

Freethinker

Registered at the GPO as a Newspaper

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

VOLUME 89, No. 12

Saturday, March 22, 1969

Sixpence Weekly

DEMISE OF THE DEATH PENALTY

THE REMINDER that it will not be difficult for parliament to make definite the abolition of the death penalty after its trial period elapses in July 1970 is heartening indeed. All that is required is one resolution, to be passed by the Commons and the Lords. There should be little trouble over this in the Commons but the vital step could be delayed in the Lords if the reactionary weight of the backwoodsmen is brought into play. But this is less crucial than the decision which the cabinet has yet to take as to whether the resolution is to be brought in before the general election in 1971. If they delay, then after July 1970 the law providing for hanging as punishment for certain types of murder will again come into force, and if the Labour party loses the election the resolution's chances will automatically be reduced. If, however, the resolution is brought in before the election the Labour party's popularity may suffer, since the weight of public opinion as expressed in recent opinion polls is in favour of a return of the death penalty. It is to be hoped however, that despite the recent 'guarded utterances' of Mr Heath, the government will soon set a date for the completion of the review of the hanging laws upon which the date for the tabling of the resolution depends.

Assuming, as seems likely, that jodhpurs and party politics present no insurmountable obstacle to a permanent abolition of capital punishment, then the question of prison sentences must be considered in a new light and becomes a matter of supreme importance. Much has been written and said about this, following on the thirty-year sentences handed out to the train robbers, the similar sentences imposed on the Kray twins, and the sentencing in the USA of James Earl Ray, Martin Luther King's murderer, to ninety-nine years which, we are told, means in effect thirty-three years.

It must first be accepted that with the abolition of the death penalty progressive forces have taken a firm hold and that the trend is now decidedly away from punishment intended to revenge society on the criminal, and towards correction intended to integrate the criminal into society. In other words the final abolition of capital punishment will establish that the way to maintain law and order is to change the anti-social criminal mind by awakening its social conscience rather than to attempt to repress the criminal mind with the fear of death. This is a step towards a harmonious society—a harmonious society which can never be envisaged when instincts are subdued with terror.

At first sight the imposition of thirty-year sentences on anyone, let alone on men who when released will be of pensionable age is punishment rather than correction and is no way to reform the criminal mind. Some would say that such action kills men as effectively as hanging them. Nevertheless, progress of this kind must always be slow, chiefly because experiment is involved and to be lenient with men like the Krays in the hope of rousing a social conscience, which cannot for certain be proved to exist, would be to take an irresponsibly large gamble with the lives and freedom of innocent members of society. But at the same time is it in keeping with the welcome trend set by the abolition of capital punishment that heavy sentences of thirty years should be handed so arbitrarily? First there is the objection that such sentences should be passed by one man, the trial judge. A recent distinguished correspondent to *The Times* suggested that the jury should play a larger part in determining the length of these sentences which of necessity must be relatively severe. His reason for this was largely that the jury "would thus represent the



lay conscience" and the public would therefore be more satisfied with the decision. But the government will have already overridden public opinion if they abolish the death penalty—thus emphasising that progress in matters of this nature is often made only if the will of the public is disregarded. Such a policy is nothing new and on matters of this sort public opinion generally follows some years behind the government.

Thus it is informed opinion which should count, and a

(Continued overleaf)

Freethinker

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

Editor: David Reynolds

The views expressed by the contributors to FREETHINKER are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

(Continued from previous page)

wisser sentence would surely be arrived at if instead of one expert, or one expert and a lay jury, a body of say ten or twelve experts in penal matters and criminal psychology were to consider the case and decide on the sentence. The same body could also give more worthwhile attention to the reviewing of prisoners for remission.

The progressive tendency should also be marked by more attention being given to the criminal and less to his crime. Perhaps the Krays, being twins, think alike, have an equal chance of acquiring a social conscience and therefore merit the same sentence for the same crime. But surely of the train robbers who received thirty years, some are more likely to respond than others. Many men are at present locked up because they committed a crime which merited a certain punishment. If they hadn't been imprisoned some of them would doubtless have committed the same crime again but then some would not. Men are incarcerated who wish no one any harm. They have committed a crime once in an abnormal situation but are no more likely to commit another than the average man in the street. And there are some who become criminals because they want to revenge

themselves on society which they rightly feel has punished them too severely.

Thus if the abolition of capital punishment can be followed by a more considered passing of sentence and a more detailed examination of cases for remission, this must eventually be followed by a system whereby criminals are committed to prison for unspecified periods, to be released when they are considered by experts to be socially responsible. Such a system will not of course be instituted for some years. And nor should it, but the establishment of a board of experts to replace the judge in passing sentence would also create a core for a body, which at some time in the future could terminate sentences rather than impose them.

REASON VERSUS FAME

MR EDWARD SHORT'S views on compulsory religious education were given distinguished support last week by Mr Harold Macmillan. Speaking to pupils and parents at Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School, Kennington, the former prime minister called for a fight to the "bitter end" to preserve the great church schools. Producing familiar and not very meaningful arguments he said that these schools meant "something more than the teaching of scripture and the Bible, the knowledge of which is sadly lacking even if you regard it as the history of literature. It means more than that, more than religious instruction, or attendance at church services, whether compulsory or voluntary, or, as I now think, a bit of both". It means that children should have an opportunity to be brought up in the atmosphere that his generation had—an atmosphere, which, he said, had something precious in it and in which consciously, or unconsciously, children could absorb the tradition of Christian life and civilisation.

With pressure being brought to bear by people like Mr Macmillan, who undeniably command respect and influence, it is encouraging and not surprising to learn that in recent weeks the National Secular Society has markedly stepped up its campaign for the abolition of compulsory religious education. David Tribe's excellent booklet *Religion and Ethics in Schools* has been reissued with a new preface. The preface begins "A great deal has happened since the first edition appeared in 1965, yet I find that in most particulars the arguments that follow are as relevant today as then. Indeed the greatest change that has taken place is widespread acknowledgement of their truth and a growing defensiveness in official circles". Mr Tribe goes on to point out that in four years the argument for a change in the law has been strengthened by various developments including the fact that the numbers of non-Christian immigrants in our schools is increasing and that "The 'protest movement' which began in universities and art colleges is filtering down into the sixth form, making young people increasingly resentful of indoctrination by an adult world, particularly when it doesn't itself subscribe to the views projected".

This dissatisfaction in school children is substantiated by the staggering size of the response to another of the NSS's recent publications, a single sheet leaflet addressed to fifth and sixth formers. The leaflet, which puts the case why older pupils should be in a position to decide for themselves whether they want to worship God, ends with the words "If you are a non-believer, WITHDRAW. If you are a Christian, support this move to make morning worship genuine and sincere". The leaflet received publicity from both *The Times Educational Supplement* and *The Teacher*.

(Continued on back page)

COMING EVENTS

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

Aberdeen Humanist Group: The Saltire Room, Provost Ross's House, Shiprow, Aberdeen: Friday, March 28, 7.30 p.m.: "Homosexuality", Prof. E. M. Backett (Chair of Social Medicine, Aberdeen University).

Agnostics Adoption Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Saturday, March 29, 2.45 p.m.: Annual General Meeting—Chairman: Prof. A. J. Ayer. Speaker: Mrs. Iris Goodacre (author *Adoption Policy and Practice*), "Adoption Societies—Problems and Prospects".

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, March 23, 6.30 p.m.: "A Reasonable Basis for Morals", R. Montague (Leicester University).

North Staffs Humanist Group: Cartwright House, Hanley (near Cinebowl): Friday, March 28, 7.45 p.m.: Meeting.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, March 23, 11 a.m.: "The Structure of Religion and the Secular", Dr H. W. Turner. Admission free. Tuesday, March 25, 6.45 p.m. Discussion "Psychoanalysis and Kindred Systems", Gwen Mountford. Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

West Ham Secular Group: Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre: Wanstead E11: Thursday, March 27, 8 p.m.: Meeting.

LEGAL SHADOWBOXING

P. G. ROY

ONE SATURDAY a friend fetched me in his car; unhurriedly we doodled along, as he had met old school mates and we were engrossed in their stories. So we were rather unaware that we were crossing an unguarded mainroad with a towering van coming down. The impact hurled us aside and we just missed a tree. We escaped with shock and bruises.

At the trial the police let it be known that they had assembled seven witnesses to testify to our great speed. Had it been true, nothing would have happened. But it having been a Saturday afternoon, the particular stretch of road where the accident had happened was deserted!

However, even before this experience I have always felt a deep revulsion from everything connected with law and legal proceedings. I know that all laws are made for the protection of the power-that-be, however unbiased their outer appearance. In every land and system there are two separate laws: the window-dressing laws decreeing the citizen's "liberties" and the operative trap laws, used not so much against real criminals as in order to suppress and silence political dissent.

In this country we have the show-laws of "Freedom of Speech", of conviction, demonstration and what-have-you; but when it comes to the crunch and you express beliefs contrary to those of the ruling set, they gag you under the catch-laws of: disturbing the peace, law and order, threatening behaviour and obstructing the highway.

The same applies to the legal systems operated in the so-called "Socialist" countries as has been proved by the trials of Soviet intellectuals and writers and of those who dared to demonstrate their disapproval of the Rape of Czechoslovakia.

Soviet Law and Practice

As in English law, the "presumption of innocence" (Article 14) is the basis of "Socialist Legality" and the burden of proof must not be shifted to the defendant. Stalin's bloodhound, Vyshinsky, invalidated this show piece by the argument that pre-trial screening of the accused and his confessions had already determined the guilt. However, in the 1958 draft it was established that the investigator had merely to prepare the cases and eliminate those that proved unfounded for further proceedings.

Article 125 of the Soviet Constitution declares: "In conformity with the interests of the working people, and in order to strengthen the socialist system, the citizens of the USSR are guaranteed by law:

- (a) Freedom of speech;
- (b) Freedom of the press;
- (c) Freedom of assembly, including the holding of mass meetings;
- (d) Freedom of street processions and demonstrations" including the right to strike! but when the peoples of Czechoslovakia tried to make the test, they were forcefully led back to "normality". These freedoms only exist for the purpose of May Day celebrations and October demonstrations when the law-abiding citizen has got to sing the praise of his rulers. When an accused reminded the court that the proof of freedom is the freedom to criticise, he was quickly reminded of Article 70 which reads:

"Agitation or propaganda carried on for the purpose of subverting or weakening Soviet authority or of committing certain especially dangerous crimes against the state, or circulating for the purpose slanderous fabrications which defame the Soviet state and social system, or circulating, preparing or keeping, for the same purpose, literature of such content, shall be punished by deprivation of freedom for a term of six months to seven

years, with or without additional exile for a term of two to five years . . ." (These and subsequent quotations from the special issue "In Quest of Justice" of the official USA revue *Problems of Communism* [July/August 1968].)

How to stage a dissenter's trial

Every form of voiced political dissent can, from the start, be construed as a "Breach of the Peace" and/or an "Obstruction of the Highways", so the showcase of the "Onus of Guilt" is already complied with. Slogans are being wrenched out of your hands because the police had been threatened with them, as their witnesses will confirm; in consequence, the charge of threatening behaviour in word and deed will be added.

In Russia peaceful, non-violent sit-down demonstrators are first attacked by plain-clothes police to give the impression that the ordinary 'people's soul' was overboiling. After this provocation everybody apprehended is taken to the police station and home searches follow in which even blank notepaper and sheets of music paper are "apprehended" (see Official Search Record in the Galanskov case). In his, frequently interrupted, Final Trial Statement, defendant Bukovsky asked: ". . . why was it necessary to make so many searches? Why search a violator of public order? Was it to take from him the means whereby he had created the disturbance?"

The explanation is that political dissenters are no longer considered decent citizens with a deep and sincere conviction but dirty hooligans and common criminals, and they are dealt with under Criminal Law. The writers Sinyavsky and Daniel steadfastly refused to admit any guilt; the courtroom was filled with strawmen of the prosecution who jeered and silenced witnesses for the defendants, and the Soviet Press ("free" according to the Constitution) defamed the accused as confessed scoundrels.

"If this trial had taken place twenty years ago, Sinyavsky and Daniel would have been shot in some MGB basement, or placed on the interrogative "conveyor belt", where the interrogators were rotated but the accused man remained standing for hours and days on end until his will was broken and his mind deranged. Or else, serums would have been administered to suppress the will . . ." (From the White Book, compiled by A. Ginzburg).

Nowadays such trials are being conducted in a farcical imitation of Western democracy. Defence lawyers are constantly forbidden to ask pertinent questions, witnesses are ruled "Out of Order", presiding judge and prosecutor assist fabricated evidence. A former General of the Red Army who requested to be heard was turned down as "mentally ill"; a woman who wanted to tell the court how the KGB had persecuted her mentally unstable husband whose evidence, given when he was in a certifiable state, played an important part, was ejected from the courtroom while the judge shouted and the audience howled to drown her words.

"The commandant of the court, KGB Colonel Tsirkunenko, did not allow witness L. Katz back into the court after a recess, telling her: 'If you had given other evidence, you could have stayed'. . . The courtroom is filled with specially-selected people—officials of the KGB and volunteer militia—to give the appearance of an open public trial. These people make noise, laugh and insult the accused and the witnesses. Judge Mironow made no attempt to prevent these violations of order. Not one of the blatant offenders has been ejected from the hall." (*Ibid.*)

Ginzburg—who now suffers the same fate as the martyrs on whose behalf he appealed for world publicity—addressed his appeal to the BBC and the Western progressive press. "We are not sending this request to Soviet newspapers because this is hopeless."

GEORGE GISSING

NOVELIST AND MAN OF LETTERS

RICHARD CLEMENTS

THE CENTENARY of the birth of George Gissing occurred in 1957. It was commemorated, at home and abroad, by many articles in newspapers and periodicals. One of the most notable tributes to his life and literary work was that of André Maurois, the versatile French writer on English history and literature, who reminded the readers of *La Revue de Paris* that the neglected Victorian author had a circle of warm admirers in France.

At that time there were also signs in England and America of a revival of public interest in his writings. This trend of opinion has since been confirmed and strengthened by the appearance of numerous biographical and critical studies of the man and his writings. For more than half a century he has been a favourite novelist in many progressive circles.

Two books read recently afford an opportunity to look again at Gissing and his outlook on life from the point of view of a Rationalist. Mr Oswald H. Davis, who wrote as a born Gissingite, opened his monograph with the words: "The pages of George Gissing have been for me the source of more exquisite pleasure than the works of any other writer known to me, either British or foreign".¹ Mr Bernard Bergonzi, in his recent and admirable introduction to *New Grub Street*, wrote of our author: "Gissing has several qualities in common with the great Victorian novelists: the ability to fill a broad canvas, skill in characterisation, and in the evocation of atmosphere. But he lacks their energy . . ."²

There is a warm personal note in the response of many readers to the Attic calm of Gissing, to his skill and lucidity in developing a chosen theme, and the musical quality of his prose. This is perhaps the explanation why some in this group of his admirers become attached to certain of his novels for their autobiographical appeal, e.g. *The Unclassed*, *Born in Exile*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and *New Grub Street*.

Others are attracted by his short stories. ("These form", writes Mr Davis, "from the reader's angle, the most limpid and unstrained section of all this author's work, except his *Letters*".) While some there are who find pleasure in the esoteric quality of his art, his delineation of the Victorian social scene, the subtle beauty of his gallery of feminine characters, and his good judgement as a critic.

But, to present a balanced picture of the impact of Gissing and his work, it must be said that during his lifetime and since, many readers have found his writings woefully depressing. In the past such a snap judgement arose from a sense of dislike or fear aroused by Gissing's agnosticism towards orthodox religious, political and social beliefs and practices.

Others, who shared his Positivism, disliked the passive attitude of mind it seemed to have induced in him. To the Socialist he was no Socialist, to the Secularist not a militant engaged in the day to day struggle against superstition. He inclined as the years went by to the life of a bookish recluse and the companionship of a small circle of artists and writers.

These characteristics of the man are traceable to the influence of the age in which he lived, and to his unbringing and education. He belonged by birth to the English lower middle class and was born at Wakefield, Yorkshire, on November 22, 1857. His father, Thomas Waller Gissing, was a pharmaceutical chemist, a man of strong mind and

character, an enthusiastic botanist, and a born lover of books. He exercised a formative influence on George's early life, especially in such matters as his love of nature, choice of reading, and delight in long exploratory walks in the English countryside.



H. G. Wells, in his fascinating biographical essay on Gissing, wrote that the father was "in a double sense the cardinal formative influence in his son's life. The tones of his father's voice . . . his gestures, never departed from him; when he read aloud, particularly if it was poetry he read, his father returned to him". Wells added: "and his father's well-stocked library and his . . . encouragement had quickened his imagination and given it its enduring bias for literary activity".³ Unhappily, when the precocious boy was barely thirteen years of age (December 1870) his father died; and it is easy to imagine what an emotional and spiritual void his death must have created in his son's life.

It was early in the next year that George went to the Lindow Grove Boarding School, Alderley Edge, Cheshire, where he was "the eldest and most zealous of three brothers". He was an excellent pupil and made rapid progress in classical and English subjects. Frank Swinnerton in his book, *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, said that the young student "rose to eminence in connection with the performances on half-yearly speech-nights of Greek, French or English plays". He won a junior exhibition and for some two years studied at Queen's College, Manchester. Then, at the age of seventeen he matriculated in the University of London, and later he gained honours in the intermediate BA examination and won the Shakespeare Scholarship.

Readers of his autobiographical novel, *Born in Exile*, will remember the descriptive passages about its hero's scholastic successes, which were doubtlessly based on the memory of his own experience at school and college. The

hopes built upon his student career were shattered by his own conduct. The details of that unhappy business were later made public in Morley Robert's thinly disguised biography, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*.

All that needs to be said here about Gissing's relapse is that he met in Manchester and fell in love with a young woman of the streets; and, as he was without the financial means to support her, he stole books and clothes from the college cloakrooms and spent the proceeds of his thefts upon the girl. He was detected and had to withdraw from Queen's College; shortly afterwards he left England and went to live for a time in the United States.

Without seeking to excuse, or condone, such anti-social behaviour as stealing from fellow-students, three things might reasonably have been urged in mitigation. First, that the offender was a youth in his teens; second, that temporarily his powers of reason had been submerged by amorous inclination and perhaps a romantic desire to redeem the girl he had come to love—some support is lent to this view by the fact that as soon as he could do so he married her; and thirdly, the temptation to steal—which in a time of aberration he had yielded to—was one that all the evidence available shows him to have successfully outgrown. The tragedy for the man himself lay in the bitter memory of a youthful course of conduct that haunted him to the end of his life.

On his return to Europe in 1877, Gissing spent some months in the German university town of Jena, an historic centre of European culture, where he earned a living as a teacher, and in his hours of leisure studied philosophy and literature. In his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, there are some passages that clearly indicated his own intellectual progress during his stay in Jena.

He read at that time David Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, a literary landmark in the development of the Higher Criticism in Europe, which was to him "like the first ray of heavenly light piercing the darkness of a night of anguish and striving of woe unutterable". He also studied the writings of Goethe, Schopenhauer, Schiller, Comte and Haeckel. His reading and reflections clarified his Agnosticism, strengthened his love of nature by contact with the Monism of some of the German authors he read, and he also gained a clearer insight, and a more realistic attitude, towards political, social and cultural problems. Henceforth he was a spectator of the tragi-comedy of life under an empty sky.

Such, in broad outline, was the story of the first twenty years of his life.

To this period of his life belongs, too, his meeting and friendship with Edward Bertz, who later came to live in London for some time, and with whom he carried on a correspondence to the end of his life. In 1879 Gissing wrote to his brother Algernon, saying: "In consequence of my acquaintance with Bertz I hear very much of German life and occasionally see German Socialists who are living in London, and also read German Socialist newspapers". He traced a literary portrait of his German friend in the character of Julian Cash in *The Unclassed*.

In February 1880, by which time he had succeeded in getting published *Workers in the Dawn*, his first novel, he was confident in his ultimate success as a novelist. In a letter to his brother, he wrote: "Yes, I do feel sure that fiction is my forte, every day more sure of it . . . You will see that I shall force my way into the army of novelists, be my position that of a private or of a general". And a fortnight later he added: "Yet, if ever literature was man's vocation it is certainly mine. I feel that no amount of discouragement will make me cease writing; indeed I cannot

conceive of my life otherwise than being spent in scribbling. I have written now for so long, that it has become second nature".⁴

Thus in the years between 1880 to the time of his death at St Jean Pied de Port, in the Pyrenees, in December 1903, he wrote some twenty-five novels, in addition to various miscellaneous writings, on which his claims as a novelist and critic now rest. He clung during the first part of his mature period to the tradition of novel writing then in vogue. It was customary for the writer to develop a complex and intriguing plot, involving an intricate network of personal and social relationship, often extending over a long period. Then, if a publisher could be found, to issue the work in accordance with the three-volume novel convention.

But a subtle change crept into his later works. This was due, in the main, to his growing acquaintance with the French and Russian realists, especially with such writers as Balzac, Flaubert, Daudet and Turgenev. In his letters written about the middle of the 'eighties he wrote: "I have just got from Germany translations of five or six of Turgenev's novels". Three years later he declared: "Turgenev is a man I glory in". He was also a warm admirer of Dostoyevski.

Then, about the middle of the 'nineties, he explains in a letter to his brother his mature opinions on the novel as an art form: "One volume", he wrote, "is becoming commonest of all. It is the new school, due to continental influence. Thackeray and Dickens wrote at enormous length, and with profusion of detail; their plan is to tell everything, and leave nothing to be divined. Far more artistic, I think, is the later methods, of merely suggesting; of dealing with episodes, instead of writing biographies. The old novelist is omniscient; I think it better to tell a story precisely as one does in real life, hinting, surmising, telling in detail what *can* so be told and no more. In fact, it approximates to the dramatic mode of presentment".

Readers who come to Gissing for the first time, cannot do better than to begin with *New Grub Street* in the edition published for the Penguin English Library. While those who are Gissingites already will welcome it for the scholarly introduction, notes, and suggestions for further study made by Bernard Bergonzi. The volume is printed in a most attractive manner.

¹ GEORGE GISSING: *A Study in Literary Leanings*, by Oswald H. Davis. Johnson Publications Ltd., pp. 109, 15s.

² NEW GRUB STREET, by George Gissing. Edited by Bernard Bergonzi. Penguin English Library, pp. 556, 8s 6d.
Each of these two studies merits a wide readership.

³ GEORGE GISSING AND H. G. WELLS: *Their Friendship Correspondence*, edited by Royal A. Gettman. It contains a reprint of the essay mentioned above.

⁴ LETTERS OF GEORGE GISSING: *To members of his family*. Collected and arranged by Algernon and Ellen Gissing, pp. 57. Constable, London, 1927.

FREETHINKER FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can. The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

G. L. SIMONS

THIRD OF FIVE ARTICLES

MANY PEOPLE are able to agree that the lot of the Chinese peasant has improved under communism; these same people are quick to condemn what they feel to be China's aggressive foreign policies. To some extent China is filling the international role that the Soviet Union filled a generation ago. Russia is no longer regarded as the great ogre that threatens the peace (?) of the world. And despite Czechoslovakia the Western liberal looks today towards China as the main disruptive influence in international affairs.

A number of examples are given to "prove" China's aggressive designs; the most frequently cited of these examples are China's occupation of Tibet, China's intervention in the Korean war, and China's invasion of India. In addition to these specific points there is China's specific attitude to wars of national liberation and her support for national forces of insurgency. I will consider these particular points in turn.

Tibet

In the first place it is worth indicating the sort of Tibetan society that the Chinese supplanted in the early fifties. The Tibetan peasant and herdsman were born into abject and complete serfdom. Their lives were spent in a feudal subjection as absolute as anything known in England in the Middle Ages. Barbaric punishments were meted out for various crimes—the punishments included the gouging out of eyes, the pulling out of tongues, etc. And needless to say the bulk of the population had no facilities for education or medical attention. The Chinese founded the first secular schools, the first hospitals, and divided the land among the serfs.

Curiously enough these accomplishments will not impress many a Western democrat. To such, barbaric activities are legitimate if the authority that sustains them is pro-Western. In such circumstances, if a communist regime intervenes to eliminate foul practices the Western democrat is not impressed. I do not intend here to argue whether communist intervention would be justified in such a case, for it is not necessary that I should. There are weighty legal arguments to justify the Chinese intervention in Tibetan affairs. These arguments clearly show that *Tibet is part of China and has been for a very long time.*

Many writers (Greene, Edgar Snow, C. P. Fitzgerald, etc.) have pointed out that Chinese suzerainty over Tibet was never questioned until China becomes communist. It was only in 1949 that the United States government began to suggest that Tibet was an independent country, and there was talk of supporting a Tibetan application for membership of the United Nations. When the Dalai Lama left Tibet this was cited as evidence that the Chinese had invaded Tibet; communist "aggression" was proved once more.

In *The Birth of Communist China* (by C. P. Fitzgerald) it is pointed out (p. 245) that "The Chinese claim to suzerainty over Tibet is, in international law, quite unchallengeable". It is stressed that no Chinese government has ever renounced its rights over Tibet, and there has never been any agreement acknowledging a supposed *de facto* existence for the country.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Chinese maintained an *Amban* in Lhasa supported by a small garrison, and the rulers of Tibet required endorsement and confirmation from Peking before they could exercise power.

In the twentieth century Chao Erh-fang reorganised the government on the model of Chinese provinces and districts. After the declaration of the Chinese Republic in 1911 the Chinese government was too weak to exercise effective control over Tibet, and it was left to the Chinese communists, soon after the revolution, to govern Tibet as part of China, as *in fact and in law*, it had been for several hundred years.

Korea

The origins of the Korean war are more complex than many people realise. There is, for example, evidence that it was the South Koreans and *not* the North Koreans who started the war. (I hope to indicate this evidence in a later article.) General MacArthur, even more aggressive than the American politicians sponsoring American intervention, pushed into North Korea and launched a 100,000-man offensive towards the Yalu river, on the border between Korea and China. MacArthur was quoted in the *New York Times*, 29/8/50, as saying ". . . it is the pattern of the Oriental psychology to respect and follow aggressive, resolute and dynamic leadership".

The MacArthur offensive was launched on the day the Chinese Communist Government representative arrived in New York to discuss with the Security Council a possible peace settlement. In *From Yalta to Vietnam* David Horowitz comments: "MacArthur's move could have had only one objective: to prevent a peace settlement and to provoke China into entering the war. He was entirely successful". And Horowitz further observes:

"The Rand Report concluded that China neither participated in planning the initial North Korean invasion, nor intervened later under Russian pressure, but was "rationally motivated" to enter, assuming from statements issued by MacArthur's headquarters that he intended to invade China. When the Report was released, 'General MacArthur . . . reaffirmed that this was his intention and that it remains an unfulfilled ambition'" (Toronto *Globe and Mail*, 22/2/61).

Clearly China only decided to participate in the Korean war on a massive scale when she had undisputed grounds for believing a serious threat existed against her own territory. And today, honouring the armistice agreements, the Chinese have withdrawn all their troops from North Korea: defying the agreements the United States Government is maintaining 40,000 troops in South Korea.

India

In October 1962, when fighting broke out between Chinese and Indian troops, it was widely assumed in the West that China was the aggressor. It is instructive to learn that the neutral nations accepted the Chinese version of the relevant events rather than the Indian one. The London *Daily Telegraph* reported from New Delhi (October 29, 1962):

"But what really hurt in New Delhi was the discovery that the rest of the neutral block deserted India to a man. Most seemed to prefer the Chinese version of the events leading up to the final collision."

In brief the situation seems to boil down to the fact that the Indians decided, virtually as a matter of whim, to define as "Indian" certain border territories over which, in fact, she had never exercised jurisdiction. When the Chinese learned of this decision they immediately suggested negotiation—whereupon the Indian government refused and, according to a number of commentators, launched the initial attack against the Chinese positions. The *Sunday Telegraph* (October 21, 1962) reported: "India made a

secret high level approach to the West for support shortly before launching her offensive against the Chinese on the Himalayan border, it is now learned . . ." After the Chinese forces had destroyed the Indian attack, with an efficiency that was humiliating, they withdrew behind the Mahon Line and again suggested negotiations.

Burma, Nepal and Pakistan negotiated border agreements with Communist China. India decided to act unilaterally—and she paid the price. The action she took brought her nothing, except criticism from the neutral world and the humiliation of her armed forces. The British also had their share of humiliation since they were supposed to have made the Indian army an effective force.

The Chinese crushed the Indian attack—and withdrew unilaterally at a time when India could have done nothing about it had China chosen an aggressive course. Because of the Chinese withdrawal all fighting stopped and within a few weeks all the Chinese had left Indian territory. Later the Chinese returned to India all the captured Indian prisoners and even the captured weapons.

Wars of national liberation

Little need be said about this subject. China's support for national liberation forces is, in the first instance, through propaganda. In suitable circumstances she is prepared to supply arms and other supplies. But the idea of Chinese

troops actually invading other nations is quite mythical and inconsistent with the Chinese philosophy of national liberation.

China believes that when a people is living in subjection by capitalist or colonialist the people have a right, even a historic duty, to throw off their oppressor and establish a just society. China believes that this is right and continually tells the world that this is right. The theory involves the idea that the people themselves must make their own revolution: the idea of liberation from outside is alien to this creed.

Unless a people has good grounds for complaint, Chinese propaganda will fall on deaf ears, and unless the grounds exist it is also obviously futile to ship arms to imaginary insurgency forces. There are no Chinese troops fighting in Vietnam but the Chinese are prepared to support the Vietnamese with arms and food; the Chinese will not intervene unless there is a clear and serious danger to China itself.

The West has successfully branded China an aggressor in the minds of the ordinary Western citizen. The image is a lie and should be exposed. But we need not pity the Chinese for the slandering they persistently receive in the Western press and broadcasting. The Chinese have an enormous strength—a gigantic and involved population. The social philosophy that can create this involvement will be considered in the next article in this series.

FILM REVIEW

AL SCHROEDER

"SHAME"

(Academy Cinema Two, Oxford Street, W.1)

"O Shame! Where is thy blush?"

—Hamlet, Act III, Sc. IV.

SHAKESPEARE asks for shame's blush. Ingmar Bergman in his new film queries whether shame's colour has a blush or a blackness. "O Shame! Where are thy dark glasses?" is, of course, what he finally demands.

Shame is about two people caught in a civil war. The couple are without beliefs, without any political faith, people who are incapable of it. They are naive. They haven't tried to see through any problem of commitment or take a stand. They are like the majority of people. They are simply carried along, until suddenly they are subjected to pressure from various directions. They don't understand anything and cannot tell who is a friend and who's an enemy. They are humiliated at every quarter.

Shock, terror, outrage, fear, dread, alarm are here in this remarkable film and it is with no sense of uneasiness that we see them. It is with genuine pain. Preached far and wide enough, Bergman's vision of the annihilation of the human spirit would be enough to persuade the world to keep its cool. It is not any set of bombs we should fear, he says, but a lost world seen through the dark glass of shame.

BOOK REVIEW

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

SOUL ON ICE by Eldridge Cleaver (Jonathan Cape, 35s).

THIS BOOK was written by one of the leading black power advocates whilst he was in a Californian jail serving a nine year sentence for rape. It is a collection of essays and open letters on personal and racial questions.

Cleaver's descriptions of what it is like to be a negro in a white man's prison are vivid but undramatic. But when he writes about the black/white struggle that is going on outside his prison, then he really begins to burn.

In the best essay of this collection, 'The White Race and its Heroes', Cleaver pins his hopes for black/white equality on the young whites.

It is the white students, he says, who, inspired by the rebellion of the black students, have seen through the myth of white supremacy. Once they have rejected this doctrine, then they must reject the whole way of life which is dependent on that belief—foreign and domestic exploitation.

This leads the students to re-examine the role that the white race has played since the beginning of European expansion—it is then that they realise that the greatest white heroes are, in fact, arch-villains. The teachers who perpetuate these myths are seen as a clique of brain-washers and whitewashers.

Cleaver writes: "A young white today cannot help but recoil from the base deeds of his people. On every side, on every continent, he sees racial arrogance, savage brutality, genocide. The young people know that the coloured people of the world do not seek revenge for their suffering. They seek the same things the white rebel wants: an end to war and exploitation. Black and white, the young rebels are free people. And they are outraged"

Peter Hall reviewing this book for *New Society* commented that all this has no relevance in Britain. But this is to miss Cleaver's essential point. Britain has a history of imperialism and exploitation, both at home and abroad, which is far worse than that of the United States. And in this country too it is the students who have woken up to see through these historical myths. It is these students, the protesters, the militants, the radicals, who alone are speaking out against the injustices and abuses of personal freedom and dignity.

It is very easy to stand in the middle; to profess oneself to be in sympathy with the views of the radicals, but to condemn them in their attempts to bring the truth out into the open. But history has shown the dangers of fence-sitting. The time has come for us to decide which side we are on. As Cleaver says, "It is no longer possible to ride two horses at the same time".

Cleaver is at his weakest when writing about sexual relations—but then a prison is not the best place for clear-thinking about sex. In particular his vicious condemnation of homosexuality seems to be more partly due to his own sexual frustration.

This book was a best-seller in the United States, and it established Cleaver as not only an articulate leader of the negro liberation movement, but also as a major new talent in American writing. *Soul on Ice* is worth reading not only for its politics but also for Cleaver's literary style.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Free copies from

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

Annual report of the
National Secular Society

LETTERS

Agnostics Adoption Society

I HAVE NO DOUBT your readers will respond with generosity to the appeal by the Agnostics' Adoption Society, for funds to enable it to extend its work in a new direction; namely finding foster-parents willing to take into their homes, infants who for reasons of colour, or other reasons, are difficult to place for adoption. In London there has been for some years a shortage of suitable foster-parents; according to the information given to me by the Children's Officer of one of the London Boroughs concerned.

In another borough, in 1966, about half of the children in their Homes were of mixed parentage, difficult to place for that reason. Some idea of the size of the problem may be deduced from the official figures. Of the 69,000 children annually in the care of Local Authorities, two-thirds are there temporarily, mothers being in hospital, and for other domestic reasons. Quite often, these are the ones for whom there is no difficulty in finding foster-homes. The remaining 23,000 are the core of the problem, which the new initiative by the AAS will help to reduce. W. BYNNER.

'Soap Box' site

SOON WE ARE to lose our 'Soap Box' site in Manchester. We have another suitable for summer only, but one is wanted in the centre of Manchester urgently. A few of us have formed Manchester Free Speech Movement; secretary J. Phillips, 9 Boland Street, Manchester 14, who will give full details to anyone interested.

May I, through our paper ask that Manchester readers contact above, without delay as we must fight for this right. Already we have contacted 'On site' (Granada) for wider support.

VINCENT J. WOOD.

Free Will

A J. LOWRY's reply to Michael Cregan (March 8) seems to disregard the distinction between subjective values and objective acts. A J. Lowry's soldier is a being touched by subjective values and these exist independently of the mathematical objectivity of $2+2=4$. CHARLES BYASS.

Blood sports

HYPOCRISY regarding cruelty to animals is not found only in Spain.

In Britain our laws or the lack of them encourage it, as shown in the recent Court case (*Sun*, January 10) when a group of Pakistanis were heavily fined for arranging fights between quails. Whilst I am in no way defending this variation of cock-fighting which is now illegal, it is surely not nearly as cruel as the "sport" of making one terrified animal run for its life before a pack of hounds, kept hungry and trained to kill?

How many Mayors, I wonder, gave civic recognition to the infliction of suffering by attending Hunt Meets on Boxing Day after celebrating the greatest Christian festival of the year?

VERA SHEPPARD.

HUMANISM, CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

David Tribe 6d plus 4d postage

THE NECESSITY OF ATHEISM

George Ory 2s 6d

RI AND SURVEYS

Maurice Hill 1s plus 4d postage

RELIGION AND ETHICS IN SCHOOLS

David Tribe 1s 6d plus 4d postage

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN STATE SCHOOLS

Brigid Brophy 2s 6d plus 4d postage

AN ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

Percy Bysshe Shelley 1s 6d

WHAT HUMANISM IS ABOUT

Kit Mouat 10s 6d. plus

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

David Tribe 42s plus 1s 8d postage

Obtainable from the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

National Secular Society

ANNUAL DINNER

BRIGID BROPHY

(Guest of Honour)

CHARLES OSBORNE

LORD RAGLAN

JOHN RYAN, M.P.

DAVID TRIBE

(Chairman)

The Paviour's Arms, Page Street
Westminster, S.W.1

Saturday, 29th March, 1969

Reception 6 p.m. Dinner 6.30 p.m.

Vegetarians Catered For

Tickets 27/6 each from

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

Telephone: 01-407 2717

(Continued from page 90)

with the result that the NSS has received orders for almost 10,000 copies. Most of these orders have come from fifth and sixth form pupils and almost all the rest from teachers.

Allegations have been made that the NSS should not try to impose propaganda on schoolchildren. Even if one doesn't believe that senior pupils are capable of taking their own decisions as to whether to act as the leaflet suggests, one must admit that any alleged injustice must be weighed against the injustice of approximately ten years of religious indoctrination, and people like Mr Macmillan telling parents and children that without RI we will create a world of "moral and intellectual nihilism". Also the NSS is only sending the 'propaganda' to those who ask for it!

Finally the National Secular Society has reprinted as a leaflet the article "Surveys on Religion in Schools" by Maurice Hill, which was first published in the FREETHINKER on January 25 this year. One can only hope that these endeavours to influence public opinion with reason will be sufficient to overcome our opponents attempts to sway the public with their famous names and auras of respectability.

FREETHINKER subscriptions

and orders for literature ... The Freethinker Bookshop

01-407 0029

Editorial matter

... The Editor, The Freethinker

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

01-407 1251

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months: £2 1s 6d 6 months: £1 1s 3 months: 10s 6d

USA AND CANADA

12 months: \$5.25 6 months: \$2.75 3 months: \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.