

**NEXT THURSDAY IS HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

PETER BURNS

**THE RISE OF THE ILLIBERALS: YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED**

"What the Conservative leaders fail to recognise is that the case against liberal values, both as they apply to national and international affairs, is becoming strong and respectable. It may be necessary for the advanced Western nations, if they are to protect themselves against the forces of disruption, abroad and at home, to behave in a way that flouts the liberal conscience. I suspect that this is the direction in which the Western world is inexorably moving, and that governments will become more and more involved in actions that contradict the rule of law, national and international alike. Increasingly, in short, Home Secretaries and Foreign Secretaries will find themselves acting arbitrarily, the former in fields that have to do with the maintenance of order in the streets, on campuses and even factory floors, and the latter in fields to do with the maintenance of order overseas". Peregrine Worsthorne, *Sunday Telegraph*.

**Illiberality Becoming Respectable**

It is no longer good enough, if it ever was, to think of Britain as the freest country in the world, where individual rights are respected and liberal values enshrined in our way of life. As Peregrine Worsthorne so rightly points out—and who should know better than he?—illiberality is becoming respectable, almost a matter of pride. The stage has been set in the last few years. Those who are now hurrying from the wings to its centre are the upholders of law-and-order, the censors and bigots, the little Englanders and the racialsists, the violent radicals. The spotlight is on them, and the script begins with the line: "If you don't agree with us, shut up or get out".

This is the context in which we in Britain solemnly celebrate Human Rights Day every 10 December. There are hymns, speeches and righteous self-praise. The United Nations flag is raised and we are all uplifted.

Meanwhile, back to reality; thousands of people in this country are locked away in Victorian prisons, gypsies are evicted and moved on from place to place, Asians from East Africa with British passports are shuttlecocked around Europe and back to Africa rather than be admitted beyond Heathrow immigration desk. Black citizens are discriminated against in housing, jobs, education and services. Teenage servicemen are held to unjust agreements that prevent them from leaving the forces. Tens of thousands of students are denied the right to participate in decisions affecting their own education and status. Homosexuals are harassed by the police—because they are homosexuals. Works of arts are banned or censored. Citizens are arbitrarily searched for drugs. Innocent people are imprisoned for months awaiting trial. Telephones are bugged, mail is opened and the Special Branch is allowed to be a law unto itself.

**Resisting Attacks on Our Liberties**

If in this situation, a National Council for Civil Liberties did not exist, it would be necessary to invent one. For now, more than ever, there is a need for an organisation, a movement, to mobilise liberal opinion and to resist the

growing attacks on our liberties. Let's be quite clear, it will be an uphill battle. For theirs is the power, if not the glory. But it is a battle that must be joined by all who believe that law without justice is a form of tyranny.

The NCCL is doing what it can, in the face of public listlessness and limited resources. Its most obvious and immediate contribution is to assist the individual victim of injustice. The NCCL provides legal advice, ensures legal representation and intercedes with the authorities. The complainant might be a prisoner seeking help in framing an appeal against sentence, a young sailor seeking release from the navy, a demonstrator needing a solicitor, a citizen seeking redress for an arbitrary decision by our anonymous army of officials. It is a kind of legal ambulance service.

Individual cases often highlight serious defects in the legal system itself. When this happens, the NCCL campaigns vigorously for a reform of the law. Here the Parliamentary Civil Liberties Group comes into its own and a combination of parliamentary questions, deputations, memoranda to Ministers, lobbying MPs and other pressures, can and does achieve results. The NCCL's campaign to establish the right of privacy is a case in point. At the time of writing, evidence is being prepared for a Home Office Committee on Privacy. This Committee resulted from an intensive NCCL campaign in both House of Parliament to get a Bill on Privacy. Other earlier campaigns have finally led to legislation—the 1959 Mental Health Act, the 1968 Caravan Sites Act and the Race Relations Act. The NCCL is not always so successful. It failed, for example, to affect the contents of the Dangerous Drugs Act or the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. But the pressure applied in these and other instances was in itself important and necessary.

**Informing the Public**

A major cause of injustice is ignorance: ignorance about the rights we have, the limitations of official power, our means of obtaining redress. The NCCL tries, with varying degrees of success, to combat this ignorance by giving the

(Continued overleaf)

people the facts. Its *Handbook of Citizens Rights*, soon to be expanded in scope, is a best-seller. Publications on problems such as the citizen's rights on arrest and the rights of mental health patients, are given away or sold, sometimes in their thousands. Promoting press, radio and television news stories about cases, and features on civil liberty issues, is yet another way in which the NCCL helps to inform the public so they will be aware of the dangers and in a position to stand up for themselves.

Since the formation of local NCCL groups in many cities, it has been possible to make more direct contact with the public, particularly with those in need. For the groups are now beginning to set up their own legal centres. These are usually open once a week and are manned by local lawyers and other specialists as well as by laymen. Not only do they give information; they are also able, unlike Citizens Advice Bureaux, to take up the cudgels on a complainant's behalf and to follow a case through until justice is seen to be done.

NCCL Groups are providing a valuable way of mobilising liberal public opinion and making civil liberties a reality to them. Groups take up cases, campaign on local issues, and are essential watchdogs for their communities. Their presence, at the very least, inhibits an excess of zeal by local authorities and officials.

### Ignorance the Enemy

The main enemy of civil liberties in Britain is not, as is sometimes supposed, the law. True, it is not perfect, but it does in theory protect the citizen and ensure some kind of civilised relationship between the powers-that-be and the community. The danger really lies in a combination of public ignorance, the apathy of liberal opinion and secret decision-making. This combination leads to the law being flouted and to central and local government officials and their agents riding roughshod over the individual. It enables financially powerful and illiberal pressure groups to get their way. It allows minority groups to be isolated and minority views to be stifled. It makes it easy for government to establish national data banks, fingerprint banks,

security dossiers and all the other paraphernalia of the nascent police state, without more than a whimper from the public.

It is thus the job of the NCCL to alert and inform the public about their rights and about the rights they are likely to lose by default. It is up to the NCCL also to try and tear down the sound-proof walls of secrecy that increasingly envelop the decision-makers and protect them from the victims of their own arbitrary actions.

Too often we in Britain look across to the United States and say with some smugness: it couldn't happen here. Yet it usually does. We now have the ghettos of black poverty, the fear of the police, the dissent on the campuses and the increased power of the Executive that emerged in the USA in the 1960s. In the 1970s who knows, we may have our very own Spiro Agnew, Judge Hoffman and Governor Reagan. When that time comes, we will need a strong and spirited defence. In the USA there is the American Civil Liberties Union, a force in 48 States, backed by millions of dollars, hundreds of lawyers and tens of thousands of members.

The only effective defence for civil liberties in Britain will be an equally powerful NCCL. A start has been made. More members are joining, more groups are being formed, more money is being donated. But there is a long way to go before it will be truly equal to the challenge that is already upon us. That is why it is the responsibility of liberal people in this country to join the NCCL, and to support it in ways that will make real the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we will so righteously praise next Thursday.

The alternative is to vacate the stage and hand over total power and authority to those who would create in Britain the kind of society prophesied and hoped for by the illiberals. It could happen here. The choice is still yours, but only just.

Peter Burns is promotion secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, 152 Camden High Street, London, NW1.

## PHILATELIC FUN

GEORGE RULF

Like our policemen, our Yuletide postage stamps are wonderful. According to the Post Office's official blurb, this year's three Winter Solstice stamps—beg pardon, it should, of course, be Xmas stamps—are all in a religious vein. However, it was not stated whether this vein was, perhaps, somewhat diseased and whether it should not really come under notifiable diseases. Anyhow, the information was that the motifs had been taken from the de Lisle Psalter of the Arundel Collection in the British Museum.

Cunningly suppressed was the rather astonishing fact that the depicted three scenes were already, at least, 2,000 years old *before* the New Testament was concocted, for they appeared already on the Temple walls at Luxor, Egypt, round about 1750 BC. There, one can see the so-called "Nativity" scenes, viz. the angel's announcement to the shepherds tending their flocks in the fields; the annunciation of the angel to the virgin; the adoration of the infant by the three Magi; and the nativity scene itself.

In other words, millennia BC, the Egyptian mythology used already the symbolism of the birth of a baby, much

in the same way as we use the figure of a youngster at the side of Old Father Time.

Unfortunately, the priestly falsifiers of the New Testament turned allegorical figures into historical ones, and thereby saddled the Western World with the white man's burden, namely: the impossible figure of a saviour who cannot save and a redeemer who does not redeem, despite ecclesiastical assurances to the contrary.

On the fourpenny stamp (which will be the last special stamp issued at such a cheap price), can be seen a robust angel, trailing a banner with the words "Gloria in Excelsis Deo"—"Glory to God in the Highest"—which must have frightened the poor sheep no end, for they can be seen jumping higher than any goalkeeper.

The fivepenny stamp shows the nativity scene with the recumbent goddess Isis (Mary) on a delivery-couch, with the newly-born baby Horus (Jesus) in a manger, whilst the god Osiris (Joseph) sits nearby with a troubled mien. In

(Continued on back page)

# JOHN FOSTER: ONE KIND OF FREETHINKER

ERIC GLASGOW

Although it was produced by a clergyman, I am sometimes quite surprised by the entries for unorthodox thinkers that appear in my 1906 edition of *The Nuttall Encyclopaedia*. In particular, that for John Foster (1770-1843), described there as "an English essayist", has attracted my further study. The chief source for research is still the combersome edition of his *Life and Correspondence* (J. E. Ryland, London, 1846, 2 Vols.). Yet, he remains highly significant, at least for the conditions of nonconformist theology in his period. He came from humble origins, in Halifax, Yorkshire, and from the start made life difficult for himself by displaying what he later called "an awkward but entire individuality" in all his dealings with the outside world. He became a voracious reader, especially in theology, as well as a keen student of the natural world; although the harsh economic circumstances of his family prevented him from receiving much formal schooling. When he was only 17, he joined a Baptist congregation at Hebden Bridge and was soon accepted for that ministry, studying for a time under the celebrated theologian, John Fawcett (1740-1817), and later, for a short time, at the Baptist College in Bristol, which he left in 1792, qualified as a minister.

## From Preaching to Publishing

For the next 25 years, he served a large variety of Baptist congregations—in Dublin, Chichester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Battersea, Bristol, Frome, and elsewhere—but, probably for reasons of personality and temperament, he was never a great success as a minister, and often left such churches smaller and weaker than when he had encountered them. So, whether as cause or effect, he devoted more and more of his time and thinking to writing. His first book of essays, in which the element of religion merely served to enliven and to activate the larger interests of literature, was published in 1805, when he was in the West Country. It was quite successful, with a second edition within four months, and a third in 1806. On the strength of that public support, Foster took seriously to literature, becoming a regular contributor to the *Eclectic Review*. This journal is now almost forgotten, but during the first half of the 19th century many articles of major importance in literary criticism were published in it.

The *Eclectic Review* became the chief vehicle for Foster's copious and eloquent writings, and over the years he contributed no fewer than 183 articles. Some of the best were re-published as a book in 1844, the year after his death. Not surprisingly, such a large and regular output made Foster's home a very bookish and literary place. We are told, in his *Life and Correspondence* (1846) that he had a tiny, cramped study, which was "crowded and loaded with papers and books". Despite such literary dedication, however, he did not cease to give lectures, usually in Bristol, until 1825.

## Moral Fervour

It was inevitable that his writings should betray the instincts and the ideas of the evangelical preacher. Even in the interpretation of ordinary literature, Foster brought to bear a moral fervour and a earnestness which may not go down very well nowadays. He began, it is true, as early as 1805, with some inherent suspicion of the notion of the "romantic" which was then just pervading the literature of his day. There is a very interesting reference to this in Ian Jack's *English Literature, 1815-1832* (*Oxford History*

*of English Literature*, 1963, pp 408-9). It is not unfair to say that, despite his growing liberation from the formal status and restrictions of any kind of church organisation, he continued to interpret life and literature in religious or what he took to be spiritual terms. "Churches", he wrote in a letter of 10 September, 1828, "are useless and mischievous institutions, and the sooner they are dissolved the better". But that was only in the hope—surely more suitable for the 19th than for the 20th century—that "religion might be set free as a grand spiritual and moral element" (*Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 20, 1889, p 59).

Nevertheless, if we can allow for the obvious limitations and suppositions of even a radical thinker during the first half of the 19th century, it is possible to discern much that is still useful and relevant in the strangely emancipated and progressive ideas and thinking of John Foster.

## Pioneer of State Education

There is some immediate and lasting relevance in Foster's very early and unheralded advocacy of some rudimentary system of national education, which he made in an essay *On the Evils of Popular Ignorance* (1820), largely on the basis of a lecture which he had given in 1818, on behalf of the British and Foreign Schools Society. The essay seems to have been widely read, for it quickly reached a second edition. So it is only fair to credit John Foster with some of the pioneering that was eventually to produce the Education Act, 1870, even though that decisive intervention of the British State, into the educational field, took a further 50 years to achieve after the publication of the modest introductory essay of 1820. It is that essay of 1820 which the circumspect, clerical editor of the 1906 edition of *The Nuttall Encyclopaedia* (p 255), regards as John Foster's "best-known work". Foster was also a rather dreary advocate of republicanism. He became noticeably less ardent in his republicanism as he grew older. So, in the scope of his social and political ideas—never far below the surface, even in his most apparently literary or religious expositions—John Foster must still be generally remembered as a neglected pioneer of the idea of a State system of education, rather than as either a corrosive critic of the "gaudy paraphernalia" of royalty, or a wholesale rejecter of virtually every kind of ecclesiastical organisation.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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## 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 St., 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.

## EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Salisbury Hotel, King's Road, Brighton, Sunday, 6 December, 5.30 p.m. Public meeting addressed by a speaker from the Howard League for Penal Reform.

Eastbourne Humanist Group, Central Library, Eastbourne, Friday, 11 December, 7 p.m. "Any Questions?" New Hotel, Grange Road, Eastbourne, Saturday, 19 December, 7 p.m. Winter Solstice Dinner. Tickets 26s each from David Purdon, 88 Broderick Road, Hampden Park, Eastbourne.

Guildford Humanist Group, Guildford House, Thursday, 10 December, 7.45 p.m. "The Place of Ceremony".

Humanist Holidays, Christmas House Party, Osborne Private Hotel, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight, 23 to 28 December. Details from Mrs Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 6 December, 6.30 p.m. Paul Biscoe: "A Problem of Conservation".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 6 December, 7.15 p.m. Martin Savitt: "Anti-Semitism in Britain Today".

Merseyside Humanist Group, Ethel Wormald College, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 2, Wednesday, 9 December, 7.30 p.m. Roy Murphy: "Anarchism".

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group, Adult Education Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, Friday, 11 December, 7.30 p.m. Ken Coates: "Democracy in Crisis".

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# NEWS

## CENSORSHIP

There was a 70 per cent increase in the banning of films in South Africa between 1968 and 1969. And Jannie Kruger, chairman of the censorship board, has threatened tougher action against periodicals which do not toe the line. He has indicated that powers not used by the Publications Control Board may be invoked. This would mean that instead of banning a single issue of a periodical (as it has been doing) the board could impose a permanent ban.

The warning also applied to theatrical and entertainment organisations. According to Kruger, "some producers have been hovering on the brink of what is passable, and they need to be told that a telegraphic order can be served on them for the instantaneous closing down of any show found by the board to be objectionable in terms of the Act."

Some opponents of apartheid had thought they saw a tendency to a gradual relaxation of censorship by the South African Government, but Kruger's new threat makes it clear that such hopes are hardly justified. Indeed, the statement by the chairman of the censorship board may be a milestone on the road to South Africa's complete cultural isolation.

## READING FOR RECRUITS

The Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers published a document last week recommending that candidates for the priesthood should read the works of Karl Marx and Mao Tse-tung. They say that Communism and atheism are becoming ever more "widespread, deep-rooted, aggressive", and that in future priests must be well prepared "to understand the reasons which seem to be pushing humanity towards an ever deeper atheism". According to the Secretariat, atheism and secularism are causing ferment and doubt among all humanity, "not excluding that part which is considered most specifically and traditionally Christian and believing".

It is encouraging to know that the Vatican's recruiting officers are so worried about the spread of atheism and secularism. They aren't too squeamish to mention atheism and secularism, and it is a pity that some Humanists have developed such a dislike for these words that they seem to spend a lot of time thinking up vague and woolly phrases. It is not just "old-fashioned, 19th century rationalists" who claim that words like atheism, secularism and freethought, are understandable to friend and enemy alike.

## LECTURE

It was announced last week that a new public lecture is to be established at the University of East Anglia. The subject of the lecture, which will be given every two years, will be some aspect of the life or times of Thomas Paine, the 18th century radical and deist who was born in East Anglia.

The lecturers will be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, a representative of the University's School of English and American Studies, and a representative of the Thomas Paine Society. Provision has been made for the possible publication of the lectures.

The new lecture has been established through the generosity of Jesse Collins, a member of the Thomas Paine Society and generous supporter of the National Secular Society.

# AND NOTES

## NO SOLUTION

Everyone but the most insensitive dimwits was glad that the attempt on the Pope's life was foiled. The would-be assassin is reported to have said: "I want to eliminate the Pope . . . because he is the symbol of superstition and hypocrisy". The Pope is not *the* symbol but *a* symbol of superstition and hypocrisy, and the net result of his violent removal from this vale of tears would have been a new Pope and an upsurge of sympathy for the Roman Catholic Church.

There have been many assassinations during the last decades and these are to be deplored, whether the victim was a president of the United States, an unknown political prisoner or a student demonstrator. And the killing of Pope Paul would have been deplorable, even though he is the head of an organisation which has a rightful place in the rogues' gallery of torturers and killers.

## NSS CONTRIBUTION TO EGY

It is very likely that the specific campaign pioneered and conducted by freethinkers which has had the greatest impact on social life in this country, was that to popularise family planning. So it is appropriate that the National Secular Society's contribution to European Conservation Year will be a public meeting at which speakers will put the case for a free and comprehensive family planning service for Britain. This takes place at Conway Hall, London, next Tuesday evening.

The speakers will be Caspar Brook, director of the Family Planning Association; Richard Crossman, MP, editor of the *New Statesman* and Health Minister in the last Government; Sir David Renton, MP, president of the Conservation Society; Mrs Renée Short, MP. David Tribe, president of the NSS, will be in the chair.

This meeting merits the support of *Freethinker* readers, and everyone interested in the quality of life in Britain.

### European Conservation Year, 1970

## PUBLIC MEETING: A FREE AND COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY PLANNING SERVICE FOR BRITAIN

### Speakers:

**CASPAR BROOK**

(Director: Family Planning Association)

**RICHARD CROSSMAN, MP**

(Editor: *New Statesman*)

**Sir DAVID RENTON, MP**

(President, the Conservation Society)

**RENEE SHORT, MP**

**Chairman: DAVID TRIBE**

(President: National Secular Society)

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

Tuesday, 8 December, 7 p.m.

Organised by the

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

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## BOOKS

**THE BARRELL OF A GUN: POLITICAL POWER IN AFRICA AND THE COUP D'ETAT**

by Ruth First. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 84s.

What Mark Twain said of the Jews is true of Africans—they have their full share of human nature. This fact has surprised those who held great expectations of what the new black states would achieve in the 1960s. Disillusionment has now set in, as this book reveals in the brilliant light it sheds on the shortcomings of the African elite in general and especially of the mindless army rulers posing as statesmen.

A military academy like Sandhurst does not provide the best training for men who abruptly take control of politics, let alone economics. They act against a government, usually with only a small force at their command, because they want to see their country run more efficiently than corrupt politicians have run it. This process of take-over has occurred in many of the African states since they attained their political independence in the last decade. Miss First examines the course of events—in rather excessive detail—in Nigeria, Ghana, and the Sudan, and she also looks briefly at what happened in Algeria and Egypt. The pattern is clear enough; what we need to understand is why events repeatedly take this direction.

In the chapters devoted to analysis the author writes with lucidity and penetration. The fact of the matter is this: in tropical Africa political power was not transferred to a middle class which had already achieved economic power. The familiar process whereby politics reflects the realities of economic life is therefore absent. Without anything like a hard or long struggle, the black bourgeoisie took over the government. Britain and France decided to relinquish it in their own interests, realising that investment could continue profitably without direct political control.

Accordingly, the African countries were faced with the necessity to accumulate capital by one means or another. At first they favoured the idea of "African socialism", dependent on neither western capitalism nor eastern communism. Only a few years were enough to show that such non-alignment, admirable in theory, led nowhere in practice. It became perfectly clear, however, that the state itself as the main source of domestic capital, was bound to play the decisive role in economic activity. "The state", says Ruth First, "is the principal employer of labour, the chief dispenser of jobs, benefits, patronage, contracts, foreign exchange, and licence to trade. Manipulation of the offices and resources of the state by the power elite proved the shortest cut to wealth. It was political power that made possible the creation of economic power, not the other way about".

Corruption is a subject that has received much less study than it requires. It is, of course, not a disease that afflicts only the poor countries. Indeed, it is arguable that the rich countries grew rich, at least in part, through a process of empire-building (not to mention slave trading) that involved corruption on a collective or national scale which makes the individual grafter of these days look petty in his ambition.

Be that as it may, the question arises whether the African middle class, now enjoying all the perquisites of office with a minimum display of social conscience, are due to

## FREETHINKER

continue playing their political games for ever and a day. It would hardly be fair to Ruth First to reproach her for not dealing, in a book already too long, with this question. It deserves another book and she indicates in passing that she knows where to find the answers. If the power elite are to be removed from their privileged position—which they hold with the open or tacit approval of British, French and American investors—a revolutionary force strong enough to do the job must emerge. Such a force could conceivably come from the peasants who form 85 per cent of the population in the new states. They would probably need the partnership, if not the leadership, of an urban group which may be described as the *lumpenproletariat*. These are the increasing numbers of jobless and aimless people in and around every African city. Because Africa, except in the far south, has not yet had its own industrial revolution, no economy is able to provide the jobs or offer the opportunities demanded by the new generation of the half-educated and the unwanted. Nor will it do so while foreign companies remain in occupation of the commanding heights. Meanwhile, the total population of all these countries goes on rising at a rate faster than it does in Europe or even in Asia. So the cities are swollen with men hopelessly searching for non-existent jobs and living in shanty towns beyond the control of the authorities.

A possible link between this army of the unemployed and the peasants on the land is the habit, almost amounting to a tradition, of migrant labour. Steadily, if slowly, younger people in town and country begin to realise that their new rulers in the capital, succeeding one another, lack the policies as well as the determination to change the society from its foundations. Can and will an alliance be formed by the victims of this miserable situation? Even the modern marxists have not yet explored this possibility, perhaps because it was not foreseen by Marx.

Ruth First herself ranks as a modern marxist who is alert to the challenge of these times. She has written an illuminating book. It might stimulate some Africans while it wounds others by its frank realism. Her own concern for Africa is beyond praise; and "faithful are the wounds of a friend".

JOHN GILD

**MORALS AND MEDICINE**

BBC Publications, 25s.

This book is the printed record of a series of lectures given late in 1968 at the Department of Extramural Studies, Liverpool University, and broadcast on the BBC Third Programme. It covers a variety of controversial subjects, such as human experimentation, abortion, contraception and the problem of the use of finite medical resources and keeping people alive.

The contrast between those who seek to construct all their moral thinking along hazy and unreliable beliefs in the supernatural and those who believe in observational reality comes out clearly in different chapters. Professor Henry Miller begins with the well known Humanist affirmation of Sir Peter Medawar that the "art of the soluble" is preferable to fruitless speculation about the unknowable. Dr Cedric Carter and Professor Bernard Williams take the ever increasing quantity of genetic knowledge and build on it a constructive framework of moral responsibility. Carter

# REVIEWS

reviews with great wisdom the interaction of family planning and genetics, "if the average family size should be only a little over two children per parental couples, the genetic responsibilities of parents are such that this average should be made up of a considerable variety of family sizes with some parents planning considerably larger families than two and some parents planning only one child or occasionally deciding to have no child of their own at all".

In contrast, Professor Jeffcoate writing on abortion reaches a series of conclusions which are both nonsensical and cruel. Having wrongly condemned the 1967 Abortion Act as "beyond rational interpretation" and then emphasised his own conservatism of professional attitude, Professor Jeffcoate concludes, "if there were an acceptable method of inducing abortion which they themselves [i.e., women] could employ I can see no reason why they should not be free to do so, provided they appreciated the risks. There may come a time when an efficient oral abortifacient is discovered. A woman might then choose to take this, just as she can now elect to take oral contraceptives or to smoke cigarettes despite any hazards involved. Meanwhile, however, abortion necessitates an operation, carried out by a skilled team, consisting of a surgeon, an anaesthetist and nurses. These are all motivated by a strong ethical code and are dedicated to protect life and health. Only they can form a detached professional opinion as to what is in the best interest of the patient". Fortunately, this Alice in Wonderland conclusion that medical ethics are there to defend the doctor and have no relevance to what the patient does is not shared by all doctors. There are a variety of reasons which could have been set out within a rational scheme of argument leading to the conclusion that abortion might be made available on request. There are also reasonable arguments for maintaining that the community does have a justifiable interest in the embryo or foetus. Only Professor Jeffcoate seems to have adopted the novel ethical approach that the means of performing the abortion determines its moral status. It is, of course, of great interest and significance that the President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists made such a statement within a year of an effective abortifacient which can be self-administered—namely Prostaglandins—and no doubt those who share his "strong ethical code" will find his guidance in this field of great value in the future.

The Humanist, who is not always given to judging men by their deeds, will notice the contrast between the harshness of Professor Jeffcoate's judgement of human frailty—"so feckless girls and women with unwanted pregnancies have to be admitted as a matter of emergency taking precedence over women anxiously waiting to have their prolapse, or other disability cured. Is it right that the promiscuous girl, who has not troubled to practise contraception, should have priority over the decent married woman", with the compassion of Carter's non-religiously motivated approach to the problem of criminal behaviour—"punishment for criminal behaviour then must, I think, be regarded as cruelty unless it has therapeutic value in inducing some desirable behaviour patterns".

The volume also includes a powerful review of the need for contraception, by Harold Francis, and a straightforward and useful account of human experimentation, by Lord Platt.

MALCOLM POTTS

# CINEMA

## GETTING STRAIGHT

Cinecenta, Leicester Square, London.

This is a hard hitting, hilarious, high velocity hurricane of a film. It paints the American student campus larger than life, but at the same time with eye-opening realism. It inserts an eminently plausible and highly sympathetic character loosely into the events that took place in the summer of 1968 at Berkeley university in California.

Harry Bailey (Elliott Gould) is typical of the more aware students who abound in both American and British universities. His only real peculiarity is a highly extrovert personality, which make his temper similar to that of a pressure cooker. In his early days he was a serious student rebel. We join him when he's reached middle age (25) and is trying to pass his master's exam which will qualify him as a teacher. This, his severe lack of money, his old slapstick car, his residential and sex life problems, and his beautiful girl friend (Candice Bergen), are set against the background of student protest, which becomes increasingly violent and culminates in a mind-arresting orgy of violence on the part of police and students alike.

When I say Harry's personal situation is set against the larger campus, or society's situation, I don't mean simply that the two things appear in the same film and can thus be seen to be interrelated. For a lot of the time the two things happen, and are seen together, thus emphasising the very real parallel between student unrest and the position of the individual student. The film is therefore saying that student revolt is not caused by a minority who start the ball rolling out of their individual perversity, is not a plot, red or otherwise, but is a mirror of the frustrations felt by all the individuals who collectively make up the protest or revolt. This comes through best when we see Harry at his English Literature oral, the final obstacle in his face to become a school-teacher. Many of the shots of this, in itself brilliant, scene are taken through the barbed wire outside the window—the barbed wire which encircles the college buildings and outside of which the students are having a pitched battle with the police.

The brilliant spectacle and perceptive thinking of the whole film are perhaps enshrined in this one scene. Harry is assailed at his ordeal by a man who is homosexual and who is trying to get himself a kick by getting Harry to admit that F. Scott Fitzgerald was a homosexual. Harry is stunned by the suggestion and is virtually speechless for a full minute. He then erupts, screams: "She'll be mighty surprised, Zelda Fitzgerald'll be mighty surprised to hear that". Through the bloody students and baton-swinging police, through the barbed wire, through the window, we see him leap on the table, screaming and throwing things about as the dozen members of the academic board look for cover. Harry and the student body vent their rage together.

In this way the twin frustrations of individuals and society are superimposed, their cause and effect linkage is shown visually. Elliott Gould, a man whom we know to be representative of the new genre of socially concerned actors, plays the part with artistry. The writing is on the wall in capitals eight feet high for the antique unconcerned stars, such as John Wayne, Bob Hope and Ronald Reagan. Actors like Gould and directors like Richard Bush, who have here made a memorably effective piece of entertainment, must surely perpetuate the current upward trend of the popular screen's offerings.

DAVID REYNOLDS

# IS "FAITH" WORTH DYING FOR?

NIGEL SINNOTT

There has been some embarrassment, especially in "Ecumenical" sections of the Protestant churches, over the Pope's recent canonisation of the "Forty Martyrs"—English and Welsh priests and laity who suffered slow and obscene deaths rather than accept the Protestant religion in the days of "Good" Queen Bess.

I can well imagine that these proceedings have embarrassed those who were brought up on the traditional twaddle of the "civilising influence of Christianity", but I think it very healthy that if society is to retain such toleration and civilised standards as it has yet acquired, people should from time to time be reminded of what was done in the "good old days", from Mary Tudor's burning of Protestants to the activities of the Nazis.

I think we should honour the Forty Martyrs, and the many others who paid such a price to enable society to retain its "Faith and morals". I hope we will also judge the value to mankind of such "faith" by the ghastly products which it has engendered: "As long as men believe in absurdities, they will commit atrocities" (Voltaire).

## Other Martyrs

The recent canonisations in Rome have brought forth

some considerable interest in the Press and on television in the lives of the Catholic martyrs and of the highly ingenious hideaways that were constructed for priests in Catholic houses. As a child I had the interesting experience of having grandparents who lived in a 14th century house at Woodstock, Oxfordshire, which still had an old priest's hiding hole, though much of it was bricked up. My grandfather, who was the local chemist, used the rest of the reputed hiding hole for the storage of boxes of elastoplast, cotton-wool, cosmetics and contraceptives, though despite the presence of the last-named, the house was not haunted by any outraged ghost!

In paying homage to those men and women of the past who died rather than turn from the truth as they saw it, I hope we will not forget some of our own historic martyrs, such as Giordano Bruno (burned alive, 1600), Adam Duff O'Toole (burned alive, 1327), and a more recent one, Francisco Ferrer (shot, 1909). It is sobering to remember that, whilst most readers of this journal are free, there are thousands of people in both East and West rotting away in jails for only their opinions, and many of them under the threat of "liquidation" at any time. The truth will embarrass our own "Ecumenists"—it should sicken them! As long as men believe in absurdities . . .

## LETTERS

### Abortion

Whilst not wishing to take up more space discussing "when is a human being not a human being" with Mr Mears, there is one point in his letter on which I must comment.

His earlier letter (which I have in front of me) did *not* ask "what this Association has to say for itself" or for any of its literature which would have reflected its viewpoint. It requested a number of detailed, statistical facts such as "the estimated number of illegal abortions performed before and after the Act?", "the number and parties of MPs voting for and against David Steel's Bill" and the "date of formation of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, its present officers and address?"

Incidentally, I have never seen the article on the Abortion Act for which Mr Mears said he needed this information!

DIANE MUNDAY, *General Secretary,*  
Abortion Law Reform Association.

*This correspondence is now closed.—Editor.*

### Brainwashing at Public Expense

Merle Tolfree is mistaken when she suggests that my remarks were directed mainly against her article. I wrote my letter because I am becoming concerned about the spread of yet another form of brainwashing at public expense and with the support of public authority. The Muslim demands for religious instruction in school are established realities in certain areas, and are likely to expand in others. The fact that Christianity has not supported female emancipation does not invalidate my argument that it would be deplorable to see the even more repressive and degrading Muslim view of women taught in our schools.

I am quite aware that Merle Tolfree would be opposed to any form of religious observance in schools. But another Humanist view has been expressed that these Muslim demands would merely involve "minor adjustments" and "some inconvenience" to employers and educational authorities, and I maintain that there is a danger of Humanists applying different standards to the demands of immigrants than to those of other groups.

We do not view Roman Catholic demands for RI any more sympathetically because they have "problems of community living" in areas such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Belfast. I do not feel we should be expected to show any more sympathy to Muslim demands for RI because they too have such problems.

DOROTHY ROBERTS.

(Continued from page 386)

the background can be seen the heads of an ox and an ass. These two animals belong to the Egyptian mythos as Yorkshire pudding belongs to roast beef. The ass's head was the symbol of the Messiah—not an irreverent joke in bad taste, but sober fact, for Anup was the ass-headed god of the Egyptians. That is why the Gospel Jesus was portrayed as riding on an ass—and, according to one version, even astride an ass and her foal, a very clever circus act which must have impressed the populace immensely!

On the tomb of Rameses VI can be seen the Sungod riding into full glory on the back of the dark moon. This was turned into a phantom Messiah's "triumphal entry into Jerusalem" (Aarw-Salem or Fields of Peace), which scenario should have come *after* his death.

The masculine bull (or ox) symbolised creation and was part of the Egyptian religion and greatly venerated. The Israelites must have liked it too and the so-called "golden calf" aroused the great anger of Moses. Actually, it was a brass figure of Taurus, the Bull, the well-known sign of the zodiac, which dominated that particular era. This was followed by the age of Aries, the lamb which played such a great part in early Christian symbolism, so much so, that the lamb was equated to an imaginary "saviour" and often invoked in hymns and prayers.

By far the best stamp is the 1s 6d one, portraying a sitting Mary, showing a rather too prominent spot of rouge on her cheek. But the funniest thing is the way she is holding the holy infant who, for all the world, looks like a ventriloquist's dummy! The three Kings, who are seen offering presents to the newly born baby, were already a feature of Egyptian mythology thousands of years before the alleged event in the gospels. However, pietistic philatelists will be pleased to have another set of yuletide stamps, suitably adorned with the Queen's head in gilt which seems to say: "We are not amused!"