

# Freethinker

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## HANGING

BY COINCIDENCE the Home Office decided to bring out its report, *Murder 1957 to 1968*, on the same day as the National Secular Society's Meeting on Capital Punishment. Thus the speakers were at the last minute given excellent additional material with which to reinforce their views. The meeting was chaired by C. H. Rolph, the author and journalist, who introduced the speakers with the minimum of ado.

The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Younger, PC, the Chairman of the Howard League for Penal Reform, made the opening speech: "To restore the death penalty would be an extreme measure, which would only be justified if there was extreme evidence to support it. There is not extreme evidence. In fact there is none". Mr Younger went on to say that no country has ever gone back on a law abolishing capital punishment. "Anyone who now supports capital punishment will, in my view, have to bear responsibility for what is done in his name." He considered fear to be the cause of the current campaign for the reintroduction of capital punishment—fear engendered by the current trend towards lawlessness, which trend is nothing unusual, rather something to be expected during a period of social change. "Often in the past the law has reacted with savage reprisal. There is no example where a rise or fall in the violence rates follows a change in the prescribed punishment."

David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, spoke next and began traditionally with a joke: "I don't intend to say anything about the moral questions involved. I'm to be followed by Canon Collins who is a well-known moralist. I'm a well-known immoralist." He went on to stress that society must look for the social reasons behind crime in general. "Murder is the most constant of all crimes according to figures produced in all countries. We should think more about the things, which go up." "It is the increase in status that material possessions give, which has caused the rise in crime, not the abolition of capital punishment." Tribe highlighted the corruption in society by saying: "Would anyone pay any of the leading criminologists on the platform £30,000 (like Mrs Biggs) to conduct an inquiry into the rise in crime?" Instead of protracted debate about capital punishment people should be looking into the problems caused by the technological revolution, the frustration with politics and politicians, the increase in leisure without the education for it to be channelled into edifying spheres, the increased population, the housing shortage. "If capital punishment stops one victim from dying then there is a case for it. But there is no evidence of this. But while there is a possibility of an innocent person being killed by the state, there is a case against it. And there is evidence of this—Timothy Evans whom I have no doubt was framed."

Canon Collins, the Chairman of the National Campaign for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, began by saying that he assumed that all present regarded capital punishment "as an indecency which any civilised society would reject automatically. (No audible dissensions.) How can we

ensure that the foolish people who want to reintroduce capital punishment see that their ideas are wrong?" He then referred to "the belated but nevertheless excellent" Home Office report, which "has shown conclusively that the emotional and quite fantastically stupid hysteria created by Duncan Sandys and others is totally false. There is no justification for supposing that the abolition of capital punishment has in fact increased the rate of murder in any significant fashion". Speaking of deterrents Canon Collins said: "It has been proved over the centuries that you cannot deter violence with violence. . . . So why try to retain a form of judicial violence in a society which no longer needs it". He said that South Africa uses violence as a deterrent in order to improve society. Yet while London with a population of eight million has 50 to 60 murders, Johannesburg with a population of two million has 800. "South Africa accounts for 47 per cent of all capital punishment in the world today, and South Africa consistently says that capital punishment is a deterrent!" "Duncan Sandys is horrified by the increase in violence. Let us tell him that all of us will join with him in a campaign against violence to remove some of its causes, but we will oppose him to the last ditch in making a return to capital punishment."

Dr Louis Blom-Cooper, the editor of *The Hanging Question* and eminent criminologist, spoke last, beginning by saying that the Home Office report "strongly reinforces the view that there is no discernible relationship between the penalty prescribed for an offence and the frequency with which it is committed". Speaking of murders by shooting which Mr Sandys would have us believe are perpetrated by criminals who carry guns and use them when they get into trouble, Dr Blom-Cooper said, "In fact most of the shooting is done by the murder-suicides—the domestic killers". "The increase in firearms offences are increases with regard to people having them without licences and carrying them, but very rarely using them". The argument that the police need the protection of capital punishment was refuted by the fact that between 1957 and 1965 13 policemen were killed, some of them by manslaughter. In the last four years five have been killed, three of whom died together. "This is hardly a large figure." "A favourite jibe of the retentionists is that abolitionists have no feelings for victims or relatives. This can be destroyed by the fact that it was the leading abolitionists, like Margery Fry, who led the campaign for compensation for the victims of violence, and the families of those killed with violence." Dr Blom-Cooper then outlined some of the consequence of a return to capital punishment: the purely practical problem of finding equipment, and a public hangman, the

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Editor: David Reynolds

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effects on the prison service as a whole—the emphasis now being on good warder-prisoner relationships, the fact that since abolition various ways of delaying sentence have become available to prisoners to the point where a reprieve might be necessary—for instance prisoners might appeal to the European Committee on Human Rights, since capital punishment might well be said to violate the European Bill of Human Rights, to which Great Britain has recently become a signatory. Dr Blom-Cooper ended by reminding us that there are other victims in the business of murder—the families of the guilty man. “The horror of knowing that your son was executed for his crime is appalling.”

Mr Rolph read a number of messages from eminent people concerned that capital punishment should not be reintroduced. Many of these were printed in the FREE-

THINKER last week. The following are the remainder:

*“I would like to send you my best wishes for a successful meeting. In flat contradiction to the available evidence the death mongers are working hard to re-establish the barbarous capital punishment which is a relic from our savage past. Obviously we must strain every nerve to prevent this backward step into the dark ages.”*

—LORD CHORLEY

*“I very much hope the meeting on November 6 will be a success. The campaign to bring back Capital Punishment must be opposed: it would be a disaster to return to the barbarity of hanging.”*—LORD WILLIS

*“I much hope the meeting organised by the National Secular Society against the re-introduction of capital punishment will declare itself whole-heartedly against any such step. It is surely entirely appropriate that secularists, who have no expectation of any future life, should set a particularly high value on life on earth and should be irrevocably opposed to the deliberate destruction of any human being, however anti-social. I would also emphasise that in the past seven years serious doubts about the correctness of verdicts of murder have been expressed in at least four cases, and that in the case of Timothy Evans it is now officially admitted that a mistake was made. The risk that an innocent man may be hanged is thus by no means negligible should capital punishment be reintroduced.”*—BARONESS WOOTTON

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

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

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## COMING EVENTS

### 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.

### INDOOR

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group: 67 Heddon Court Avenue, Cockfosters: Thursday, November 20, 8 p.m.: Discussion on Housing led by Mr Jim Radford, the well-known squatters' leader.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, November 16, 6.30 p.m.: “Midland Heretics and Freethinkers”, Richard Clements, JP, OBE.

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8: Sunday, November 16, 7 p.m.: Discussion on Compulsory Birth Control led by Robin Osner.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, November 16, 11 a.m.: “Human Types”, H. J. Blackham, BA. Admission free. Tuesday, November 16, 7 p.m.: Discussion—“Mass Psychology—Motivation Research”: Wm. Schlackman (Managing Director W. Schlackman Ltd.). Admission 2s (including refreshments). Members free.

## VISION AND REALISM

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National Secular Society

## OBITUARY

WE REGRET to record the death of Fred Sharp, aged about 80, and a secularist of long standing. The witnessing of horrors in Africa during the 1914-18 war made him an uncompromising ‘militant’ pacifist, yet his heroism while fire-watching in World War II earned him the BEM, the first ever to be awarded. Self-educated, he was very widely read and was always forthright in expressing his mind.

The Secular Address took the form of appraisal of the work and appreciation of Fred, splendidly rendered by Tom Goodman, who concluded with those verses from Omar Khayyam that Fred had particularly liked.

## WHAT LINE HUMANISM?

LAURA CAMPBELL

IT HAS struck me for some time that there is a tendency to assume that the humanist line in any particular controversy is obvious. It often may be: but such an assumption should never be superficially accepted. A conscientious humanist must see that comprehensive and responsible research is always considered before decisions are made (which means *listening to others* if you can't do it yourself) and keep his mind open to the possible humanist aspects on *both* sides of opposing viewpoints. The concept that all the good can ever be on one side and all the bad on the other is a characteristic feature of the most primitive manifestations of religion. And the fallacy of it is just exactly why truly adult decisions are so difficult, and often involve compromise. The more idealistic a person is the more his conscience may stick at some such compromise. But the fanaticism of the saint may lead as easily to disaster as the fanaticism of the sinner—or, I would rather say, of the philanthrope and the misanthrope. Yet the compromises made in modern history by Neville Chamberlain, Roosevelt, and the lesser Kadars and others may be hardly less despised. Again one has to guard against the religious glorification of martyrdom, with its manic tie-up of idolatry and suicide.

An example of this dichotomy. The defender of individual liberty (and humanists are such) will say: Drugs are no worse than alcohol; so drugs should be allowed on the same terms of sale as alcohol. Agreed. The philanthropist (and humanists are such) will say: Drugs are as potentially damaging to human health and happiness as alcohol: so why add to the sources of human degradation and misery? Agreed.

To my mind the true humanist would not be side-tracked by *either* of these viewpoints. He would go straight to a demand for professional study of the human cravings for comfort, confidence, success and highlights (the search for oblivion, escape is secondary resulting from the lack of these others). He would then try to discover why many persons, whether isolationist or convivial, are deprived or diverted from finding fulfilment of these universal desires in happier, healthier ways. Only subsequent to such research can there be any hope of sound social and legislative policies. This goes for a lot of other subjects too: and at last this autumn it has been said that the problem of those who do not want to work should be tackled by finding out *why* they don't want to work. You don't say!

Difficulty in evaluating two opposing courses of action, to decide which best supports an undisputed reaction to a situation, has never been more clearly before all thinking people than in the dilemma of whether it is better to close or to keep open cultural and other contacts between ourselves and those countries, where things are going on which we deplore: Nigeria, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Rhodesia, South Africa, an increasing number going back to pre-war Germany and Spain. The instinctive answer based on the conscientiousness of feeling, is very likely the negative one. It was certainly the one to which I was brought up. Yet when I was in Cape Town at the time of the University protests against the application of apartheid, all my friends there thought that our applying economic sanctions would most hurt the Africans themselves. And I heard that the one thing which might have improved the situation would have been if more people had emigrated to South Africa from Britain during the previous twenty years or so. Amongst the many conscientious people protesting against the Sprinkboks Rugby tour are also self-righteous ones who

insist that anyone not adamant about wrecking matches and digging up rugby pitches is pro-apartheid. Meanwhile, Dr Barnard on his return to South Africa after a tour abroad, has publicly stated that when people asked him why his country prohibits marriages between certain individuals he couldn't say why, because he doesn't himself see why. This decries not from those who shunned him but those who mixed with him and asked the questions. Which incident, I wonder, will do most to help the problem of apartheid. And when I was teaching in Germany after the war, the Germans I met who had seen the evil of Nazism were those who, like the hairdresser who had been a ship's barber, had jobs which took them abroad, and could say 'I was able to see it from the outside, to read newspapers abroad: I used to come back and say to my wife, "This is all wrong . . ."'.

Such evidence suggests the last thing these countries need is insularity, their greatest need contact with the outside world. And I would add that those readiest to lay down facile black and white judgements are too often those with no first-hand knowledge of the countries themselves, so those outside would also benefit from contact rather than disconnection. The "untouchable" attitude is unlikely to solve any issue satisfactorily.

Yet there is undoubted truth in the adage that not to condemn is to condone. What sometimes alarms me when it appears under the name, but to my mind not the spirit, of humanism, is the failure to recognise that because something has in the past been condemned *for the wrong reasons* (religious prejudice) does not necessarily make it right; any more than the thing which has been praised for the wrong reasons (say, simply being British!) is necessarily bad. For example: that an unmarried mother should be looked down on because she has had intercourse outside holy matrimony is, in our view, wrong. But this should by no means automatically carry with it an assumption that the witting production of fatherless children (a 'human' deprivation, if ever there was one) merits encouragement. Similarly to be convinced that there is *no moral* reason against abortion, does not thereby imply that a responsible humanist will advocate 'abortion on demand', knowing that the waiting lists for our hospitals involve (to mention a case I know) a young girl being on a two-year waiting list to have her appendix removed, at the ultimate risk of her life. How would you go with a two-year waiting list for abortion!

I think we need to beware of the development of a sort of evangelical humanism, with its own rule of thumb 'rights' and 'wrongs', carrying with it the typical evangelical blinkeredness towards mitigating factors. One must always have all one's senses open to new knowledge and be prepared to bring it to bear, even if it threatens to alter one's former conclusions. The main difficulty, as I see it, is to come by the adequate knowledge.

For this reason I think it is a great pity when persons who are of an undoubtedly humanist outlook leave a humanist organisation owing to disagreement on one or two particular issues. Why hand it over to those who you think are taking the wrong humanist line? That is surely to pave the path to fanaticism, rather than adding your little bit of knowledge and experience and so helping to

(Continued on page 367)

# A CENTURY OF FREETHOUGHT

RICHARD CLEMENTS

*An extended review of 100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT: David Tribe.* (Elek Books, 42s.)

THE PROGRESS of Freethought in this country during the last hundred years, and the part it has played in bringing about a more rational outlook on life, man and society, is a story packed with human interest. Dr Michael Ramsay, Archbishop of Canterbury, recently commented on the growth of a secularist outlook during the last forty years. He added: "It is no longer possible to assume a religious attitude". But he said no word as to *how* this remarkable break-through to Humanism on the part of whole sections of our people has come about. He thereby showed the need for a factual and up-to-date book about Secularism and the secular movement.

*100 Hundred Years of Freethought*, by David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, meets this very need. He describes his book as a "social document", and in its pages he has essayed the task, after much research, wide reading, and years of active participation in the day-to-day activities of the National Secular Society and kindred humanist groups, of tracing the origins and growth of the secular movement during the years from 1866 to 1966. It throws a flood of light on the men, the ideas and the groups who pioneered in this country and abroad, the revolution of modernity. The leader of the secular movement, unlike the head of the Anglican Church, describes the grass-roots struggle of ordinary men and women to shake off the fetters imposed by the terrible trinity of Church, Bible and Dogma. And thereby opened up the way to intellectual freedom, morality without revealed religion, law reform, social betterment, and human rights.

Tribe's book is therefore both apposite and timely. It should be widely read and discussed in humanist and progressive circles. It will help newcomers to understand the movement that made possible the freedom of thought and opportunities for further progress and culture now enjoyed by the masses in Britain. And at the same time, this book will encourage the whole humanist movement to work for intellectual and artistic freedom and the maintenance of the pace of the social advance at home and abroad.

## Spirit and Contents

In his Introduction the author states succinctly the scope of his work, and indicates its contents, and the spirit in which he has carried out the task he imposed upon himself. I quote in illustration a few of his own sentences:

Freethought has no beginning and no end. Or rather its beginning is lost in the thickets of pre-history and only the extinction of higher forms of life will see its end . . .

The hundred years of this book is like all historical periods, in some ways an arbitrary time. Its selection [was] prompted mainly by the centenary of the National Secular Society of Britain. But as the natural history of societies closely parallels that of ideas there are broader historical reasons for marking off the last hundred years for special study. For some purposes the sixteenth century may be regarded as the start of the modern age; for others, the nineteenth.

The essay is undertaken in the hope that it will lighten some of the dark corners of hitherto unrecognised work in the service of humanity, while casting rays of a less conventional line on the floodlit road of social change throughout the period . . .

If much of this book is about the interests and activities of the National Secular Society it is not to suggest that here is the truth pure and undefiled but simply the need to appreciate the larger tapestries by concentrating on a recognisable corner of one sampler . . .

In the seven chapters which follow the author has developed his theme in a factual lucid and tolerant manner. In part one he considers three of its aspects, namely: the historical setting; the philosophical outlook; and the political orientation.

## The Wonderful Century

It was at one time fashionable for some academics, as well as popular columnists, to write in denigration of the nineteenth century and its many achievements. Writers of the rationalist school have been more discerning in their judgements; and to that sound tradition Tribe has sensibly adhered. For, despite some tragic blunders and shortcomings, the last century was a period in our national history aptly described by Alfred Russel Wallace, as "the wonderful century".

Secularism, like so many other significant ideas and upsurges of the human spirit, such as Utilitarianism, Darwinism, Trade Unionism, Utopian and Marxian Socialism, and many other new and daring scientific and philosophic concepts, was born in nineteenth century society. Thus Tribe describes some of its contradictory characteristics:

There were two Britains intellectually. There was the land of hope and glory, conformity and respectability; and the land of doubt, rebellion and unconventionality. Up till recently in most, and even today in many circles, it is fashionable to use 'nineteenth century' and 'Victorian' as disparaging terms . . .

True, there was a world of cant and humbug, self-righteousness and stuffiness, presided over by dukes, factory-owning magistrates, absentee rectors, society ladies and debutantes decorated by aspistras, home-stitched homiletic samplers, bell-jar confections and pianos with decently draped legs, intellectually sustained by books of sermons, improving poems, melodrama and soulful ballads.

But, then, the picture that will perhaps live on in the history will be of a radically different world:

A world of the Romantic Revival, optimistic Whig history, developing social history, scientific materialism, technological advance, creative imagination, critical fearlessness and prodigious energy, presided over by reformers, factory-owning radicals, cultured clerics, feminists and nurses, decorated by botanical rarities, daguerreotypes, suspension bridges and artistic treasures of the Empire and the Mediterranean, intellectually sustained by works on evolution, freethought verse, recitals and opera . . .

This, as he proceeds to show, "was the stock on which the secular movement was grafted in 1851 and established in 1866: rooted in old abuses but already stirring with the sap of new thought". For it was in 1866 that the National Secular Society came into being, under the dynamic leadership of Charles Bradlaugh. None who are interested in the history of its century old struggle; its leading personalities; and their relationship with other currents of radical dissent, such as Ethicism, Rationalism, Humanism, Positivism, Agnosticism, and Materialism, can afford to neglect the mass of facts Tribe has packed into part one of his book. For he has there furnished a convincing account of the part played by the philosophy of Secularism in the last hundred years.

## Towards New Horizons

A creative movement, whether intellectual, political, social or cultural, must be capable of relating itself to the traditions, ideas and aspirations of the society which gave it birth. The spirit of Secularism belonged to a great century. This experience endowed the NSS with its traditions, inspiring leaders, and a programme that was in its heyday

both radical and constructive. Today its officers and members face the challenge—like all strong-souled movements in our time—while adhering to long cherished traditions and respect for the role of its great pioneers, to move with the advance of thought, to give leadership to present-day society in its efforts to cope with new needs and opportunities, and to show a capacity for effective relationships with other radical societies and groups.

Then, too, the author has in chapter 5 given us a group of cameos of the personalities who have in the last hundred years been outstanding in the service of the NSS—Bradlaugh, Annie Besant, Foote, Cohen, Ridley and others. These pages will give much pleasure to all who have been associated with the secular movement nationally or in the work of its local societies.

There is much in chapter 6 and 7 that brings the reader into touch with the intellectual, social and political realities

of contemporary society. The world of the welfare state, education ("Education has always been more to free-thinkers than the meal-ticket it has now generally become"). Secular and moral education, law reform, civil liberties, peace and world government. Amongst thoughtful people there is much difference of opinion on such subjects, but inquiring minds will find it stimulating to consider free-thought views as they are presented by the author of this book.

It remains only for me to commend it warmly to readers of the FREETHINKER, as well as to others in humanist and radical circles in this country and overseas. For it is a veritable *vade-mecum* needed by the students and general readers who engage in the dialectics of our time.

*100 Years of Freethought* is obtainable from the Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1, at 42s plus 2/2 postage.

## HTA MEETING

DOROTHY ROBERTS

TYRELL BURGESS, author of *A Guide to English Schools* and editor of *Higher Education Review*, spoke at a meeting organised recently in London by the Humanist Teachers' Association. His subject was *The New Education Act—the Future of Religion in Schools*.

Mr Burgess outlined the reasons why a new act was necessary: (1) Technical—many inconsistencies had crept in since 1944 and the old act is now out of date; (2) Educational—the old act incorporated the ideas of the 1926 Haddow Report, but these ideas were now changing, and (3) Reform of local government will bring changes in their responsibilities for education.

Mr Burgess regarded the religious provisions of the 1944 Act as being most un-English, and pointed out that only religious education was made compulsory. He had done a considerable amount of research to discover the reasons for this and had found that before 1944 many teachers were extremely suspicious of the churches, regarding them as having sectional interests. They resented the religious tests imposed on teachers. *There was no demand from teachers for the religious clauses*. Parents were not then organised, but in a survey by Mass Observation on what people thought of the new act, the religious provisions were not mentioned, and when people were asked what subjects should have more time in schools, only 5 per cent wanted more RE. English, mathematics, and the practical subjects were far more in demand than RE. It could be said therefore that *parents were indifferent to the religious clauses*, but they did want secondary education for all.

What stood in the way of achieving this was control of schools by churches, and church schools were very bad—70 per cent of those on the black list were church schools. The churches could not afford to make improvements and the Ministry had not the power to enforce them, so these schools had to be brought under control. This was done by a bargain with the churches, the initial refusals and later interdenominational wrangles resulting finally in three categories of voluntary schools and compulsory religion for all other state schools.

Tyrrell Burgess felt that although people are even more indifferent to religion than they were in 1944, the religious lobby is as strong, and furthermore whilst Edward Short is in charge of education, Parliament will not abolish the religious clauses. In the face of powerful pressure groups

he felt we must work with the churches, many of whom were worried about the religious clauses in practice, and offer them a new bargain with the state. In return for dropping the religious clauses, we could make RE a general matter of choice, leaving it to the local education authority whether it were provided or not. Schools should be independent, having less than half their managers from local education authority and more than half from parents and teachers. Thus there would be a vast increase in personal and parental choice; a school could be chosen because it offered a particular combination of subjects, or a particular type of regime, or because it offered religious education or no religious education.

Questions from the floor revealed anxiety about the reality of this choice. It was feared that it might lead to an increase in church schools; that there would be no choice anyway because children were usually sent to the neighbourhood school; that the single school areas could still be controlled by the churches with no choice for parents. Speakers also felt that children themselves, especially the older ones, should be allowed to opt out of RE and worship without reference to their parents.

### SECULAR EDUCATION APPEAL

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## A CENTRAL PARADOX

G. L. SIMONS

THERE ARE a number of ways of expressing disagreement with someone whose outlook you cannot share—you can, for instance, spit in his eye or deluge him with a fearsome torrent of fact and argument. If your opponent is committed to his position then his reaction will be largely the same which ever course you adopt. The affront you commit against him with saliva or syllogism will produce an emotional response of resentment and annoyance—and he will not change his opinions unless he has powerful reasons for wanting to do so. I once knew a Catholic girl who wanted to go to bed with a boy: she was quite religious but her amorous inclinations soon made her an easy convert to rationalism.

In arguing with people there are a number of approaches that can be fruitful. The one to be adopted largely depends upon the subject matter and the orientation of the opponent. Assuming we are trying to be rational, and that we are arguing against a political, religious or philosophical system, we can attack particular premises on factual grounds or we can show that the reasoning from the premises is in error. A third method is to demonstrate that the premises (or propositions derived from them) are inconsistent—in one from this approach is of course the classic *reductio ad absurdum*. I want to consider this approach in connection with the framework of the bourgeois political system as this framework is represented by its supporters.

A number of things have been said about the bourgeois political framework. Some of these are true, some not. There are at least two positions, however, which appear to be essential to any description of the bourgeois state. One of these is that the bourgeois state is democratic—the nature of the democracy varies from one country to another. The US and Britain do not have the same political systems but both are said, by their supporters, to be democratic. The other position that I want to highlight is that in a bourgeois state it would be wrong for the government to control education in every particular (i.e., the universities, for example, must be 'independent'), to control the press, and to control all forms of broadcasting. What is meant here is that the supporter of a bourgeois society believes that it would be wrong for all the organs of propaganda to reside in the hands of the state.

These then are the two propositions maintained by the upholder of bourgeois society: (1) bourgeois societies are democratic; (2) it would be wrong for all the organs of propaganda to reside in the hands of the state. What I suggest is that to uphold these two propositions simultaneously involves one in a contradiction. The contradiction is formal one and indicates that one or both of the propositions should be abandoned or modified to achieve consistency. Let us look at them in more detail.

What does it mean when we say of a society that it is democratic? Generally we are referring to *political* democracy, with some sort of franchise system, and elected delegates having legislative power. But clearly the position is complex. In the Soviet Union there are regular elections but the Western bourgeois citizen would not consider the USSR democratic. A Marxist, however, would tend to stress also *economic* democracy where ordinary people had a big share in determining the economic policies that affected their lives. I do not wish to pursue these differences. I want to stress only an important theoretical feature of

bourgeois society—the notion that democracy means *government of the people by the people for the people*. If this is the essence of democracy—and who can deny it?—then the state organs in a bourgeois society (assuming it to be democratic) must be interpreted in a particular way.

One consequence is that the state organs must be identified in *some* sense with 'the people'. If we ever contrast the state organs with the people then we can no longer talk of government 'by the people'. If the state organs and the people are not in *some* sense the same then the classic definition of democracy falls down. Put another way—if we find a society where distinctions are drawn between the interests of the state machine and the interests of the people then, if the distinctions are valid, the society is not a democracy according to the old definition. In short, according to the definition of a democracy there must be a 'oneness' between the state and the people—if this oneness disappears then the state is not democratic.

Consider now the second proposition—that the state in a bourgeois society should not control all the organs of propaganda. The reason for this is thought to be virtually self-evident, i.e. where the government controls press, broadcasting, education, book-publishing, etc., we have a dictatorship—there is little or no 'freedom of expression' and only government views can be heard.

Superficially this position has a certain plausibility. But the people who maintain it do not seem to realise what they are admitting. If the government is once represented as an organ that can have different interests to those of the people then, if the representation is accurate, the society in question cannot be democratic. For, if it were democratic, the people would be the government ('government of the people by the people . . .').

Thus the right-wingers who argue that the press should be *in private hands* in our *democracy* land themselves in a formal contradiction. If the government is not the people then we do not live in a democracy: if the government is the people then *how can the people conceivably have interests opposed to those of the people?*

Of course the contradiction only arises because patently obvious facts have to be ignored for the preservation of the bourgeois myth. The facts are that the holders of economic power are much more likely to maintain the *status quo* if they control the dissemination of opinion as much as possible. So the absurdity has to be maintained that for the elected representatives of the people to control the press would mean dictatorship, whereas for the press to be wholly controlled by three or four capitalists means democracy. The brilliant effectiveness of the capitalist propaganda machine can be judged by the number of people who believe this absurdity. If we were really interested in making our society more democratic instead of merely propping up an effective tyranny over the homeless and the other deprived people in our midst, then we would be fighting to spread the influence of the mass interest to all social fields—we would be taking more things into public ownership, and we would be deepening the socialist orientation of such ownership (not the bourgeois nationalisation we have today where the public corporations are run and milked by capitalists). And we would be striving to increase the participation of ordinary people in the affairs that concerned them—they have capacities and strengths they do

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## REVIEW

DAVID TRIBE

*Essex Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1s).

ONE OF THE MOST encouraging developments of recent years is the growth of newsletters and magazines among humanist groups in different parts of the country. In this way grass-roots support is fostered.

*Essex Forum*, the new quarterly of the Essex Council of Humanist Groups, is a lively example of local humanist literature. In the centre of the journal, where it should be, is a table of forthcoming events. Round this are some pages of cartoons, like the curate's egg. I was particularly pleased to see poems, by Malcolm Warrington, though they too obviously gave the impression of being space-fillers. (In this way *Love Poem* appears, improbably, beside a well-sketched head of Norman St John-Stevas.) There is a crossword, and local news. It is some time since the NSS has had to complain about press coverage nationally or locally (naturally we would like more of it), so it is disappointing to find that local groups—Havering in this case—still suffer from the sort of mischievous publicity we have had to endure in the past.

The articles are mostly on contemporary social problems, notably adoption and abortion. That explains the Stevas portrait. The abortion issue is treated as a forum, with himself (MP for Chelmsford) and Madeleine Simms of ALRA in debate. Included is the ubiquitous letter from Leo Abse, MP, resigning from the BHA Advisory Council over its support for ALRA.

But what makes the journal so remarkable is its editorial by Christopher Pettit. This raises the question of what, in some areas, grass-roots support is really supporting. The editorial begins with implied approval of the Abse resignation, which prompts 'serious doubts as to the direction Humanism in Britain is taking'. Whereupon the attack switches to secularism and freethought: 'To contend that Humanism has but one root (rational freethought) is to condemn the movement to being a very sickly plant indeed.' After two pages of curious argumentation the conclusion is reached: 'Perhaps the time has come to play down the Brophys in our midst and invite the John Robinsons to join the BHA so that all those in favour of human values may fight under one banner'.

The prototype Brophy in our midst is, of course, Brigid Brophy, one of the NSS Distinguished Members Panel. To her is attributed the following proposition: 'That the basic issue is not the happiness of man, but the fact that the "truth" is that God is non-existent, and even if it meant condemning man to misery, it were better to teach the truth!' This bald statement is innocent of all quotations and references and—though I am naturally not in a position to refute it—is a very garbled version of anything I have ever heard Miss Brophy say. The editor then proceeds to assert that 'one of the stumbling blocks of British Humanism is its insistence that man is on his own, and there is no after life'. This is presumably a reference to the BHA. But even here there is a subtle alteration (no doubt unintentional) of what has actually been said: 'Humanism proceeds from an assumption that man is on his own and this life is all and an assumption of responsibility for one's own life and for the life of mankind' (H. J. Blackham in *Humanism* (1968), p. 13). An assumption is very different from an insistence.

These statements are, in Mr Pettit's view, subversive of the 'open mind' and the 'open society'. Oh what a substitute for thought these blessed phrases are becoming. While we may all agree on the dangers of dogmatism and the importance of accepting new facts, it is from time to time necessary to point out that the most 'open mind' in the world belongs to an idiot or a mob. And while there are varying degrees of civic freedom, no stable society in the world has ever been completely 'open' but enshrines certain ideological assumptions, implicit or explicit, in its constitution and its fiscal and foreign policies. Indeed public protestation of 'openness' is not infrequently accompanied by above-average private dogmatism.

In these fundamental problems of life we are urged against 'excluding the spirit of enquiry from operating'. What are we supposed to do to test theories of the afterlife: invite our friends to a *séance* and then commit suicide? The editor seems to have no notion of the onus of proof.

We are next told that 'precepts that started life as Humanist protestations have been accepted as valid by leading theologians', and 'Bishop Robinson' is commended for his observation: 'There is no supernatural reality, high and lofty, above us'. Now, this remark by someone who is not, by the way, a leading theologian but a biblical scholar, is considerably more contentious than the

atheist claim. Atheists simply declare they find no evidence for theistic intervention in the world, and have no views on 'supernatural reality' which is, by definition, beyond natural investigation. There is no particular reason why Dr Robinson shouldn't join a humanist organisation. He seems to believe no more than Miss Brophy, who, had she been a man prepared to be as reckless in credal undertakings at ordination, might have been a bishop herself. That would have been different. For what is dangerous dogmatism in a secularist becomes admirable when endorsed by a bishop. Will John Robinson retain his fascination now he has renounced his bishopric?

Had Mr Pettit any acquaintance at all with freethought literature of a hundred years ago he would know there is nothing novel about the views he now puts forward with such an air of showmanship. Fortunately the movement then grew tired of these linguistic excursions and settled down to the job in hand, viz. the challenging of powerful vested interests. This work was more than theological wrangling, for no movement has had a better record of 'good works' in the social, educational and humanitarian fields. I am confident that in the second half of the twentieth century the freethought movement will again come to its senses and, whether it trades under the label of secularist, humanist or secular humanist, ignore the shufflers who arrogantly claim to have a monopoly of 'human values'.

## WHAT LINE HUMANISM ?

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produce the fluctuating, compromising, practical humanism which—in contrast to a fixed and rigid perfectionist doctrine—is what any true humanist line would be. Most of us are better equipped to feel than to judge. Is not our ideal of true humanism an outlook based on the closest possible balancing between available knowledge based judgements and uncrushed human feeling?

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## A CENTRAL PARADOX

*(Continued from page 366)*

not realise. But of course in capitalist society the reverse course must be adopted—the *people* must be excluded from power at all costs, and the capitalists, not the people, must run the newspapers and broadcast.

I have spelt out the formal contradiction above because it seems to me indubitable—and I have given my interpretation as to why the contradiction (the 'central paradox') exists. My interpretation may be in error (such an anomaly has been known!), but I hope that critics who do not accept my portrayal of the contradiction will give me reasons. There is a case here to be answered—and if it cannot be answered, the capitalist coffin has acquired another intellectual nail. To anyone with any sense the capitalist system, the bourgeois society, the social democracy, the Western democracy—is stupidly unjust. That its own premises are self-contradictory should surprise no one.

## LETTERS

### Lucky Strike ?

IN A RECENT BMA report, Professor J. G. Scadding names cigarette smoking as the chief culprit in the causation of chronic bronchitis. In view of the fact that this illness accounts for 30 to 35 million lost working days per year, while unofficial strikes accounted for less than three million in 1968, may we expect the political parties to get their priorities right and abandon any idea of sanctions against unofficial strikers in favour of legislation to curb the activities of cigarette manufacturers and of the advertisers who peddle their wares?

MICHAEL CREGAN.

### Only human !

IT IS VERY AMUSING and rather unfortunate that the Pope, in his recent address to the Synod, had to associate the Virgin Mary with his talk about celibacy and chastity. The poor girl must have been at her wits end as to how to solve her perilous problem in that pre-abortion age when women could be stoned to death for irregular sexual lapses. No doubt the family council called with Joseph to decide what to do in the emergency could only agree with his suggestion to hide her away privately until the whole sorry business was over.

However, a timely solution suddenly appeared in that superstitious age when some people still believed in the intervention of gods in human affairs—many women claimed having had intercourse with a god including Alexander the Great's mother. So someone—perhaps the culprit himself—thought up the idea of using the Messianic story of the child that should be born to a virgin. Here was the virgin—or had been—and here was the credulous elderly carpenter who could easily be imposed upon by a skilfully contrived vision (easy in those days) and a plausible tale. So honour was saved all round. But who was Gabriel? And anyhow the Pope should keep quiet about chastity. The girl was only human after all!

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

### Heythrop College

MORE ATTENTION would be given to the opinions of J. Stewart Cook if his facts were more accurate. I must reiterate:

1. I did not say Mr Cook waited till I went on holiday before selling out secularism. Naturally he didn't care. Indeed he sold out before I went away. I have little doubt there is no closed season for Mr Cook's salesmanship. The holiday was mentioned to explain my long delay in replying to his 'unanswerable' charges.

2. I did not say the University of London Senate did anything illegal. In law they were not obliged to tell anyone what they were doing. They were exercising a legal autonomy in the high-handed way everyone has come to expect of such bodies. This is what the protest movement is all about. In a more recent 'effusion' welcoming the report of the Commons Select Committee I have set out a number of ways in which I believe universities have forfeited their right to special privileges of this sort.

3. Like all other voluntary societies the NSS cannot afford to send out details to its entire membership of every emergency motion that arises after the agenda has been distributed. This is moreover physically impossible, as submissions may be made up to the morning of the conference. To allege that our last AGM was a 'secret conclave' on that account is typical of the recklessness of Mr Cook in flinging his charges to the winds. Had he taken the trouble to turn up at the meeting he could have tabled an amendment congratulating himself on his broad, informed and democratic views. Next year, if he likes, he can propose a motion

welcoming the success of Catholic Action in Islington North. Of such is academic statesmanship compounded.

4. I did not say the students of Heythrop would receive more privileges than other students of the university. What they will receive are more privileges than they had before, and more incidentally than technical college students enjoy (e.g. the use of adequate union facilities).

University College, London, was founded in 1826 as an institution restricted to 'secular subjects' and called the 'University of London', the pioneer of 'redbrick'. Its motivation was: 'The range of studies that were effectively cultivated at Oxford and Cambridge at this time were narrow. Little provision was made for the study of the languages or literature of modern Europe, or of natural or experimental science. The organisation and traditions encouraged an expensive mode of life among the students. The whole constitution and atmosphere of both Universities were strongly pervaded with clericalism.' (*University College Calendar, 1969-70.*)

This was how the Church of England intended things to stay in the university world. The following year a rival Anglican establishment, King's College, was set up. By 1836 the original University of London was obliged to become University College and a new body was set up to claim the old name. After reorganisation at the beginning of the twentieth century the Congregationalist New College and Methodist Richmond College came into the University of London Faculty of Theology. And so things rested till 1969, when Heythrop joined the happy family. Technically it could be said of the first three denominational colleges that the Church of England is the Established Church, Methodism one of its offshoots and Congregationalism a parallel development from the Reformation. These are not good educational claims, but they at least have a constitutional plausibility which Heythrop lacks. They gained their status, further, in a very different climate of opinion for Christianity generally from that existing in 1969. If the time is not yet right to remove the earlier privileges, it is surely inopportune to extend them.

And why stop here? Are not other Christian sects sincere? Why stay within Christianity? Can anyone rival the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in studious indefatigability? The incantations of Juju are more complicated than outsiders imagine and are taught to novices with the same devotion. As the University of London Senate is not apparently bound by intellectual considerations of the twentieth century or constitutional niceties dating from the sixteenth, there would seem to be no bound to the exercise of its caprices. Will we next find Mr Cook advocating the admission of schools of astrology to the Faculty of Science on the grounds that it is an ancient discipline, many books have been written about it, it is a complex study and some people pursue it with the utmost diligence and conscientiousness?

If 'theology is regarded by universities as a proper and acceptable field of study', so much the worse for universities. It merely confirms the widespread suspicion that they are quite out of touch with modern thought. For whether or not God may be postulated as 'ultimate reality' it is quite certain that nobody knows anything about him. The propositions of theology are simply assertions devoid of evidential support. Far from being the 'queen of the sciences', theology is not a science at all. If it is an art, it is the art of deception and self-deception.

By referring in my last letter to the 'risk of being again denounced as a Paisleyite by Mr Cook', I had hoped to avoid it. I sought thereby to arouse some latent sensitivity, some forgotten canon of civilised debate, some painful struggle out of the ditch where mud-sliding is a by-product of all activity into the fresh air of open controversy. Alas, I forgot the ecological law that every species has a natural habitat.

DAVID TRIBE,  
President, The National Secular Society.

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