

# Freethinker

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## BBC DUPLICITY AND POTTER'S CHRIST

THOSE OF US who are attempting to rationalise the policy of the BBC with regard to religion and the defence of Christianity were given considerable additional data by the screening on BBC 1 of Denis Potter's play *Son of Man* on April 16. From a secularist viewpoint the play itself left little, if anything, to be desired. Expert dialogue coupled with a brilliant portrayal of Christ by Colin Blakeley produced a most plausible and significant piece of drama. As the title suggests Potter does not see Christ as in any way divine. Totally ignoring the stories of the virgin birth as told in the Bible and also what little material there is dealing with Christ's childhood, the play began with Christ in the wilderness, and covered his life from there to his death on the cross with no mention of miracles or of anything to suggest that he possessed any kind of supernatural power. Potter did not however, portray Christ as merely a normal human. It was quite clear that the playwright sees Christ as an unbalanced religious fanatic and in this context we saw a Christ more preoccupied with the question of whether he was really the Messiah than he was about the sins of the world *et alia*.

Colin Blakeley conveyed a Christ who babbled hysterically to himself, whose physical appearance was decidedly unimpressive and above all who seemed continually uncertain as to whether what he was doing was right. What can best be described as Potter's rational explanation of the Jesus story was strengthened further by his including certain scenes which came almost directly from the Bible. Notable amongst these was the sermon on the mount, which to someone reading the Bible tends to convey the traditional impression of Christ as gentle, wise and kind—all three to an unprecedented degree. However, the same words from the mouth of Potter's Christ as put over by Blakeley, held no such ethereal aura and sounded very much like everyday conversation. Potter dismissed the miracles with the inclusion of a short scene where Christ calmed a hysterical girl by the same process of gentle soothing as would any man when confronted with hysteria. Another myth for which he showed contempt was that of Judas Iscariot as an arch traitor. Judas was shown as perhaps the most intelligent or aware of the disciples, a man whose loyalties were, quite naturally, divided between Christ and Caiaphas, the high priest. The latter used his authority and tricked Judas into believing that he would be helping Christ by handing him over to the high priests.

Thus we had the BBC televising a play which showed Christ to be not only completely lacking in divinity but also a lunatic but not lunatic enough to be absolutely certain that he was the Messiah. It was this uncertainty which, Potter postulated, caused him to remain silent when Caiaphas asked him if he was the Messiah, and thus caused Caiaphas to find him guilty of extreme blasphemy. And again the suspicion in Christ's mind that after all he might not be the 'chosen one' caused the famous "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" to be spoken in a hysterical whine which made the question sound more like an exclamation of disbelief.

It is of course a sign of progress that the BBC screened such a play—a play in which historical facts, such as that following on the prophecy of John the Baptist a number of men felt that they were the Messiah and that Pontius Pilate treated them all including Jesus Christ as religious maniacs, were put before a television audience—a play in

### INSIDE: RELIGION BY RADIO

by  
DAVID TRIBE

The President of the National Secular Society discusses the recent book by Dr Melville Dinwiddie.

which a man well known to viewers as the actor who used to play Fancy Smith in *Z Cars* appeared as St Peter. And such a policy is in line with the fact that Britain is no longer a country where reverence must always be paid to religion. However despite the fact that Britain is now much more than that, one wonders how much argument *Son of Man* provoked among the higher echelons and indeed how large a part the author's name played in producing the decision to screen it.

For despite this gesture to public opinion the BBC shows no signs of letting up on its patronage of Christianity. And in so doing Lord Hill and his associates contrive to flaunt the enormous responsibility which has been given them. Their policy on religious broadcasting not only disregards public opinion but creates a false impression as to the importance of religion. That for society this duplicity is dangerous and unhealthy is in no way mitigated by the occasional screening of plays by established playwrights which, though excellent in their own way, do very little to establish a broadcasting service which gives viewers an accurate picture of public opinion and presents adequately both sides of every argument.

### CAUSE FOR ALARM

THE SORRY STORY of the Abortion Act was brought up in Parliament last week when Mr Crossman, Secretary of State for Social Services said that the way the Act was working especially in the private sector was causing grave alarm even to those who were keen supporters of the law. Few will deny that the situation is a cause for alarm,

(Continued overleaf)

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though some might feel that the disorder in the public sector is a more serious cause for concern than are the machinations of those doctors who take private patients—especially when it is realised that the disruption in the public sector is helping the private sector to flourish.

There is as Mr Crossman said “undoubtedly a financial racket being worked”. Whether this means that gynaecologists are using their power to refuse an abortion in order to force a woman to pay for one is not clear, but the main cause of the breakdown is the mere fact that doctors are empowered to refuse to undertake or recommend abortions at all. A doctor can be struck off the register for various obscure reasons but is permitted by his own arbitrary decision to cause an unwanted child to be born. As Mrs Renee Short has pointed out some consultant gynaecologists working under the NHS are issuing blanket refusals to undertake any terminations at all, even though the patient might have been referred or recommended by two or even three medical colleagues.

Of course at the present time no government would be able to get a law through which forced doctors to grant abortions. What they could do though, is to compel doctors who will neither recommend or undertake abortions to

## 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.

### INDOOR

Bristol Humanist Group: Room 3, Colston House, Colston Street: Tuesday, April 29, 7.30 p.m.: “Euthanasia”, speaker to be arranged.

Glasgow Humanist Group: Glasgow Cross (outside Grandfare): Sunday, April 27, 10.30 a.m.: Survey to be carried out at the Barrows.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, April 27, 11 a.m.: “The Law and Religious Liberty”, Amphlett Micklewright, MA.

Worthing Humanist Group: Morelands Hotel (opposite the pier): Sunday, April 27, 5.30 p.m.: “Extra-Sensory Perception” Kenneth Bowen.

send the patient to a doctor who will. Such a policy would cure the evil of the GP who will not on any account recommend an abortion, and also the gynaecologist who will neither perform the operation nor send the patient to a doctor who will.

Mr Crossman has assured us that he is looking closely at the private sector in order to end the financial racket. Though this is welcome, an amendment to the law along the lines suggested above would make his job easier in this sphere.

Unless pressure is put on the doctors soon the breakdown of the law may well provide Mr Norman St John Stevas with ammunition for yet another onslaught on fundamental human rights. His declared object at the moment is to get an amendment through which will remove the social clause of the bill which provides for abortions on grounds other than the mother's health. For this to go would not only mean an immediate increase in unwanted and uncared for babies and an upsurge in the activities of the old backstreet abortionists but would also open the flood gates to the tides of reaction on the whole gamut of social reforms. That this should be triggered by the failing of an Act which was not adequately worked out would be tragic. We may well reach the point soon where either the government must apply more pressure to the doctors or else we must face another long drawn-out wrangle with the forces of Mr St John Stevas with their notorious filibusters and deliberately prolonged sittings thrown in. If that should happen when a Conservative government is in power the whole future of social reform will be put in serious jeopardy.

## ULSTER TRIUMPH

THE ELECTION of 21-year-old Bernadette Devlin as member of parliament for Mid Ulster is to be welcomed as a triumph for the Northern Irish Civil Rights Movement. The way in which the different factions, which were originally opposing the Unionist candidate, stepped down in order to give Miss Devlin a chance of winning is as encouraging in its show of solidarity as The People's Democracy's victory itself.

A lot will no doubt be written by ageing journalists about Miss Devlin's ‘youth’ and such boring questions as whether her victory represents another triumph of the ‘younger generation’ will be asked. That the latter is not so will be apparent to anyone with a knowledge of Ulster. The triumph belongs to the civil rights movement, for if anything Miss Devlin's lack of years will have counted against her and thus make her victory a particularly fine achievement.

No doubt it will also be wondered whether as a student Miss Devlin will be putting forward suggestions for university reform and engaging in colourful debates with such educational reactionaries as Enoch Powell and Patrick Wall. Though this is a delightful prospect and though her presence in their midst may jolt some MPs into a greater realisation that young people can and do count Miss Devlin's prime and most important object will be to influence the British government's policy towards Northern Ireland. Any student or otherwise who argues with that would do well to remember that being Member of Parliament for Mid Ulster means being responsible to the people of that constituency.

## THE FIELD OF THE BURNT ONES

ELIZABETH COLLINS

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE in a limited field having been reluctantly conceded to members of the Catholic Church, it may be appropriate to quote the words of that well known Rationalist the late Marjorie Bowen.

Turn where we will in history we find that there is no Christian Church and no Christian sect with a record that gives it any right whatsoever to interfere in the affairs of, or to dictate to, the conscience of mankind. (*The Church and Social Progress*)

One such record of extreme religious dictatorship, interference with personal life, and a grim reminder of the diverse element of religion in human affairs is the story of Montségur the shameful account of which Joseph McCabe said is usually suppressed in history. It concerns the fortress-castle of Montségur situated in the mountainous region of Languedoc south-east of Foix, of which only ruins remain today. At the relevant time the Seigneur and owner of the castle Raymond de Perella, was there with his family and a number of refugees who had fled from the recently established Inquisition, some 300 persons. On March 16, 1244, 210 of those men and women paid a terrible price for their conscientious desire to differ from the religious teachings of the Church and a refusal to conform to its rites.

When Raymond VI Count of Toulouse, one of the great princes of Western Europe permitted freedom of religion to his Cathar subjects of the province of Languedoc and adjacent territories, he immediately incurred the wrath of the Church. Pope Innocent III issued a call to all Christian nations to launch a crusade against the 'heretic' province and its ruler thereby demanding that Christians take up arms against their fellow Christians who had simply felt that they could no longer conscientiously follow the doctrines and ritual of the Roman Church, which had resulted in considerable loss of revenue to the Papacy. Freedom to exercise conscience was seen as leading to a deep division within the Church and likely to undermine its moral authority. Therefore it had to be stopped. So far the most effective weapons had been excommunication and interdict, before which spiritual chastisement kings and emperors usually became abject and amenable. These however had proved useless against the provinces of Southern France where the Catharist 'heresy' had prevailed to the extent of causing almost complete severance from Rome.

The launching of this crusade led to a system of oppression almost without parallel among Christian nations. As neither Raymond nor his successors were prepared to persecute their subjects, who were mostly honest, industrious and innocent people, their neighbour the King of France (then a separate kingdom) was called upon to send an army against the 'heretics' (anyone who disagreed was a heretic). This move suited the king very well as he had long turned an envious eye upon those prosperous southern provinces. Therefore in May 1243 an army of French troops under Hugues des Arcis encamped below the fortress and began the siege which was to finally crush the Catharist 'heresy'. The Archbishop of Narbonne busily conscripted burghers and peasants, many of whom were reluctant to fight against their own people and from whom there were constant deserters. The Archbishop of Albi had a siege-engine built especially to bombard the castle but without effect. The

defenders still held out on what seemed to be an impregnable hill, hoping for help from their co-religionists at Foix and elsewhere. But the roads, tracks and gorges were too efficiently patrolled by the French who aimed to starve the defenders out. During the winter Hugues managed to secure the services of a body of hardy mountaineers who were able to make the difficult and dangerous ascent of Montségur, reached the Barbican and surprised the garrison. After making a gallant but futile effort to dislodge the attackers during a night of tragedy and bloodshed the Cathars realised that they were doomed. With many killed and surrounded by wounded and dying the Seigneur decided to negotiate. On March 1, 1244, after a siege lasting nine months Montségur surrendered to the crusading forces.

The conditions of surrender allowed the defenders to remain another fifteen days in the fort but hostages were to be given—men-at-arms could retire with their baggage but had to appear before the Inquisition to make confession of their crimes and to receive penances—all others to be set at liberty provided they recanted their 'heresies' otherwise they would be burnt at the stake—Montségur to pass to the Church and the French Crown. It was thought in some quarters that the length of the siege and courage of its defenders induced Hugues to put pressure upon the Archbishop that excessive reprisals would be unwise in view of hostile reaction becoming apparent amongst the local populace.

When the truce expired the ecclesiastical authorities, represented by the Bishop of Albi, attended by two Inquisitors, the French Commander and his knights, appeared at the main gate of the castle. The inmates were then told that French responsibility for them was ended and that matters now rested with the Ecclesiastical Tribunal. To recant or not—that was the moment of crucial decision. A centuries old law, universally recognised, condemned impenitent heretics to the flames and they were well aware of what awaited them. According to William des Puylaurens they were begged by the Inquisitors and their assistants to recant and be re-converted to the Church—but in vain.

On the south western lower slope of the mountain there is an open space still known as *The Field of the Burnt Ones*. Here the French soldiers had built a pyre of faggots, straw, and pitch large enough to contain 200 bodies, the whole enclosed by a strong palisade. An eye-witness later giving evidence before the Tribunal stated the 210 'heretics' were fettered, brutally dragged down the slope and thrown on to the faggots. Executioners then set fire to the four corners of the pyre while the chanting of priests partly drowned groans and cries from the holocaust which, as night fell became a mass of glowing human torches. The considerable treasure of the Cathar Church had previously been secretly conveyed to safety and never fell into the hands of the Roman Church. Though the Cathar resistance was broken at Montségur the protest for freedom had been made. Those people who perished on March 16, 1244, were certainly not freethinkers, but they belong to the ranks of the courageous ones who have fought and died for the freedom to believe or not to do so, for freedom to express their beliefs—and because of the price they and thousands of others were prepared to pay, you and I are enabled to read this journal freely today.

## RELIGION BY RADIO

DAVID TRIBE

MELVILLE DINWIDDIE, CBE, DSO, MC, DD, has never apparently come under the cross-eyes and manipulating arms of the BBC public relations machine, which George Orwell is reputed to have used as model for the Ministry of Truth in 1984. So his *Religion by Radio* (Allen and Unwin 25s) comes across with a refreshing frankness. Naive patronising, and sloppily put together it may be, but at least it isn't like the file of dishonest letters I have at home impudently claiming that the Corporation is impartial. Dr Dinwiddie admits that it is, and has always been, tendentious, and glories in it.

In a Foreword by Lord Reith we discover how the author came to become Scottish Regional Director in 1933. The celebrated Director-General spent a weekend in Aberdeen with Sir George and Lady Lilian Adam Smith. He needed a director for Scottish broadcasting. "What about Dinwiddie?" asked Lady Lilian. The man had been decorated during the first world war, become Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, GHQ in France, stayed in the War Office for four years, then got a 'call'. He was ordained into the Church of Scotland and made minister of St Machar's Cathedral. Reith summoned him to London for a vetting. There were questions on both sides. Dinwiddie's key one was: 'Will you yourself be in the BBC for many years yet; can you assure me of that? This is a vital issue to me'. Distinguished war record, fellow-Scot, friend of the aristocracy, evangelical minister, subtle flattery. . . . What more could one possibly want in a broadcasting boss? He got the job. The BBC has been run on similar lines ever since. No wonder there's a brain drain from Britain.

Skipping around a lot one can put together a chronological picture of religious broadcasting, which the author magnificently relates to the march of history. Radio began in Britain in 1922 as a commercial undertaking aimed at selling receivers. The industry shrewdly assessed the value of religion as a bait to listeners and it was allotted ten minutes on Sunday evening only. For a long time the churches didn't clamour for more. They had become fiercely competitive after an ecumenical phase during the war, but they didn't see broadcasting as the answer to their needs. Westminster Abbey refused permission to relay two important services in the twenties because they 'would be received by a considerable number of persons in an irreverent manner, and might even be heard by persons in public houses with their hats on'. It wasn't until 1947 that Holy Communion was broadcast because it was feared this 'central rite and most cherished Sacrament might be cheapened and discredited if overheard by unbelievers in wrong surroundings and unsuitable conditions'. But soon the churches ceased to care whether it was overheard by black magicians copulating or bed-ridden atheists masturbating, and there developed an 'un-Christian' scramble among the various sects for the available propaganda time. Radio was at last recognised as 'a useful ally of organised religion'.

The General Strike was resolved in 1926 when the BBC put it 'above party politics and class bitterness by broadcasting a united service of reconciliation'. In the depression of the thirties 'cynics were active against Church and State', but broadcasting was able 'to make known the deep concern of church people for those in need'. At the end of the decade the world and the churches faced a graver menace. Religious broadcasting rose to the challenge of war. Short acts of intercession were broadcast each night after the nine o'clock news, and some latter-day Christian

made the exalting discovery that 'the sentences of the Lord's Prayer could be fitted into the strikes of Big Ben'; Dorothy Sayers dramatised Jesus as *The Man Born to be King*; *Lift Up Your Hearts* began as a daily blend of 'spiritual exercise, coupled with a series of physical jerks'; overseas broadcasts scattered triumphal community hymn-singing across the Empire; men known to be pacifists were denied the air on any subject; national days of prayer were beamed over the nation in righteous contrast with the situation where 'broadcasting was taken over for propaganda purposes in dictatorship countries'. Historians were under the impression that most of these were Christian (probably more Christian than Britain), and it took the Religious Broadcasting Department to discover that they were in fact 'ruthless and pagan'. As such they could not hope to stand up to this bombardment of invincible religiosity and Britain naturally won the war.

The most outstanding event of 1945 was the Anglican report *Towards the Conversion of England*. 'A big campaign was recommended to recover the soul of a war-scarred generation' and it was stated that 'the true task of religious radio is missionary and evangelistic'. Happily the BBC recognised this role. Despite 'a humanist age' the Corporation pretended that Britain was 'a Christian country' and that its people, though avoiding the churches and their teachings, accepted 'what the church stands for'. BBC policy was 'to be handmaid of the churches' and the protests of sceptics and agnostics 'in isolation' were 'soon forgotten'. From the earliest days it was arranged that there should be 'no secular alternative to religious services'. Those who were dissatisfied were expected 'to exercise tolerance and gain understanding'. How unsporting not to help the BBC in its 'acknowledged aim . . . to make Britain a more Christian country' and to 'usher in the reign of justice and truth all over the world'.

In 1952 the nation faced ruin again. Commercial television gained legal status. In religious broadcasting ITV was actually 'willing to experiment more than the BBC' and got top viewing figures. Personnel abandoned Auntie for the new channel. Desperately those who remained 'became more extreme in experiment'. There were 'kitchen sink' plays with 'a deliberate desire to shock' and obscenities like 'the eternal lounge bar, couples in bed, family rows, swearing, squabbling, fighting, and even shooting—not only on Westerns'. And there were those dreadful satire shows that 'delighted the artistic and intellectual types of viewer'. It might all have ended in a Continental Sunday. So different from the dear departed days of Lord Reith. Then, like a female St George, along came Mary Whitehouse. At first she was a nuisance. She whipped up agitation, dared to criticise the infallible Corporation. An NSS deputation was told the BBC intended to ignore her. Dr Dinwiddie says she 'caused some embarrassment' and there was 'some relief' when COSMO and TRACK 'sprang up as an antidote to her campaign'. But as he and the BBC establishment obviously agreed with her complaints, as soon as contracts lapsed no time was lost in shedding the programmes she objected to, and the purifying lady now seems to enjoy consultative status and positively cooes compliments at the Corporation. Men of good will can look forward to a second dawn of the 'things that are true and noble, just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable'. Nothing like freethought, secular humanism or radical politics.

Lord Reith has something of the rugged honesty of the author, and makes a pertinent observation:

"The churches—all denominations and confessions—presumably exist to bring men to a knowledge of, and faith in, Christ; 'Come and see' their supreme commission. In business terms they have something to sell; and, as elsewhere, sales can be vastly increased by, and may to a great extent depend on, advertising. Here millions of pounds worth of advertising had been done for them free. But neither the governing bodies nor the individual salesmen of the ethics have even yet realised how accidental and odd it was that, from the very beginning, and against indifference, ridicule, opposition, the Christian religion and the Sabbath were given positions of privilege and protection in the broadcasting service, which—circumstances having been otherwise and as might have been expected—no protest or petition by the churches (on eventual recognition of what was happening) could have secured for them."

For making just this point I have received nothing but insulting letters from his successors.

*Religion by Radio* is an important book. Not for intel-

lectual content and literary grace, or, for that matter, much insight into either religion or radio. But for setting down in unequivocal terms the partiality of the BBC and the thought (or absence of thought) processes of a ruling elite in the mushrooming world of modern communications. I hope that FREETHINKER readers will bombard the Corporation with letters of complaint not only against the hard and soft sell of the Religious Broadcasting Department but also against the things that are said—and not said—in the soap operas, discussion programmes and features outside its orbit. As the 'general trend to depreciate religion' grows, so there is an 'expansion' of religious broadcasting. There are now two reports on broadcasting (Beveridge and Pilkington) that the Corporation continues to defy. As the BBC's position gets more and more untenable by any rational or democratic standard, correspondents can unfortunately expect—as Kit Mouat's file and mine demonstrate—answers to increase in offensiveness and mendacity (if they get replies at all).

## THOMAS PAINE EXHIBITION

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

ONE HUNDRED and seventy-five years after its first publication, Thomas Paine's penetrating attack on organised religion, *The Age of Reason*, lives on—while those books that attempted to answer him are hardly known even to the most erudite. Paine's work was based on principle; the others on myth. Such is the lesson of a chapter of history that was recalled by the Thomas Paine Society with an exhibition during National Library Week (10th-15th March), at the Public Library in Albion Street, Lewes.

The exhibition included various editions of *The Age of Reason* from those of the 1790s to the cheap Watts and Pioneer Press editions, known to twentieth century freethinkers. Foreign language editions—one from Sweden of 1870, another from the USSR of 1959—indicated the universality of Paine's writings. Graphically the exhibition showed the reaction to Paine with fierce anti-Paine cartoons by such masters of invective as James Gillray, George Cruikshank and others, together with more reasoned replies by Bishop Watson (entitled *An Apology for the Bible*, this alone had any survival), Joseph Priestley, Gilbert Wakefield and W. Grisenthwaite.

That it was not just a respectable paper battle was shown by the documentation of Richard Carlile's magnificent fight for press freedom: a copy of the Bill of Indictment against Carlile, which led to his imprisonment for two years plus a sentence of £1,000 fine, was displayed alongside Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner's effectively telling *Penalties Upon Opinion*; in another case were displayed token propaganda coins of "both sides": those that alarmingly cried "Sedition" and wanted Paine hung, and those that commemorated the acquittal of the fearless publisher, Daniel Isaac Eaton.

The Mayoress of Lewes, Mrs Barber, opened the exhibition on behalf of her husband, Alderman A. C. Barber, who was in hospital. She told the gathering that the Mayor, who was a member of the Thomas Paine Society, had very much looked forward to the event, and was deeply sorry that his illness had prevented his attending. She then read the speech that he had prepared before his illness.

In it the Mayor said he had a great admiration for the works of Thomas Paine. "Many people have great admira-

tion for particular aspects of Paine's views and work, and many people have particular admiration for particular parts of his work, but no admiration for any of his views. I like both his views and his writing."

Alderman Barber's address then reminded people that it was while Paine lived in Lewes that he published his first piece of argumentative thinking—a carefully-phrased appeal to the reason and humanity of Members of Parliament for higher salaries for the Excisemen, of which Paine was one. "The authorities recognised the power of this man's pen—and sacked him!"

After the close of the exhibition, the Librarian Miss E. Clarke told the Thomas Paine Society that it had gone very well, attracting a number of people from outside Lewes as well as local citizens; it had been prominently reviewed in the *Sussex Express* and on Radio Brighton. Thomas Paine Society Secretary, Robert Morrell at the same time announced that a similar exhibition to commemorate the 175th anniversary of *The Age of Reason* is to be mounted in Norwich, also at the Public Library, from Saturday, June 7.

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# FREE SPEECH

G. L. SIMONS

## G. L. Simons replies to Martin Page and J. Stewart Cook.

MR PAGE makes many points in his letter of 29/3/69 which I would like to answer. I will confine myself to the ones I hold most important—that I misrepresent his position, that liberalism and militancy are compatible, that people like Tribe and Lord Russell should seize every opportunity on TV and radio to “spread the cause”, and that liberal forces have had “undoubted success” in weakening and undermining the power of capitalist vested interest.

That my knowledge of Mr Page's political position is partial I readily admit. But that my representation of it does not follow reasonably from the portions that Mr Page has revealed in his FREETHINKER writings I deny. In his letter of 29/3/69 he uses the phrase “dialectic of ideological warfare”, but his ready use of the Hegelian/Marxist word “dialectic” does nothing to convince me that he accepts a Marxist view of the dynamics of social change. In a long article (FREETHINKER, 28/12/68) on the problems the world faces, Mr Page says *nothing* about the naked exploitation of workers in developed countries, and of the under-developed countries, by capitalist groupings. To Mr Page our school- and housing-shortages are solely due to our population explosion, not to a wholly disproportionate appropriation of the nation's wealth by a very small minority of the population. Britain regularly finds thousands of millions of pounds for military expenditure, luxury apartments, luxury office blocks, prestige projects such as Concorde and QE2, foreign investment, etc. etc. And yet seven million British citizens (in the UK) live at or below the poverty level defined by the National Assistance Board. And as for the under-developed countries—alas, Mr Page again only sees the population explosion. He says that “Even with foreign aid” the under-developed countries may not be able to develop fast enough. *Even with foreign aid!* Is he unaware of the realities behind economic “aid”? For example, between 1950 and 1965 the total flow of capital on investment account to the under-developed countries was \$9 billion while \$25.6 billion profit capital flowed out of them, giving a net *outflow from the poor to the rich* in this instance of \$16.6 billion. This is naked capitalist exploitation and the principal reason why the poor countries are staying poor. Why does Mr Page not mention this? I suggest because his analysis of society is superficial and non-Marxist. Of course he briefly alludes to “ruthless economic and religious exploitation” but this scanty reference in no way informs his judgement as to the causes of British and overseas deprivation.

Whether we like it or not the only effective force of social dynamics is class war, and unless we have it, in some form or another, then the social advancement of the mass of the people will be neither adequate nor secure in the long term. But Mr. Page never once refers to the concept of class war, or to its reality in most human societies today.

The second point—that liberalism and militancy are compatible—may only be a linguistic difference between Mr Page and myself. To me liberalism means reformism, and militancy is closely connected with a capacity for revolutionary action. To me, to be a liberal means to have good intentions but naively to expect wealthy and powerful groups to disgorge their wealth and power as a result of the liberal's pious appeal; to me such a view is absurd. The people will have to *take* what is rightfully theirs; it has never been different in history.

Then Mr Page says that people like Tribe and Lord Russell should take their opportunities where they can on television and radio. In the first place Mr Page's use of these two names is very significant in the present context. Both Tribe and Russell are represented as radical non-conformists (as of course on particular issues they are), but neither of them would urge the working-classes to take up arms to end exploitation; neither is a revolutionary radical. In fact, about ninety-nine per cent of Russell's relevant political writing is specially anti-Marxist, anti-communist, and anti-revolution. (As a start, see his essay *Why I am not a Communist in Portraits from Memory*—I will give many other references if required.)

Militant, articulate, knowledgeable and eloquent revolutionaries are *completely* excluded from all channels of mass communications. (Please don't mention Tariq Ali; he was outflanked on the left a long time ago!) And what is the effect of the appearances of Tribe and Russell? In the first place they are never given a programme to run on propaganda lines as they wish. There is always an “interviewer” or a “discussion”; every appearance is thoroughly

stage-managed, and how infrequent are the appearances! How many times have we seen Russell on television since he started criticising the American crimes in Vietnam? But the supporters of the system find the occasional appearances of friends Tribe and Russell extremely useful. Look! they cry, we even let radicals such as these appear! See how democratic we are! And naive folk believe them.

As for Mr Page's remarkable suggestion that liberal forces have weakened and undermined the power of capitalist vested interest, I cannot imagine where he gets this idea from. Despite death duties and “punitive” taxation, capital distribution in Britain is pretty well what it always has been in the twentieth century. *The wealthiest two per cent of British adults own 75 per cent of all private wealth, and the income of the top one per cent is in sum about the same as that shared out amongst the poorest third of the population.* And at this time of Britain's grave economic plight, in the days of credit squeeze, incomes policy, devaluation, sterling crises, etc., etc., when the workers are told to tighten their belts, when a strike for a living wage is “holding the country to ransom”, at such a time, are dividends and profits restricted, are large shareholders feeling the pinch? In fact dividends have never been healthier. I quote from the *Board of Trade Journal* (28/2/69) (the italics are mine):

“Gross trading profits of the 257 companies analysed in the quarter ended December 31, 1968, amounted to £369 million, an increase over the previous year's total of almost 25 per cent. This represents the most rapid growth of profits compared with a year earlier since the Board of Trade initiated the quarterly analysis of quoted company accounts at the beginning of 1963.”

(These were the profits shown in accounts published in the last quarter of 1968. They relate to financial years ending in April, June and July 1968.)

This point also relates to the letter of Mr Cook (29/3/69). Mr Wilson is doing very nicely for the capitalist class of this country, even though he does find it necessary to do things like stopping free milk to poor children in schools, and his betrayal of working class interests is one tragic reason why a confused and anxious electorate will, in desperation, elect a Tory Government at the next General Election.

As for the social progress made in the last fifty years—little of this would have been achieved but for militants who organised the working classes into trade unions. (Remember the Combination Acts which made trade unions illegal until worker militancy forced changes in the law; and without the formation of the trade unions there would have been no Labour Party.)

In my article on Social Democracy (FREETHINKER, 15/2/69) I said “. . . the social democratic leadership is forced to pursue policies that are broadly in the interests 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”. How clearly this is happening today! Of course, Mr Cook I welcome the National Health Service (which I *had* noticed) and other social provisions; but there are many dismal and distressing shortcomings which in a developed society such as ours are scandalous, and there are unmistakable signs that the social services are steadily deteriorating.

Social progress can be made under capitalism in certain circumstances—but this progress, crucial to the well-being of the mass of the people, will always be *tardy, inadequate and insecure, and only seldom has this been shown as clearly as it is being shown in Britain at this very moment.*

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## BOOK REVIEW

IAIN SAUNDERS

THE ENVIRONMENT GAME: Nigel Calder (Panther Science, 8/6).

WE HAVE BECOME so used to the progress of technology that we no longer view each step as a never-to-be-repeated miracle; rather we expect it as a matter of course transforming the nineteenth century conception of a static environment into a dynamic era of change to the extent that science-fiction is now an essential accompaniment to long-term planning. In *The Environment Game* Nigel Calder suggests various paths that technology could take but he lays great emphasis on the fact that at the moment we have no control over which path is taken. It is this lack of control that fills many people with misgivings over the value of technical progress as it increases the power of man over the environment (which includes other men) when there is little indication that it will be used beneficially.

Although many fascinating possibilities are revealed, by far the most important section of the book is concerned with the method that Calder outlines to deal with this problem of control. The essence of his reasoning is that much of the difficulty lies in our inability to see the overall context of the problem and thus all its wider implications. One example of this is given by the effect of applying Western medical knowledge to under-developed countries which has simply been to disturb the natural equilibrium by generating chronic over-population. Whether or not death by starvation is more agonising than by disease is a debatable question but it was not one that the single-minded medical missionaries ever considered. However, simply to say 'look at the full implications' is not very helpful as the complexity of this approach virtually precluded its application until the development of the computer. With this machine it is possible to explore the intricacies of the vast number of relationships that go to make up a 'system' and it allows the effect of changes in the independent variables on the system as a whole to be considered. It also interestingly brings with it a different conceptual approach to situations with its emphasis on consistency between premises and conclusions which should prevent such behaviour as 'spending six days a week training as a soldier and the seventh affirming, with Moses and Jesus, that killing people is wrong'. The complex-systems approach provides the potential for making much more aware decisions and thus gives us the power to control the direction of technology but whether we use it or not, beneficially or otherwise, is still our responsibility.

This emphasis on a particular mode of analysis rather obscures the fact that Calder spends proportionately more time on the problem of providing sufficient food which is indeed a very important question, but it is essentially subsidiary to that of control in that if we do not have the means the ends are unattainable regardless of our concern for them. It is perhaps unfortunate that the ends were not omitted altogether as Calder makes some very strange value judgments in his preferred conclusion, basing his society on the belief that because man was once a hunter this is what he would like to be in the future. He also misses the irony contained in the great effort and vast technological constructions that are needed before we can return to the degree of co-existence that we first enjoyed thousands of years ago but he does appreciate the quite considerable probability that we might never get there.

## LETTERS

## The Secular Task

THERE SEEM to be as many brands of unbelievers as there are brands of Christians. I have met people who call themselves Christian Humanists and Humanists who say they do not believe in any God and Humanist agnostics. I have even met atheists very angry with the Russians because they think their people are not allowed freedom of thought.

All this seems to me to show that there is as much confusion amongst the above as there is in politics, which I venture to say are also mixed up with religions.

All this confusion of thought I think is leading to general muddled thinking which is causing the world to be in the mess it is now in.

Common sense seems to me to be most uncommon.

I think the students of today realise that education has to be changed in many ways, but where are we to find the number of teachers and professors who have reasoning and clear minds? While we are trying to cope with this huge problem, the mentally

disturbed military and political people are likely to blow us all up anyway.

Education as we have had it in the past has produced these mentally disturbed people and these people produce the general environment until the world is one big looney bin.

The old Freethinkers G. W. Foote and his followers knew all this and were fighting very hard to prevent the world from being as it is today, yet in spite of their good work these confusions are more widespread and dangerous.

I think the secular societies have a bigger task now than they have ever had and I would like to see a big meeting and discussion of clear-thinking people brought together to discuss ways and means of going forward, it will mean a lot of hard thinking and work from the older and younger generations—both men and women working together, after formulating a good sound policy for organisation.

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS,

Chairman of UNA Taunton Branch.

## Antipodean blush

COMMANDER CAMPBELL tells a story in his *Scrapbook* (W. H. Allen, London) which must be very annoying to Australian churchmen. Permit me to repeat it word for word:

"On my early journeys to Australia with emigrants aboard, we were always subjected to a medical examination on arrival at Fremantle. This was not only for health reasons, but because the country has a very stiff colour ban, and any sign of 'a touch of the tar brush' and the unfortunate man was ordered to be taken back to his native country.

I remember once the doctor who boarded us was a youngster and very keen on his job. We had all the third-class passengers lined up for his inspection—nearly eight hundred—and he asked me before he started if there were any coloured people in the ship. 'No,' I said. Well, he went along the line of passengers, and to my surprise tapped three men on the shoulder, telling them to fall out. When he had completed his work these men were standing alone on the deck.

'Now these men are coloured,' said the young doctor, 'and I'll not allow them to enter Australia.' That meant we should have to carry them back to Port Said, which would involve extra expense for the company.

'Look here,' I remonstrated, 'those men are Syrians.'

'Never mind what nationality they are—they are not coming into this country!'

Feeling rather indignant, I reminded him that Jesus Christ was a Syrian and said, 'I suppose you wouldn't allow *Him* into the country, then.'

'No, I wouldn't.' Then he added with a grin, 'Anyway I don't suppose He'd pass the education test.'

So we had to take the men back. These visiting doctors had the whole power of the State behind them, and it was policy to bow to their demands."

W. MOFFAT.

## Procreation and Over-population

MRS ISOBEL GRAHAME'S "Which First—Religion, Sex or Morals" shows an attitude to sex befitting the Age of the Mastodons.

She refers to a girl's "adolescent shock and loathing of her body and its functions and those of the boy, together with the whole process of procreation", and also to the girl's "bitter detestation and neurotic hatred of babies". Mrs Grahame doubts whether such adolescents "will be able to develop into confident, mature people, with the capacity to really want and love their own children".

I, also, doubt that the adolescents in question will develop into mature people, but for reasons entirely unconnected with sex.

However, can someone remind Mrs Grahame that procreation is the purely animal side of sex, accomplished in all farmyards with no less foresight than that shown by many human beings; that making love (in her sense of the word) is baby-worship; and that talk of "species preserving"—particularly preservation of the types she mentions—on this fantastically-over-populated planet is not just neurotic but the direct road to exploitation by expansionists international war new and more efficient concentration

(Continued overleaf)

## LETTERS (Continued)

camps, and the eventual *extinction* (not preservation) of all mankind?

There are two dangers inherent in sex. The first is venereal disease. More than 10 per cent of the species-preserving population of the British Isles are syphilitics and about 100,000 fresh infections occur annually. (Authoritative figures quoted by Dr J. Drew in *Man, Microbe and Malady*.)

The second is the unwarrantable birth of babies.

I invite Mrs Grahame to read "Effective Birth Control—The New Atomic Bomb" (8/2/69) and the earlier articles to which it refers—in particular "Juvenile Crime" (19/12/58). In the latter article I referred to an outbreak of student violence in 1968—which outbreak *actually occurred in the year stated*. Coincidence, Mrs Grahame? Perhaps when considered alone, but not in conjunction with other numerous predictions in other articles.

I make no idiotic pretence to being a prophet. Reason led me to my conclusions, and I live—and shall probably die—amazed that, even now, at two minutes to midnight—reason is not leading humanity to take effective action in the matter. R. READER.

## Raison d'être

I MUST REPEAT my refutation of Michael Lloyd-Jones's accusation of wishing to exclude other writers' views from the FREETHINKER, when they don't agree with mine. It is only when they threaten to make nonsense of our journal's *raison d'être* that I would wish their scope to be limited. I do not like to be called 'hypocritical' I think readers will agree that I always bring my articles to bear on the FREETHINKER'S ostensibly main and original objective, the destruction of religious belief, to a great or smaller degree.

As for his repeated accusation of racialism, and that I wish whites not to suffer more than blacks, or even equally, I have not said that. He will get me right if he substitutes 'native Britishers' for 'whites' and 'immigrants' (of whatever colour) for 'blacks'. To dispose of his racist accusation, I ask him, as I did my other critic on this subject, Mr G. L. Simons, to look up my article: "This Freedom", which appeared under David Tribe's editorship.

F. H. SNOW.

## Sexual repression

APPARENTLY, you have taken to heart the objections of those readers who wish to reduce the number of articles on sexual problems.

It seems to me that the evidence from psychiatrists, sociologists and many others, including the experiences of individuals, is already sufficient to show that the Christian anti-sex attitude has done enormous harm in the past, and is causing even more harm and suffering in the changed circumstances of today. The evidence is surely sufficient to destroy the myth of Christianity as having the highest possible morality and of the Christian morals as being a set of eternal divine unchangeable ethical laws. If this superstition is killed other superstitions may follow the same fate.

The spread of such ideas, for example, as (1) that sex is a dirty subject better not discussed, if it can be avoided, or (2) that love-making is so private and intimate a matter that it should only be done by lovers in the security of complete secrecy, is only bringing back the old conspiracy of silence and playing into the hands of Christian superstition. If myths and superstitions are to be destroyed, I think it is essential that the facts of the harm done by sexual repression should be constantly kept before the general public as well as the need for further careful scientific observations and researches. G. F. WESTCOTT.

## Japanese peace and Chinese families

IN HIS PLEA for the preservation of world poverty (FREETHINKER, April 12th), R. Reader states, among other things that "a century ago . . . Japan had enjoyed a dozen centuries of peace".

It is true that for most of history, because of its isolated position, Japan has avoided foreign wars, although operations against the unfortunate Ainu tribes of the north were fairly continuous. But civil strife at various times has more than made up for the lack. Not for nothing is the Muromachi period (1334-1615) called

the "Zankoku" (Warring State) period by Japanese school-children.

R. Reader also says that "the establishment of 700 million people under one label . . . will lead to the breeding of a further 1,400 million in a little more than a generation". This assumes that Chinese people have an average of five children each. After living for three years in Peking, I can testify that such families are as rare there as they are here. Unlike the British, the Chinese put contraceptives on the counter (next to cosmetics) in village general stores—with condoms in three sizes. They also have abortion on demand and encourage men to have a vasectomy when they have completed their planned families. The population is rising because of its age structure (caused by heavy breeding last generation); the net reproduction index in China may well be below that required to keep the population from falling in the long run—just as it is in Japan.

If R. Reader really thinks some people need to be starved to death, he can always begin on himself.

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