

Freethinker

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CENSORED!

Now THAT the Lord Chamberlain no longer has any control over what is served up in the theatre, many people anticipate a change in the laws regarding films and publications. With regard to the latter, an attempt to change the law has recently been made. William Hamling, Labour MP for Woolwich West, attempted to introduce a private member's bill to amend the Obscene Publications Act—the principle object of the amendment being to remove censorship of literature on grounds of obscenity or indecency.

Unfortunately the lamentable state of our parliamentary procedure makes it possible for a private member's bill, which is not well placed in the ballot, to be forestalled simply by another MP stating that he has an objection. On more than one occasion Mr Hamling has been frustrated in this fashion by Mr James Dance, Conservative MP for Bromsgrove and leading light of Mrs Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Campaign. In effect Mr Dance has taken it upon himself to censor any discussion of censorship, thus combining a singular lack of scruples with an overdeveloped sense of the bizarre.

It seems then, that the Bill will have to wait until the next session, when there is little doubt that it will again be adopted by a private member. There is small likelihood of any opposition from either the government or the legal profession, leaving only the odd reactionary like Mr Dance to make up the opposition. Given more time to organise a campaign, the bill's sympathisers have every chance of overcoming the obstacle represented by the comparatively small group of self-styled moralists.

Extra support for the reformists may come from the Arts Council, who at present have a working party preparing a report on the Obscenity laws. Even if their report is not published before the next attempt to amend the laws, the working party is receiving evidence from various sources, some of which has been made public. David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, has submitted a comprehensive document, which discusses the major issues at stake, and considers individually each law which relates to the question. The fact that these laws range from the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1829 to the Obscene Publications Act of 1959, is in itself indication of a need for the whole subject to be rationalised, even if obscenity as a ground for censorship is not to be done away with altogether.

Tribe begins by saying that if the obscenity laws "are intended to prevent the distribution of anything that might bring a blush to a maiden aunt's cheek, they are demonstrably not working. With frequent holidaying abroad in places like Denmark that has abolished such legislation, and with the 'dirty bookshop' of Soho and the centre of other industrial cities becoming a growth industry, there can be few citizens who have never seen anything nasty in a window or have no knowledge under what counters to see something even nastier". He goes on to show the arbitrary way in which the obscenity laws have arisen:



"In a historical sense prosecution for obscenity links up with political intrigues and curbs on serious freedom of speech rather than with any effective or, at most periods, any strenuous effort to cut smut. Obscene was linked with seditious libel to get Wilkes, and with the Victorian industrialist's exploitation of big working class families in the absence of family planning to get Bradlaugh. Just as the Roman Catholic Index of Prohibited Books gave more attention to heresy than to erotics, so Lord Campbell, the zealous Presbyterian who in 1857 decided the common law misdemeanour of obscene publication needed strengthening by statute law, had a sturdy background in blasphemy prosecutions. The great show trials that stand out in the mind of the general public have involved such serious creative artists as Gustave Flaubert, Havelock Ellis, James Joyce, Magnus Hirschfeld, Norman Haire, D. H. Lawrence, John Cleland, Henry Miller and Hubert Selby Jnr., and create an impression of official philistinism. Nor, at least

(Continued overleaf)

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in the long term, have they been effective. After causing considerable, and sometimes grievous, expense and worry to their authors/publishers, these attempts to suppress literature have usually failed. The net result has been the creation of a notoriety that has impaired objective literary criticism and distributed the offending volume among many who would not otherwise have heard of it."

Tribe puts his finger on the biggest anomaly in the existing law when he writes:

"The test of 'obscenity' in the 1959 Act, based on Cockburn's definition in R. v. Hicklin (1868), is 'such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it'. This is pure speculation. No jury, judge or other lawyer imagines that he will be corrupted by the material he is obliged to assess. It is always somebody else who is held to be at risk. In all this there is a strong class bias, as cheap publications are usually deemed to be more dangerous than expensive ones. (This was true long before children had any pocket money to speak of.) No one is ever brought into court as an awful example of depravity and corruption occasioned by the

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

Marx House, International Discussion Conference: NUFTO Hall, 14 Jockeys Fields, London, WC1 (off Theobalds Road, near Holborn Library): Saturday and Sunday, 17-18 May, starting 2 p.m. and 10 a.m. respectively: "National Liberation—What Paths of Struggle?" An international panel of speakers. Admission 7s 6d for all three sessions. Individual sessions 3s (pay at door). Tickets and information from Librarian, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, May 18, 11 a.m.: "The Novelist as Prophet", Ronald Mason, BA. Admission free.

West Ham Secular Society: Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre: Thursday, May 22, 8 p.m.: Meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group: Morelands Hotel (opposite the pier): Sunday, May 18, 5.30 p.m.: Tea Party and Annual General Meeting.

publication in the dock. It is true that at the Last Exit to Brooklyn trial the Rev David Sheppard declared that he had emerged from its perusal 'not unscathed'; but his moral scars providentially healed in time for him to be appointed Bishop of Woolwich by the Queen, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister."

One hopes that the Arts Council will take up Tribe's conclusion: "There is a case for penalising the publication of official secrets that are really vital to security, maliciously untrue defamatory libels, and perhaps vicious publications directed at children. Otherwise publication should be free. The common law offences of obscenity and indecency (and blasphemy) should be statute-barred and relevant statutes repealed".

MARXISTS PRIESTS

THE RIFT AMONGST the Catholic priesthood in Spain has now reached the point where the establishment has found it necessary to insert a full page advertisement in all national and local newspapers. Under the heading 'Conspiracy against the Church' the advertisement was addressed to "Mothers, teachers, politicians, men with a sense of responsibility". These people were warned that they should protect "the soul of our sons, the soul of our people" from subversion that was "threatening the spiritual and religious unity of our people".

It is not known who financed this colossal publicity campaign, but it is clearly connected with Franco's government and the right wing of the Roman Catholic church. That Franco and the Catholic bishops, who for so long have been able to rule Spain with a fundamental combination of laws which severely restrict freedom, and the fear of God, have seen fit to go to these lengths is both curious and welcome—particularly as the cause of the trouble is not ordinary terrorists but rebels in cassocks.

Over a period of many years there has been the occasional disturbance led by a Marxist priest, but now this peculiar combination of dogmas has become fairly widespread. The main breeding ground seems to be the Basque country, and it is here perhaps that the key to the curious advertisement is to be found.

Various priests had been arrested and questioned over the past few months and then last month a certain Fr. Juan Echave was allegedly involved in a shooting incident with the police. Echave is soon to be court-martialled together with at least seven others. This action was followed by the arrest of Vicar General Fr. Jose Ubieta, who is the second ranking churchman of the large town, Bilbao. Ubieta was held for three days suspected of aiding the organisation Euskadi ta Askatasuna, or Basque Country and Freedom. But, as though the arrest of a man in Ubieta's position was not enough, Ubieta's bishop, Mgr. Maria Cirarda came out strongly in support of his subordinate, protested his innocence and accused the regime of violating the concordat which exists between Spain and the Vatican by arresting priests without his permission and without even giving him information on their cases.

It is this sequence of events which brought matters to a head, and should be causing Franco to wonder whether the church whose support has been so essential to him in the past might not just prove to be his undoing. He is already beginning to learn that a regime which owes its existence to the propagation of superstition in simple minds cannot expect to last for ever.

THIS BLESSED PLOT

KATHLEEN BAL

TWO NEW TOWNS have been planned for South West Lancashire. One is under construction at Skelmersdale for the Liverpool overspill. The other is planned near Preston. Both will swallow up green belt areas very necessary to damp, congested, industrial Lancashire.

I have a special interest in Skelmersdale New Town. The major part of it will consist of the present borough of Up Holland, formerly an idyllic village. This also includes the hamlets of Dalton and Newburgh and their excellent fertile farming areas right up to Ashurst Beacon, a noted landmark and the highest point west of the Pennines. From there magnificent views spread towards Southport and the west coast and eastwards across to the smoke-filled valleys of the industrial towns.

I recall looking through the bedroom windows of my grandfather's house when I was a child of four years and seeing the surrounding acres of corn rippling in the breeze like waves in the sea. This was Up Holland village, unspoilt and worthy of a poet's praises. Those fields have long since gone under the axe of a post-war council estate wilderness of jerry-built houses with coal fires and in twenty years time it will be a slum. Smallholders during the last ten years or so have given way to the land grab and the result is depressingly uniform rows of bungalows with smoky chimneys. And the destruction is being completed.

Recently I discussed with a council surveyor at Skelmersdale Town Hall the unwise policy of building outwards instead of upwards, and suggested as a possible model the council flats at Roehampton where the semi-rural aspect of the area with its trees and green surroundings is retained and the medium height blocks of flats are built on concrete stilts.

Skelmersdale was until recently a country market town roughly halfway between Wigan and Southport. Now there are two dozen new factories where there were half-a-dozen farms. There is still one unspoilt village in the Up Holland area which so far has not been encroached upon. Roby Mill has a bus service of two a day and three at the weekends. It is quite a walk from Up Holland to the village, but it is fresh, open and quite beautiful. Even in winter there is a quiet grandeur in the open acres of stubbled grass, dark trees and grey skies. Yet this area was threatened a couple of years ago, not by the local council for a housing project but by a Roman Catholic monastic community.

The Roman Catholics, wealthy materialists as they are, always choose the healthiest and most attractive spots for their seminaries and mother-houses. A good deal of this particular stretch of countryside is owned by the clerics in charge of the seminary there, a well built neo-gothic edifice with a magnificent cupola. They possess woodlands and acres of arable land, houses and a farm. Further down the road to Roby Mill is a Carmelite convent, and in addition to a morbid view of their own graves which the nuns are required to dig on taking the veil, they can look down from their cell windows across miles of green and pleasant land to the valley below where the peasants grind it out.

A monastic order from Italy came next to Roby Mill, purchased a seventeenth century farmhouse and grounds and land upon which they built a 'with-it' monastery. The Order purports to take care of the aged sick, but not the

poor aged sick, and they planned to reconvert the golden cornfields to a bungalow village for paraplegics. The Methodist chapel, whose community is strong in the village, protested, and by dint of petitions and complaints to official bodies (Stanstead in miniature) managed to prevent the monks from carrying out their intentions. However the monks did cause half-a-dozen bungalows to be built on their domains and these do in fact house crippled old people. The care contributed by the monks consists of one visit per week and in any case the monastery cannot lose on the deal. The old people have purchased the bungalows themselves, and at the request of the monks, with who knows what other subtle pressures, each owner-occupier has made a will leaving the respective dwellings to the monastery. I have this on excellent authority.

At fairly frequent intervals vicious criticisms are levelled at people of other races, the have nots, who come to this England to do a job of work. Instead of merely lumping them together as coloured, why not refine the designation and refer to them as the Burnt Ochres of Hong Kong, the Plain Chocolates of Africa, the Sepias of India, the Pinko-Greys of Ungreat Britain and the Black-Topped Lesser Spotted Pale Browns of the Mediterranean. Yet the haves from the continent of Europe are more acceptable to our happy breed and encounter no prejudice when attempting to purchase land or property. These include those Czechs, Poles, Vichy French and others who turned against their own peoples to fight for the Nazis, taking refuge here at the general amnesty because a return to their native lands would have meant death by the firing squad.

At the present rate of re-ruralisation precious little heritage will be left for our children. Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, alias William Shakespeare the playwright, would turn over in his uncertain spot in Westminster Abbey if he could see what had become of his Other Eden.

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CHRISTIANITY AND MARRIAGE

ERIC WILLOUGHBY

ENTHUSIASTIC CHRISTIAN disciples who feel the desire to marry and "settle down" as the saying goes, find themselves somewhat over a barrel. Their dilemma is caused by Bible teaching on the subject, which is as ambiguous as it is on any other. Yet it is their only guidance if they wish to remain true to their faith. It is the revealed word of God to mankind, they surmise, and should therefore indicate whether marriage is part of the divine will (*sic*).

Opening his Bible, however, the Christian may be a little bewildered, especially if he follows the modern theological trend which places great emphasis on Paul's interpretation of Bible mythology.

Fanatic as he is depicted, Paul could not reconcile marriage and discipleship. The two could never be combined, he considered, as the indoctrination of others in the new faith was the only important thing in his life. He therefore devotes a large portion of what has come to be regarded as his first letter to the Corinthian converts (the portion which the monks centuries later decided was to be chapter 7) to the problem of promiscuous pilgrims. He says: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1). A simple way of avoiding "sins" associated with sex, although he follows this by decreeing: "Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband". Small wonder Christians are confused! They can neither touch a woman nor remain single without being disloyal to their faith, all in the space of two verses. At this point, all but the most intrepid Christian would put down his revered volume, but those who dare continue for just another six verses can read that unmarried and widowed folk should remain so unattached. This is the first indication of Paul making up his mind on the subject, and is endorsed in verse 27 when he writes: "Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage". It is true that, as many Christians would assert in Paul's defence, he was sufficiently deluded as to believe that the return of Jesus would occur in his lifetime, and that this, rather than his condemnation of marriage, was his main motivation for speaking against it. If this were so, it would only serve to strengthen my argument, but it is clearly untrue. Paul's objection to marriage was that it divides loyalties. Verse 32 of the chapter under review shows his real reason: "The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife". The only compromise he sees is a marriage where the religious partner undertakes to indoctrinate the other. Even Paul doubts the feasibility of this (v. 16). There is evidence that in the early days of Christianity, all fanatical disciples were celibate, and that some even practised voluntary castration! Of course, celibacy among the priesthood still persists in Catholicism today, and there are still extremist followers, mostly among Protestant sects, who believe they should not marry.

What I hope I have shown by the foregoing is that devout Christians simply should not marry, or more accurately, a Christian cannot marry and remain true to his faith. After all, there is no mention of Jesus marrying or even of his having any relationship with a woman. There is a story that the evangelist Charles Studd became engaged, and saw the solution to his problem (how to sustain his fiance's faith in spite of the normalities of married life) in a manner typical of the evangelical's intellectual level generally. He presented his betrothed with a slip of paper bear-

ing the words: "Jesus I love thee, thou art to me, dearer than Charlie, ever could be". Her instructions were to recite the pitiful words every day, or each time she felt her faith slipping. Love for one's spouse or fiance should not be allowed to encroach on one's love for Jesus, the thinking goes.

Although I have given the reason for Paul's condemnation of marriage as being fear of divided loyalties, his general attitude to women cannot be overlooked. Extracting from the same portion only of the Bible, verse 4 informs: "The wife does not rule over her body but the husband does". And in his letter to Titus, Paul gives instructions for the training of women in such things as "submissiveness" and "obedience". Paul is not alone, however in his intolerant attitude toward women. In Revelation (14: 4) John speaks of men who "have not defiled themselves with women". It is well known that among religious sects even today, women are regarded as inferior and are only allowed into services almost under sufferance and are forbidden to play any active part in the running of the chapel or services.

But married Christians need have no fear. Marriage is at least not sin, according to Paul in one of his more liberal moods (1 Corinthians 7: 36).

Now the old testament would like us to believe that God instituted marriage and it is therefore good. At least one Bible writer knew the facts of life: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Proverbs 18: 22). And volumes have been written on the religio-moral implications of the relationship between Adam and Eve as the ideal marriage. Yet marriage remains a problem which the modern disciple often finds difficult to overcome. Could it be that he doesn't really believe Genesis? Based on that book it would appear that the only interpretation of marriage the Bible knows is sexual intercourse. That is to say that a man and a woman are not deemed to be married "in the eyes of God" until they have enjoyed sexual intercourse, and that conversely, two unmarried people who share a sexual relationship are "married in the eyes of God", whether they want to be or not. This is extended a stage further in Mosaic law (Exodus 22: 16) following the announcement of other, similarly logical (?) edicts. These include that fine old maxim that a slave who has served his six years but who is too devoted to his master to seek his freedom, should have a hole bored in his ear (Exodus 21: 5, 6). Equal importance can be placed on both laws.

Religious adherents infrequently ask to be shown inconsistencies or contradictions in the Bible before they will agree there is any element of doubt about the "facts" of religion. Here is a glaring one, and as is so often the case, occurs as a contradiction between old and new testament teaching on one subject. The old testament maintains that marriage is God's intention for man, while the new testament rejects it. The plain fact is that, apart from the jaundiced opinions of Paul, the writers of the stories that others long after decided to bind in one volume and call "holy" make no clear statement on marriage. The saga of Adam and Eve merely says that God reckoned it was "not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2: 18) and that a "help meet for him" would be a good idea.

The "help meet" could, presumably, have been any beast of burden but the order: "be fruitful and multiply" was the supposed purpose of marriage and only a female

could fulfil that role; even Bible writers could not get round that one. (The use of the word "replenish" in the same verse is interesting.)

The subject of children poses other problems. Should a devout Christian woman who does her Christian duty and perhaps more besides (Sunday school teaching for instance) take time off from spreading the word to have and bring up children?

Now the way Christians attempt to overcome the marriage obstacle is typical of the Christian outlook; one must be "called" to marriage by God. "Hearing the call" is the

universal answer to religious problems. What this means in fact is that on any given topic, the individual uses his own judgement and desire, and claims divine guidance. No other Christian would dare contradict him.

That Christians are worried by the problem of marriage is obvious. A couple of years ago a speaker at a London religious gathering spoke of marriage as a "threat" to Christianity in that believers were marrying and ceasing to be active disciples as domestic matters gained more importance in their lives.

It is to be hoped that he was correct.

A WAY OF THINKING

ISOBEL GRAHAME

I AM A HUMANIST, not a rationalist or a secularist because it is my opinion that the human mind is capable of embracing more than a merely rational approach to knowledge and problems.

There is an old adage that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", but new scientific evidence indicates that "peaceful dreamless sleep" is harmful too. Mankind must dream for the good of his health, and dreaming is not subject to waking reason. It is not irrational but non-rational.

Hunches, brainwaves, sudden insights or inspirations are the culture jelly of creativity, invention and discovery. Poetry, ideas, the stuff of art, music and literature are not commanded—they come unbidden like a robin through an open window.

A mind asleep, at play, or in a state of relaxed meditative cogitation, is like a kaleidoscope idly turned until by chance conjunction of colour and shape something suddenly IS that never was before, from which a new stream of ideas may flow.

Cogitation means, literally, shaking together—a random process of juxtaposition—as though two or more conceptual fragments coming together like hooked molecules, begin to coalesce and jell into a whole new vista of concepts more significant than the sum of the previously meaningless components.

For me the term "rationalism" is not enough—I cannot subscribe to the *supremacy* of reason. The fine art of mind is created out of non-rational sensibilities. Reason develops the tools and techniques for the practical application of the art of mind. Rational and non-rational cerebration are equally but oppositely necessary.

I think, too, that secularism is not enough to free humanity from the consequences of anti-practical, anti-intellectual, anti-human beliefs which find justification in doctrines of Divine Omnipotence and the ultimate value of Faith.

There are three distinct kinds of Faith. There is the faith described by that apocryphal schoolboy as, "the ability to make yourself believe what you know is untrue". That is pious fraudulent faith!

Conditioned faith is a feeling of conviction concerning the truth of what has become familiar. It often persists in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Rational faith is merely a practical confidence in the fulfilment of reasonable expectations, for example—that tomorrow will be another day.

Believing as I do that religions are a human phenomenon, it follows that characteristic aberrations like dogma-

tism, fanaticism, bigotry, persecution, righteous indignation, arrogance, conceit and everything else we associate with the "chosen person syndrome" is of human origin too.

Secularisation would undoubtedly rid us of one grandiose excuse for some of the more schizo-paranoid episodes in the history of human behaviour, but neurotic and psychotic personalities who gain power will continue to find political and other secular vehicles for their regressive authoritarianism.

One cannot regard all crimes as the work of irrational people who need their heads examined. Those who mastermind great criminal networks are persons of high intelligence, skilled in the application of reason, who adapt to and exploit people and circumstances in starkly rational and practical ways.

It is plain that tyranny, oppression, vindictiveness and megalomania flourish equally well in the high places of secular as of religious institutions and regimes.

I call myself a humanist because I know I am human and, therefore, continually at risk from all the quirks of human psyche as well as the consequences of Earthly and cosmic events over which we have as yet little or no control. Humanists think there is greater hope for solving our problems by facing them in terms of human social and intellectual resources than by appealing for Divine intervention.

The most immediately pressing aim for our species is the prevention of war and the conservation of our terrestrial and extra-terrestrial environment, but indirectly and inextricably bound up with these is the necessity to ensure freedom from hunger and the persistent recurrence of famine. Only the co-operative efforts of all human beings internationally will achieve success.

The far distant future of humanity exists only as incalculable effects of innumerable unforeseeable causes. We cannot plan for that now, but must be content to encourage and develop a kind of pan-adaptiveness like that immortalised in the Boy Scouts' motto or, in more contemporary jargon—education for choice in the face of uncertainty.

TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS

Free copies from

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Annual report of the
National Secular Society

COMMUNITY ARTS

BOB CREW

Dovetailing Art with Society

CURRENTLY ONE OF THE more interesting and indeed controversial figures on the London arts scene is Ed Berman (BA), a 28-year-old American who has architected an impressive programme for (a) increasing the relevance of the arts to the community at large, and (b) achieving an involvement in the arts of those isolated sectors of the community which would not otherwise be involved and are in a state of depressing incommunicado.

To this end, Ed Berman is apparently completely dedicated, claiming not to draw any salary (for his tireless round-the-clock efforts) from Inter Action, the charity of which he is the founder and director, and which simply provides him with food and lodge of an entirely prosaic nature.

Ed Berman has a darkly bearded 19th century face and a headful of progressive latter-twentieth century ideas which are beginning to set a lot of people talking. Some of his ideas have achieved interesting results in the isolated sectors of society to which he wants to take community cultural awareness and group theatrical expression, either for the purposes of self-entertainment and development, or for the purposes of social therapy.

Berman's social programme includes drama projects for prisons, remand homes, mental homes, orphanages, hospitals, working-class youth clubs and schools. He sees the mentally handicapped and the criminally deviant as "socially problematic" (rather than patients and criminals), arising from their intellectual and emotional isolation from a society which allows them to fall into neglect. Against this background, he sees group theatrical games as perfectly natural and easy methods of creating the kind of community involvement and expression by which the isolated can begin to overcome their isolation (and thereby solve their problems). Berman wants to emancipate drama and theatrical expression from the commercial media, bookstalls and libraries, and put it back among the people from whence it originally came—in the streets, parks, homes and places frequented by ordinary people. He would like to see many of Britain's empty churches converted to community arts centres.

In remand homes and mental homes, Berman reads and talks poetry to the inhabitants. Clapping his hands rhythmically, he conducts them in the collective invention of their own rhyming compositions, as well as persuading them to mime with each other. In a particularly rough London settlement house, Berman managed to get a group of illiterate and tough 13-14-year-olds to enact their own improvised dance drama to blue-beat music. These children graduated from improvised group story-telling and theatrical games (creating and adopting postures to communicate unspoken moods and actions, lying in a circle in the dark with their hands touching, sharing a common dialogue) to their own dance drama production about a Superman Santa Claus which was televised by ITV.

I accompanied Berman on several of his projects and was particularly impressed by his achievements in the London settlement house where his rehearsals with a group of girls in their early teens were performed behind a locked door at which boys outside hurled bricks and shouted abuse. At one stage in the proceedings, the girls took time off to belabour the offending boys with the same masculine pugnacity, ferocity and foul language of which they had been the recipients while rehearsing. It seemed to me that the practical difficulties of taking socio-drama and Inter Action to the isolated were fundamental, requiring an intellectual and moral sincerity and integrity of purpose far above the average.

Berman sees theatre as an essential force in our everyday lives and believes implicitly in total environmental theatre, having distaste for commercial media and being critical of Brecht (who, he says, failed) and Wesker (who, he says, procrastinates). Berman has written a few little-known plays for environmental theatre which have appeared in London at clubs: 'The Mercury' (Notting Hill), and the 'Ambiance' and 'Little' lunchtime theatres for one-act plays in Queensway and Upper St Martin's Lane respectively. Berman was also instrumental in bringing La Mama Troupe to London, from off-Broadway, New York; readers may recall that this was an all-coloured dancing troupe which performed somewhat spectacular configurations in improved dance drama and theatrical games, starting at the Mercury Theatre and finishing up in the West End and on a national tour of Britain.

Berman's approach to what a lot of people would call socio-drama (although he is not in agreement with the terminology) strikes me as being religious and, of course, scrupulously dedicated. His background is Harvard (History and Biblical Archaeology) and Oxford (Rhodes Scholar), via High School in Maine. He tells me that he did some research in Turkey on the subject of nationalism where he was badly beaten-up.

Inter Action has a small office and community arts workshop in Chalk Farm, opposite the Roundhouse, which was originally loaned to them free of charge, but now costs £1,000 p.a. Berman lives where he can find free accommodation, dossing down with friends wherever and whenever a spare corner is available to him, and he is frequently to be found in the 'Ambiance' restaurant in Queensway which is the home of the lunchtime theatre.

Since starting Inter Action in April 1968, Berman has had requests to start socio-drama groups throughout Britain and in



Berman (right) with one of his groups.

different parts of Europe and the United States. Currently he is looking for group session leaders and trying to raise more money for his programme. He has attracted many willing disciples, but accepts the support of only a few volunteers, insisting always on training leaders to professional standards before sending them into an isolated area to work. Inter Action leaders can earn the modest sum of £4 per week.

Theatrical enterprises of social purpose, such as those being pioneered by Ed Berman and Inter-Action, are clearly a necessary part of the arts scene in Britain if it is important for all of the people to understand the relevance of the arts in their everyday lives and become, thereby, culturally and theatrically alive.

Whilst the significance of socio-drama is not likely to have more than a marginal effect on the state of the art in commercial theatre today, it certainly has a lot to offer in the practical application of dramatic experience outside the established temples of art and culture, in the mundane avenues of sociology. Berman has said that, in his efforts to dovetail art with society, theatrical experience is merely a by-product of bringing self and, ultimately, community expression to those people who are otherwise incommunicado. Unlike the commercial theatres which invite the public to react, the job of socio-drama and Inter Action is to get out into the streets and reach people who seldom or never experience the influence of the arts in their lives. Clearly, Ed Berman attributes (with missionary zeal) a greater priority to people than he does to the arts. In diametric opposition to the more classic notions of art for art's sake, Berman's slogan would appear to be "art for the sake of the people".

What distinguishes Inter Action from other enterprises is that it offers a comprehensive arts programme which does not require an educational or social preconditioning as a prerequisite for participation. Thus far, Inter Action's programme has involved hundreds of children in the enactment of their own plays in the streets, the production of their own films, music and songs (including the

construction of musical instruments), handicraft and clay modelling projects. With the loan of a country manor house in Sussex, Inter Action is able to offer a country scene in which children from high-density multi-racial city environs can participate in holiday drama camps and shoot scenes of their own films "on location". For its professional theatre activities, Inter Action receives a subsidy of £1,500 p.a. from the Arts Council, but all its other activities outside the theatre depend on donations and voluntary aid.

By developing new approaches to social communication through drama and by taking drama to people instead of asking them to come to the established places of theatre format, Inter Action is attempting to create new patterns for the future which deserve our attention.

BOOK REVIEW

G. L. SIMONS

RED STAR OVER CHINA by Edgar Snow (Gollancz, 70s).

PEOPLE HAVE regarded this book as a classic for many years. And rightly! The revelations brought to the Western World in 1938 about the Chinese struggle are as pertinent today as ever they were. Most Westerners are ignorant about the nature of the Chinese revolution, its genesis and development. Edgar Snow's splendid living narrative is one of the best antidotes I have discovered to the irresponsible journalese thrown at Western publics in the guise of "news" about modern China.

Edgar Snow, an American, went to the Far East when he was twenty-two. He lived in China for seven years, and in 1936 penetrated Chiang Kai-shek's blockade to enter the Red territories of China. He lived with the Communist guerrillas for several months: *Red Star Over China* is a record of his experiences.

He describes his trepidation on approaching the Red territories; he records his early meeting with Chou En-lai and other Communist leaders. Later he meets Mao Tse-tung, and the volume is remarkable in that it includes an *autobiography* of Mao. Night after night Mao talked to Edgar Snow and copious notes were taken. The descriptions of Mao's behaviour and his manner among his people show clearly his complete identification with the lot of the ordinary Chinese. If you are used to hearing 'Chairman Mao' derided and scorned, treated as an out-of-touch fanatic, then read this book. See the hopes and aspirations that he embodied; see how completely the Red Army became the "poor man's army".

The Chinese revolution was vaster than any comparable event in history. It lasted decades, ranged over thousands of miles, and involved tens of millions of people. In the early thirties the Red forces were almost defeated. Chiang Kai-shek, with Western equipment and military advice from German officers (notably General von Falkenhausen), launched an "extermination campaign" against the Communist armies, whereupon the Reds were forced to embark upon the Long March—a tactical retreat to Northern China.

The Long March is one of the most remarkable events in history. Tens of thousands of men, women and children set out to walk 6,000 miles; the decimated columns finished the trek in just over a year. On the march they had fought battles at the rate of one a day for the full year. Of the total 368 days en route, 235 were consumed in marches by day, and 18 in marches by night. There was *one* halt for every 114 miles of marching, and over the year the great army *averaged* 24 miles a day—a staggering figure when one considers that the army crossed eighteen mountain ranges. They carried with them their food and military equipment, printing presses and theatrical equipment, books and documents (Edgar Snow even refers to the young boy who carried the archives of the Chinese Communist Government on his back in two iron boxes for the whole of the 6,000 miles.)

In one important sense the Long March helped the Chinese Communists to make their revolution. It brought them into contact with the Chinese people in twelve different provinces (inhabited by more than 20,000,000 people). It showed that the Reds were on the side of the oppressed. The Communist columns liberated sixty-two cities and towns (and still kept up their 24-mile daily average); peasants joined them as they marched; the reputation of the Red Army preceded it and peasants intercepted the columns to beg for the liberation of their regions from the tyrant landlords. And this is what the revolution was about!

People were forced into such poverty that they were obliged to sell their children. *Sell their children!* They sold them so that the children may have a chance of life in oppressive

employment in Shanghai or Canton. The peasants knew that the next famine, the next flood, the next onslaught by warlord or landowner, was not far away. Soon the starving would be littering the fields again. Perhaps in the cities the children would have food. And so the children were sold for five dollars each to be chained to the walls in a Shanghai factory as slave labour. Some were forced to tend machines, to lose limbs or be mangled; some were forced to dip cocoons of silk into boiling water—they soon lost their fingers and they soon died.

Edgar Snow describes the starving Chinese he saw in Suiyan:

"Have you ever seen a man—a good honest man who has worked hard, a 'law-abiding citizen', doing no serious harm to anyone—when he has had no food for more than a month? It is a most agonising sight. His dying flesh hangs from him in wrinkled folds; you can clearly see every bone in his body; his eyes stare out unseeingly; and even if he is a youth of twenty he moves like an ancient crone, dragging himself from spot to spot . . ."

Children are even more pitiable, with their little skeletons bent over and mishapen, their crooked bones, their little arms like twigs, and their purpling bellies, filled with bark and sawdust, protruding like tumours. Women lie slumped in corners, waiting for death, their black blade-like buttocks protruding, their breasts hanging like collapsed sacks. But there are, after all, not many women and girls. Most of them have died or been sold . . ."

Some people may say that the regime was not to blame, that the real cause was the great population and the strains on a peasant economy. Edgar Snow gives the answer to this, an answer which applies (criminally!) to modern India and Latin America:

"The shocking thing was that in many of those towns there were still rich men, rice hoarders, wheat hoarders, moneylenders, and landlords, with armed guards to defend them, while they profited enormously."

And this is the sort of social system that the Americans struggled to sustain by shipping in arms, which the Germans aided by sending groups of military advisers, and which the British assisted by sending trained agents to root out the Communists in the Chinese cities.

Edgar Snow's fine book is a human account. If the word "communist" sticks in your throat, if you are opposed to revolution to throw off oppression, if you think that Communist China has paid (is paying) too high a price for its advance, then read this book. Read of the ordinary Chinese peasant and his battles; read of the nightmare that China knew only a generation ago; read of the people, with spouses, brothers and sisters, children, who fought to remove an oppression and a misery that the comfortable European has rarely known.

This volume has been brought up to date for re-issue. It contains nearly one hundred biographies of leading Chinese figures, a chart of the present leadership of China, further interviews with Mao Tse-tung, and an excellent bibliography. Buy it, read it well, and encourage others to do the same.

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LETTERS

Irresponsible

MUCH AS I AM in agreement with the general opinion expressed by Michael Lloyd-Jones in his letter (FREETHINKER, April 19) I must express surprise at his lack of knowledge concerning VD.

He writes: "The time has come to get rid of the old arguments against intercourse—risk of pregnancy and VD". This is quite irresponsible; the widespread use of contraceptives by women, i.e. the pill and coil, has probably contributed considerably to the increasing incidence of VD amongst young people, whom Mr Lloyd-Jones chooses to ignore altogether. The decline in use of the condom by the male, in these circumstances means that the spread of VD is not restricted to prostitutes, but has widened to an increasing number of women who have sexual intercourse more freely, now they no longer fear pregnancy as they are responsible for contraception themselves.

Although sexual freedom may be wisely advocated, freethinkers and moralists must both realise that we live in a world which is far from ideal and likely to remain so; opinions are poor if they fail to take due account of extremely pertinent factors!

DENIS COBELL.

Free Will

HENRY MEULEN has again quite failed (FREETHINKER, May 3) to understand G. L. Simons' arguments against Free Will. He supposes, correctly, that Quantum Theory reveals that some events are uncaused. He does not seem to realise that, though *individually* uncaused, such events are statistically determined. Each of these events is a random event occurring far below the level of consciousness. There is no sense in which a random event can be said to exemplify choice—hence Mr Meulen has no case.

It may or may not be true that "nobody really believes . . . that reasoning is determined independently of (his) will"; though I should be interested to discover how Henry Meulen knows this; but, either way, it is quite irrelevant to the argument as to whether this proposition is *true*. Truth is often uncongenial, at least to some people.

Since Peter Crommelin believes that Free Will is not meaningless perhaps we could invite him to explain exactly what it does mean?

D. C. FLINT.

FIRST OF ALL I must say I am a Freethinker and have always been one, but I cannot agree with Peter Crommelin that only a few Freethinkers will subscribe to the opinion that "Free Will is meaningless".

Free Will is meaningless because we can use it to only a very minute degree and I'm not so sure of even that small degree. Environment and heredity and health play the greatest part in our actions. As time goes on, Free Will becomes more and more meaningless because of greater restrictions imposed on us. We also have to think of others. People who think there is Free Will and try to use it get into all kinds of trouble and soon find out there is no such animal.

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS,

Chairman of UNA Taunton & District Branch.

Free Speech

MR G. L. SIMONS, although allowed a whole page to make his reply, can do no more than reiterate the stale dogmatism of his previous contributions. He also shows extraordinary ignorance of the matters about which he writes—witness, for example, his somewhat naive confusion of "gross trading profits" and "dividends".

He asserts that "Mr Wilson is doing very nicely for the capitalist class of this country"—a typical example of the sneering nonsense which passes for thought among so-called "Marxists". The simple fact is that the entire capitalist class of this country hate Wilson's guts even more than the so-called "left" do. I have seen staid "city types" almost froth at the mouth at the mere mention of Wilson's name. All Mr Simon's ranting about "stopping free milk to poor children in schools", etc., is beside the point. If Wilson is just protecting capitalist interests, why then is almost the whole strength of the mass-media in private capitalist control being incessantly used to discredit him, to weaken the nerve of the Government and to drive it from power?

Mr Simons "has noticed" the National Health Service: congratulations for such percipience. His claim that "the social progress made in the last fifty years" is largely due to "militants who organised the working classes into trade unions" again exhibits his pitiful ignorance of working-class history. For the most part, it *wasn't* "militants" who organised trade unions at all as anyone

acquainted with trade union history must know. The vast majority of early trade union leaders were anything but "militant".

I repeat that the social progress to which I drew attention was achieved by the exercise of free speech in a democratic society. It *wasn't* achieved by violence, "militancy", strikes, or any of the other means in which Mr Simons places his simple faith.

Nobody pretends that there is no more progress to be made or that there are no shortcomings in our present social services. The evolutionary socialist who believes in democratic methods accepts this and understands it: the so-called "marxist" can only use it as a flimsy argument to try and buttress his stubborn and unreasoning faith in the efficacy of violence and unreason.

But what, after all, is the use of arguing with Mr Simons? It is just like trying to discuss things with a convinced Catholic. Both have their "doctrine", both stick to it with unflinching zeal and both derive all their statements of alleged fact by deduction from the world. In both cases, the doctrine is so constructed that all doctrine rather than by observation of what is really going on in awkward facts can be facily explained away by convenient myths. Anyone who dissents is not only mistaken but morally inferior: the humanist is an agent of the devil and Harold Wilson a tool of the wicked capitalists.

The only thing I cannot understand is what Mr Simons' ideological dogmas are doing in a journal devoted to freedom of thought and rationalism!

J. STEWART COOK.

Effective Birth Control

REFERRING to Connaire Kensit's letter "Japanese Peace and Chinese Families" (26.4.69), I am amazed that a Freethinker should so distort my letter "Economic Expansion" of 12.4.69. That letter was, in fact, a plea for the *abolition* of world poverty by the only means open to humanity, not for the preservation of poverty, as CK insinuates. Also, which passage in my letter leads one to believe that I might think "some people should be starved to death"? Which passage, please?

I did not hold up Japan as a warning specifically to China. Japan is simply one instance of economic expansion pushing a country into the warring world-power expansionist class—an event that tribal warfare and civil strife do nothing to explain.

Again, although Peking is a large town, China is a large country, with far-distant provinces. CK's assessment of the "average size of Chinese families", to be reliable, would have to be based on something wider than three years' residence in a major city. As for the "condoms on the counters", their efficacy depends on the number of people who pay, or use them, or who are prepared to forgo a certain amount of pleasure. And does CK really believe that British youth has more difficulty in obtaining condoms than the Chinese? Or that any *effective* birth limitation measures would be tolerated for a moment by *any* of the present gang-New Atomic Bomb", 8.2.69.)

Despite the condoms, CK admits that "Chinese population is rising because of its age-structure", and goes on to say that "the net reproduction index in China may well be below that required to keep the population from falling in the long run"—a hoary old bogey, this—raised by all capitalist (and other) expansionists, all of whom would cheerfully watch the Chinese, or any other race, starve to death, if it put money into their pockets.

Finally, in one breathtaking volte-face, CK insinuates that the author of "Effective Birth Control", might be interested in seeing people starve, i.e. that I am myself one of the expansionists!

After more than 15 years, I am a little tired, but may I say just once more that all "economic expansion", capitalist or communist, East or West, without the *prior* existence of effective birth control, is war, death and extinction for all humanity?

R. READER.

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