It may not be amiss to state that Mr Page's able and well balanced review of *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (October 26), was characterised by very comprehensive erudition.

In closing, I should like to be permitted to suggest that Mr Martin Page write a critical study of JMR which, in book form, can attain the permanency which he so richly deserves from all of us Freethinkers.

JACK BENJAMIN.

## Three Fingers

YOUR CORRESPONDENT, Mr Edgar M. Kingston (Letters, 4.1.69), is mistaken in stating that the woman has two fingers of her right hand raised, on the funeral stele in the Athens National Museum, and elsewhere. On every occasion, when this sign is shown, three fingers are raised (in this lies its importance) the thumb, the forefinger and the middle finger, the other two fingers remain drooped.

According to Christian "belief", it represents the union of the three persons (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) in one Godhead. In reality it is a phallic sign, a symbolical representation of the penis and two testes; the three in one of all primitive and savage communities. It is always made with the right hand raised, because the right testicle, like religion, is male. George Ryley Scott says, "The Assyrians named the penis Asher, the right testicle Anu and the left Hoa, forming the male triad, Asher-Anu-Hoa. . . . With dying breath Rachel called her son Ben-oni", signifying, "son of Oni or son of the right testicle"; but Jacob renamed him Benjamin (son of my right side).

Both the Roman and the Anglican clergy use this sign to a great extent. It is used by the Pope when blessing the crowd; and by the officiating clergyman at the religious service on Television, at the benediction. It is also used by the clergy on other occasions to ward off evil spirits. Furthermore, there is ample evidence of this "three up and two down" prank, displayed in windows of any Catholic repository where holy pictures, statues and such-like are offered for sale.

*Phallic Worship*, by George Ryley Scott, is possibly the best book on this subject. The British Museum possess a copy. Another gem is *Symbols, Sex and the Stars in Popular Belief*, by Ernest Busenbark, 398 pages, 88 plates, more than 300 illustrations and diagrams; price 5 dollars, from The Truth Seeker Company Inc., Box 2832, San Diego, California, USA 92112. JAS. HUMPHREY.

## Secularism and Politics

AT WHAT STAGE does the work of the National Secular Society become a political one? At what moment must the largest subject of the world political arena makes it fight? Capitalism versus Socialism. Perhaps we are but the Devil's disciple.

If our work is but the anti-Christian field then many of our objects are irrelevant. If we have entered the wider fields of sociology then we must make a political stand.

I like to feel that much of the history of the Society has not gone down the closet and that the working-class shouting of yesterday can be asked for today. I love to feel that we are not becoming a pack of upper-class wolves that chase the injustice of 'Pink drawers for women'. Perhaps we can at times share the problems of the age that own too many employees living for a wage that allows the masters to smile the wonderful smile of humanity as they say, 'There are difficulties for working-class to attend our meetings, they work so many hours and they have not cars like us. Still, there is no excuse, they must self-educate themselves like Bernard Shaw'. I write from true experience.

If the Society has lost its boots it must at least shoe away people like

ARTHUR FRANCIS.

(Continued from page 50)

O'Neill has recently been nick-named 'Tight-rope Terence', a name which amply reflects the grave instability both of the man himself and his government, which for better or worse is the best that can be hoped for in the present state of Northern Ireland politics. History has often demonstrated how extreme views can quickly become popular when the internal stability of a country is threatened. From this it can easily be seen how delicate the position is and how disastrously powerful Paisley could become. In fact the whole situation could be described as a text-book example of the danger of faith instilled in childhood by an atmosphere devoid of any reason or doubt.

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