

## RELIGIOUS TELEVISION TO BE CUT ON SUNDAY?

### VIEWERS SWITCH OFF DURING "NO CHOICE" HOUR

Report are circulating that pressure to reduce religious television programmes on Sunday cannot be ignored much longer. Some inside observers believe it may even threaten the existence of such programmes. It has been suggested that the BBC and ITV should agree on a policy which would, in effect, mean a drastic reduction of the 70 minutes transmission time the churches now have on Sunday evening. The suggestion comes from a joint working party set up by the Independent Television Authority and the Central Religious Advisory Committee. The ITA supports the idea, but the BBC will not announce its views until March. Some clergymen and others engaged in religious broadcasting believe that programmes would be more effective if they took their place with other programmes at ordinary viewing times. But majority opinion in both Roman Catholic and Anglican broadcasting circles is opposed to any radical change in arrangements which have existed for the last 15 years. Those who oppose the change regard the proposal either as a hostile act against religious television, or a plot by the independent television companies to gather in more revenue by putting out non-religious programmes between 6.15 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. on Sunday evening.

#### "Clinging Folds of Secularism"

In a letter published in *The Times* on Monday the Bishop of Coventry said: "It is sad that at this precise moment, when it appears likely that people are beginning to shake off the clinging folds of secularism and to question the philosophy of permissiveness, the Independent Television Authority should be proposing to shorten the amount of time given to religious programmes on Sunday evenings". The bishop's evidence seems to be based on reports from different parts of the country "that the numbers of people attending carol services and Midnight Communion during the past Christmas season have increased significantly".

It is known (and admitted in an article in the *ITV 1971 Handbook*) that large numbers of viewers switch off when the religious programmes commence. Many people who are only vaguely committed to Christianity object to it being brought into their homes in this way. Others are annoyed by the lack of choice of viewing for an hour. The more dedicated Christians are not content with programmes which are often far from stimulating, and feel, with some justification, that such offerings as *Stars on Sunday* are unlikely to strengthen the faith of believers or lead sinners to the path of righteousness.

#### Recommendations Ignored

Christianity has always enjoyed a privileged position within the hallowed walls of Broadcasting House and the television studios. True, there have been anxious moments. The 1949 Beveridge Report recommended a "Hyde Park of the air", and the 1962 Pilkington Report even declared that non-religious organisations should be allowed their fair share of time in controversial broadcasting outside the periods set aside for religious broadcastings.

Although a BBC spokesman said the recommendations which affected the Corporation would be carried out as soon as possible, little has happened to disturb the peace of mind of those who labour in the Lord's vineyard of cables, arc lights, microphones, and cameras. They carry on as though little has changed since that blessed day "In the year of our Lord 1931 and in the Directorship of Sir John Reith the first Governors dedicated to Almighty God this temple of the arts and muses", i.e. Broadcasting House; and blissfully (or bloody-mindedly) ignore the fact that committed Christians now constitute only a sizeable minority of the population.

Those who defend the present situation often imply that Christianity is beneficial to the population, and that mumbling of prayers, hymn-singing and sermonising are uplifting to all but the most obstinate and depraved. It is almost unkind to remind them that in modern Britain religion depends on organisation, finance and propaganda for its continued existence.

#### No Real Reduction

Although church leaders occasionally laud the virtues of meekness, humility and even poverty, the churches represent powerful political and economic interests. The annual income of the Church of England runs into millions of pounds, and the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church is incalculable. Their teachings have caused great unhappiness and division in society. Reforms have usually been opposed until the eleventh hour by the church and their "front" organisations.

Even if the mooted changes in religious broadcasting are carried out it is unlikely that any real reduction in religious broadcasting time will result. And it will be a long time before secularists and freethinkers get anything like a fair share of broadcasting time.



## IRELAND: AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW

Harold Jackson became the *Guardian's* roving reporter in 1966 and covered the Middle East war, the Vietnam war and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Nearer home, he went to Londonderry when rioting broke out in 1968, and has returned to Northern Ireland many times since then. So he is well qualified to write *The Two Irelands: A Dual Study of Inter-group Tensions* which has been published by the Minority Rights Group (36 Craven Street, London, WC2) at 6s.

He says that, religion is far less of a factor in the often violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland than are straightforward historical, territorial, economic and psychological influences. What makes the conflict so troublesome, however, is a characteristic which it shares with some of the world's most intractable situations—the problem of the double minority. The report discusses and explains the various forms of discrimination encountered by the Catholic community in Northern Ireland and the Protestant community in the Republic of Ireland, and suggests that the Irish, both north and south of the border, are not so much the purveyors of religious prejudice as the prisoners of their own turbulent history.

### Siege Mentality

Within their own enclave the Protestants of Northern Ireland, one million strong, outnumber their Catholic compatriots by two to one. But in the wider context of Ireland they themselves are easily outnumbered three to one. The inevitable result, says Mr Jackson, has been the advent of a ruling establishment with the reins of power firmly in its hands but acting under the stresses of a besieged minority. "Fifty years of failing to get any real say in the government of the province—and with little prospect of a change in the situation—have left the Catholics with a burning sense of grievance, reinforced by both institutionalised and informal discrimination. A man's first name—Sean, Liam, Eugene or whatever—is usually enough to give away his religion and nothing will convince him that a subsequent failure to get a job or a home was not governed by that fact."

The Protestants, for their part, fear absorption into what they regard as a reactionary theocratic state (Eire), economic decline if they were to be so taken over and the swamping of the urban values and traditions of the industrialised north by the populous, peasant-orientated south. And so, says Mr Jackson, virtually everyone in Northern Ireland feels himself under threat and reacts accordingly. There is no inclination for reason or compromise simply because the most urgent need is to combat a threat which may seem small or non-existent to outsiders but looms menacingly over those locked into the situation.

Several points illustrate the importance of the economic element in the conflict—the relative harmony that prevails in the well-to-do middle class areas, the sharp differences in unemployment rates between predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant areas and the nature of political appeals by such militant leaders as Bernadette Devlin and the Rev Ian Paisley. Mr Jackson points out that there are curious similarities in their avowed dedication to the oppressed working classes and their radical opposition to

the established regime. Miss Devlin's brand of revolutionary socialism is anathema to a large part of the Catholic working class who vote for her, as she herself admits. Her charisma in the sectarian politics of the province is what really count.

Similarly, to see Paisley at work is to realise how simplistic is the view that the quarrel is religious. His speeches are spattered with references to the Reformation and with attacks on the Roman Catholic Church, but these are merely the tribal shorthand for what he sees as the economic threat posed by the Catholics in the competition they offer for jobs, homes and social benefits.

### Protestants in the South

Doctrinal differences never enter the argument; what really repels each side is the false and exaggerated stereotype it cherishes in its imagination of the other. This is the fodder and fuel of intense group loyalties and group antagonisms for which there are no easy cures in sight although, says Mr Jackson, there are some signs of cautious moves being made towards intercommunal cooperation which should be encouraged wherever possible.

In many ways the situation of the Protestants in the Republic of Ireland is the reverse of that facing the minority in the North where, though there are no evidently discriminatory measures written into the law, the practice of the community as a whole puts the Catholics at a clear disadvantage. In the Republic the potential for legal discrimination is much greater but the affluence and social status of the Protestant minority tempers the effects of the restrictions. The very small size of this minority is itself an ameliorative factor since it is no threat to the Catholic establishment. The main disabilities it suffers are to be found in the spheres of education and inter-marriage.

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## ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

F. H. SNOW

Communings with God are advanced by Christians as evidence of his reality. Such communings, or God's communications to them, result from prayer to him for forgiveness of sin, and help and instruction in the way of salvation, it is said. Repentance for trespasses is the essential qualification for hearing the divine voice. God's grace has to be yearned for, or it will not be bestowed. The soul's aural mechanism has to be self-conditioned for reception of his messages.

This entails knowledge about God, and, by that fact, excludes those millions without knowledge of him. We have never heard of a case in which a person has received communications from God without previous education about him. Nobody has a sensitivity to the voice from the sky, unprecedented by doctrinal acquaintance with it. The power of suggestion must therefore be considered as inspirational of that experience of God which Christians claim.

It is affirmed that direct communication with the Deity is the function of a special sense. If so, those possessing that sense should be permanently sensitive to God's voice, and not subject to vacillations or disabilities. And surely the divine donor of that sense would see the justice and advantage of putting those who have no knowledge of him, or are unbelievers, on his priority list, if desirous of the homage and salvation of all?

If God can be directly sensed, those equipped with the capacity to sense him ought also to have the capacity to give their fellow men hitherto unknown information about him and his purposes. Those who claim the privilege of communion with God, quite often make contradictory statements as to his will. Mundane agents interfere with the functioning of that special sense. A knock on the head or an intake of poisonous substance is very effective in removing the fancies of privileged mystics.

### Lose Contact

Senility is frequently responsible for loss of the function of communication with God and reception of his word. The present writer's very devout father, in old age, no longer enjoyed the faculty of hearing his Lord's voice, though hardly changed otherwise, and passed his last few years comfortably unconscious of loss of that faculty, and indeed of any knowledge of, or interest in, the God with whom he had communed most of his lifetime. Cerebral ill-health in the form of insanity, also has power to cut the pietist's cord of communication with the Almighty. A saintly aunt of mine, who held cottage praise and prayer meetings, became obsessed with the notion that she was the long-departed Queen Anne, who completely ousted God from her mind. He made no attempt to save the poor soul from permanent residence in a mental hospital, or, as it was termed in her day, lunatic asylum, and she remembered no more the conversation with which he had favoured her.

Atheists who were formerly religious lose their supposed sensitivity to the divine voice. Had that voice been factual, they would not have become atheists, as God's spiritual wavelength would have precluded the possibility of doubt of his reality. A person who develops blindness is unable to deny evidence of the world he has lost sight of. He does not assert that what he observed in seeing days was only illusion. The spiritually audible, were God responsible for

that condition, would retain audibility of him, by any canon of reasoning.

It would seem, then, that communings with the Almighty are dependent on the imaginative capacity of the human communicant. Ancient seers were especially equipped in this regard, though their spiritual sight was limited by their terrestrial knowledge. The glimpses they were vouchsafed of their Lord's residence showed it to be furnished on earthly lines. Gold and silver were heaven's principal garnishings, like those of worldly palaces; the precious stones that embellished its foundations all had earthly names. God sat upon a throne, like human kings, his angels wore crowns and had harps and trumpets; heaven had walls and gates. The whole set-up suggested purely human conception.

### Nothing New

What new information has emerged from the communings of God with his servants? None of the many gaps and inconsistencies in the biblical story have been explained by the divine speaker. The great difference between his ancient character of wargod and inciter to massacre and hideous cruelties, and his present loving and merciful character, are never satisfactorily explained by those in his confidence, and to whom he has spoken with evidently vast reservations. Nor have the talks between Lord and serf been informative as to his non-interventions between man and the frequent disasters which, in his sovereign power, he made a feature of human existence; nor as to his discontinuance of miracles of any kind.

The interviews of the most devout with the Omnipotent and Omniscient, have been seemingly rewarded with little more than blissful assurances of his love and compassion, primarily for their recipient, and secondarily for the rest of mankind, in this life and the one to come. In short, they have amounted to a projection of the human communer's concern for his spiritual welfare, and, incidentally, for that of others, into the mind of God—that is, into his own mystical submind, where it takes on the guise of a divinely-bestowed grace at such times as material preoccupations and soul-flatness permit, and rewards its possessor with glorious uplifts.

Though lacking the ecstatic elevations of the "unco' guid", rationalists, freethinkers, humanists are well satisfied with their secular philosophy, derived from regard for objective truth, and should redouble their efforts to destroy the fiction that "religious experience" is evidence of the reality of God, whose fanatical "communicants" have been responsible for the majority of the bloody wars and persecutions of the past, and are primarily guilty of inspiring the religious and racial oppression which still vex our world.

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## FREETHINKER

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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

Humanist Holidays. Easter Holiday at the Belgravia Hotel, Bournemouth. Details from Mrs M. Mephum, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 642-8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 24 January, 6.30 p.m. C. B. Holliday: "A Visit to Sochi, Tbilisi and Soviet Armenia" (Illustrated).

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 24 January, 11 a.m. Tony Buzan: "Intelligence v. Wisdom". Tuesday, 26 January, 7 p.m. David Main: "Democracy in Schools".

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### SOCIAL EVENING

at the OPERA TAVERN

23 Catherine Street, London, WC2

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SATURDAY, 30 JANUARY, 1971, 8 p.m.

Cabaret:

ANDREW MASSEY and Company

DAVID TRIBE

DEREK WILKES

ERIC WILLOUGHBY

Compere: MARTIN PAGE

NSS members, *Freethinker* readers and friends invited

ADMISSION FREE

# NEWS

## MRA MANIFESTO

Following the spectacle of the Bishop of Blackburn and the Chief Constable of Lancashire leading thousands of men through the streets in protest against "lowering of moral standards and that sort of thing", Moral Rearmament jumped on the puritan bandwagon—or caught up with it after a spell in the wilderness. The *Church Times* and other Christian journals obligingly gave wide coverage to the Buchmanite manifesto on "the danger of moral anarchy". The sponsors claim it has been signed by over a thousand civic leaders including past or present mayors of Coventry, Cardiff, Liverpool, Nottingham and Stoke-on-Trent.

There is the usual insipid introductory remarks about the world facing a crisis, followed by an outline of the MRA solution to Britain's problems. It is hardly necessary to record that the moral rearmerers claim "we need God as the directing force at the heart of our society and our politics, our schools and our factories".

The Communists are no longer the chief threat to England, home and beauty. But the manifesto refers to "those in this land who, in the name of culture and freedom, seem determined to use the mass media to destroy Christian faith and morals and to foist self-indulgence on the nation".

Then comes a puff for the MRA shows at London's Westminster Theatre, and the claim that evidence of their influence is impressive. Probably more renegade shop stewards have passed through the doors of the Westminster Theatre than any other building in the country. But it is nonsense to claim that their theatre is strengthening Britain's moral fibre. However, a clue to the real purpose of this manifesto may be found in the sentences: "We want to see them (Westminster Theatre plays) used fully in the life of our communities . . . We urge that the Westminster Theatre should have the full support of official bodies and that its plays and films be produced on radio and television".

The likelihood of bodies like the Arts Council handing out subsidies to this propagandist outfit seems remote. But it may be that in the next year attempts will be made behind the scenes to obtain subsidies—perhaps hidden—from local authorities, by way of gifts, free use of municipal buildings, etc.

After the manifesto had been published, it was announced that the sponsors were apologising to Mrs Edmund Gibbs, Vice-Chairman of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, for wrongly including her name as one of the signatories.

## NSS ADOPTION STATEMENT GOES TO HOME OFFICE

The National Secular Society, which welcomed the preliminary report of the Home Office Departmental Committee on adoption, has submitted further evidence. The text of the new NSS statements is given below.

"We see a value in adoption by grandparents when the natural mother is very young. This should never be a formality, but when it takes place should mark a recognition that should she ultimately marry she will not be taking



# AND NOTES

# PUBLICATIONS

the child with her, and that she is free to continue her education, take up a career, and chose a husband, unrestricted by any responsibility for the child. It is important to decide while the child is still a baby whom it should belong with if the mother marries, perhaps in five years' time. Such adopted children should, like any other, be told of their origin.

"While we agree that marriage between adoptive brothers and sisters is likely to be rare, we see no reason for restricting the freedom of individuals to marry whom they please, when there is no genetic relationship to endanger their children. (The existing legal restriction on marriage between an adopted person and the adopter should, however, stand.)

We believe that specific questions regarding religious belief should not be asked of prospective adopters, but that social questions which may be coloured by religious opinions (e.g. blood transfusions) can be asked."

## WLM DEMONSTRATION

It is announced that the Women's Liberation Movement is organising its first major demonstration in this country. This will take place in London on 6 March, and there may be a march in a northern city on the same day. The main demands of the demonstrators will be equal pay, free abortion and contraception on demand, equal educational opportunities, and adequate day care and nursery education.

The WLM is already firmly established in the United States, but it is less than a year since the National Women's Co-ordinating Committee was formed in Britain. The members are believed to be mainly middle class. There is an office in central London, but there are no leaders and decisions are made by members in local groups.

## STRESS OF PRIESTHOOD

It has long been suspected that a large number of Roman Catholic priests in the United States leave the ministry every year, and many remain only because they cannot cope with problems of the outside world. The results of studies made by a sociologist at Notre Dame University, New York, reveal that no less than 25 per cent are considering leaving the priesthood because of severe emotional stress. The main stresses from which priests suffer are loneliness, inadequate leadership, and conflicts with superiors.

A comparative study among Protestant clergyman shows that only 12 per cent consider leaving the ministry.

## RECEPTION

Michael Christie of the Africa Bureau and Margaret Roberts, the well known writer on African affairs, attended a reception at the headquarters of the National Secular Society last week. The NSS recently took a broadly based delegation to the Foreign Office to protest against the proposed sale of arms to South Africa.

TITLE	AUTHOR	Price	Post
Humanist Anthology	Margaret Knight	10/6	1/6
Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux	Eddie and Win Roux	45/0	2/0
Ri and Surveys	Maurice Hill	1/0	4d
Religion and Ethics in Schools	David Tribe	1/6	4d
Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	2/6	4d
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	2/6	4d
The Cost of Church Schools	David Tribe	4/0	6d
A History of Sex	G. L. Simons	9/0	1/0
Humanism, Christianity and Sex	David Tribe	6d	4d
103: History of a House	Elizabeth Collins	1/0	4d
Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	2/0	4d
The Necessity of Atheism	Percy Bysshe Shelley	1/6	4d
The Secular Responsibility	Marghanita Laski	2/0	4d
The Nun Who Lived Again	Phyllis Graham	6d	4d
An Analysis of Christian Origins	George Ory	2/6	4d
New Thinking on War and Peace	A. C. Thompson	1/0	4d
A Humanist Glossary	Robin Odell and Tom Barfield	3/6	6d
The Vatican Versus Mankind	Adrian Pigott	4/0	1/4
Evolution of the Papacy	F. A. Ridley	1/0	4d
Lift up Your Heads	William Kent	5/0	1/0
James Maxton and British Socialism	V. S. Anand and F. A. Ridley	4/0	6d
The Bible Handbook	G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball	7/6	1/2
What Humanism is About	Kit Mouat	10/6	1/6
The Humanist Revolution	Hector Hawton	10/6	1/6
Pioneers of Social Change	E. Royston Pike	10/6	1/6
The Golden Bough	J. G. Frazer	20/0	2/6
100 Years of Freethought	David Tribe	42/0	2/2
Catholic Terror Today	Avro Manhattan	12/6	1/6
Materialism Restated	Chapman Cohen	5/0	1/4
The Martyrdom of Man	Winwood Reade	10/6	1/9
Morality Without God	Chapman Cohen	6d	4d
Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom (secondhand)	Avro Manhattan	15/0	2/2
From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church	Prosper Alfarc	6d	4d
Man His Own Master	Archibald Robertson	2/6	8d
The Dead Sea Scrolls	John Allegro	5/0	1/0
Age of Reason	Thomas Paine	3/6	4d
Rights of Man (paper)	Thomas Paine	7/0	1/4
Police and the Citizen	NCCL	4/0	5d
The Hanging Question	Edited by Louis Blom-Cooper	15/0	1/0
Rome or Reason	R. G. Ingersoll	1/0	5d
Thomas Paine	Chapman Cohen	1/0	5d
Morals Without Religion	Margaret Knight	18/0	1/2
The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Why I am Not a Christian	Bertrand Russell	3/0	6d
Impact of Science on Society	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Mysticism and Logic	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
Authority and the Individual	Bertrand Russell	7/0	1/0
Political Ideas	Bertrand Russell	6/0	1/0
The Conquest of Happiness	Bertrand Russell	9/0	1/2
Marriage and Morals	Bertrand Russell	8/0	1/2
Bertrand Russell's Best	Edited by Robert E. Egner	15/0	1/6
Humanism	H. J. Blackham	5/0	1/0
Comparative Religion	A. C. Bouquet	8/0	1/4
William James and Religion	Gabriel Richard Mason	1/0	5d
What is the Sabbath Day?	H. Cutner	1/3	6d
Human Rights	Peter Archer	3/0	5d
Marriage and Divorce	Various	9/6	1/4
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## BOOKS

## THE PENDULUM YEARS: BRITAIN AND THE SIXTIES

by Bernard Levin. Cape, 50s.

Bernard Levin's first book was certain to provoke controversy. Probably he was the tardiest communicator to stage a full-dress *première*, most of his contemporaries, amply supplied with tape-recorders and dictaphone typists, editors to amass their *ephemera*, or researchers and ghostwriters to remove the first and last vestiges of the creative process, being infinitely prolific. Equally probably he had, by a mixture of tactlessness and honesty that editors and television producers did their best to unpolish, made more enemies than most. Then he chose to write about a time that all his readers could remember and a subject that everyone knew, or thought he knew, everything about. And he infectiously followed his own enthusiasm with engaging disregard for the complexities of the worlds of politics, law, economics and wherever else he galloped, so that outraged experts in all these fields could pepper his flanks with unheeded *caveats*. The result is a journey of mishaps and diversions, breathlessness and bravado, but of high adventure and broad exhilaration.

Like other books of its kind, *The Pendulum Years* feels obliged to have a central message and, with the same inevitability, is weakest at this point. On being told that the sixties spent much of their time looking back to the fifties or on to the seventies, one can do nothing but yawn "so what". Which decade since the putative time of Adam and Eve has not lain in this ambivalent position? Nor can I agree with Mr Levin that the period was more notable for financial swindles and lucrative mumbo-jumbo than, say, the time of the South Sea Bubble in the eighteenth century or the heyday of physical mediumship in the nineteenth century. If there is a special flavour, or flavours, about the nineteen sixties in Britain, it seems to me to involve: an accelerating neophilia (which is probably already decelerating), a collapse of national confidence associated with Dean Acheson's "lost an empire and not yet found a role", and an uneasy challenge not only of particular authorities but of the whole nature of authority. Even these aspects are not without their forerunners in the twenties. Happily Mr Levin has observed these trends even if he often swamps them in the flow of his central theme or hides them in the rushes of his particularities; while even these last are of real substance and not a flotsam of trendy names, underground magazines and television programmes with which lesser chroniclers sprinkle their pages and so doom themselves to instant oblivion. (There is, at one point, a list of names of pop groups, but this is not intended to suggest, as a BBC *Scrapbook* programme might, that any of them has the slightest significance, and instead demonstrates the transience of electronic greatness and an eclecticism of nomenclature that transcends the bizarre to become evocative.) The author is not afraid to erect a whole chapter on modern theology and nose round the philosophical foundations of the "new morality", or to draw homilies from serious art and quote *libretti* in the original German.

Refreshing in its novelty in this day of *jeune* prose is Mr Levin's style, wicked in its accuracy, mighty in its mastery of complex and compound sentences and rhetorical devices that a generation of critics, ill-equipped by either nature or nurture, has affected to deride. Particularly does he shine in his hatchet-jobs, notably on Macmillan and Wilson as the "Walrus and the Carpenter" and

## FREETHINKER

the promoters and idolators (many of them old and intellectual enough to know better and not even getting a rake-off) of all the mindless, cretinous, crapulous bilge masquerading under the "modern movement in the arts", whether it be "happenings", "mixed media events", "transmedia", "destruction in art", "found verse" (which the more shamefaced translate, as well they might, into *vers trouvé*), *objets trouvé* (ditto in the world of "sculpture"), *collages* and *musique concrète*. The wit is natural, the gags are few, and the incidental anecdotes, like that of the apocryphal BBC TV man in the Congo who raced down a line of desperate refugees trilling "Anybody here been raped and speaks English?", superbly told. I regret the wild judgments about Mao, Vietnam, Dr Francis Crick's courageous stand against a chapel at Churchill College, and some other matters, but without the courage to be (as I see it) snappily wrong, the author might well have lacked the courage to offend reactionaries and progressives alike by being in his analyses so often spot-on.

DAVID TRIBE

## THE DATA BANK SOCIETY

by Malcolm Warner and Michael Stone.

George Allen and Unwin, 60s.

"Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains" was romantic Rousseau's outcry. Will the computer tape forge an even stronger, since invisible, chain? The threat of computer tyranny, and of the deprivation of our privacy resulting from it, is the topic of this book, *The Data Bank Society*.

Computers already represent a "provisional catastrophe". The data banks in existence now form a potential threat to our freedom. In the first six chapters the authors discuss the present situation concerning the computer and its impact on society. Bureaucracy, already too strong as it is in our daily lives, threatens to turn into an invincible "computocracy". Both government and industry are developing their computer network and data storage facilities. It is alleged that over 200,000 businesses in the United Kingdom are already on file with the computer service as the major banks and so their soundness and reliability can be immediately ascertained. The National Giro Service has a computer system that, in the wrong hands, could turn out to be a "Big Brother". For that matter, the Inland Revenue Office, the police, and the National Health Service are beginning to get computerised. Soon there may be a data bank, a mass-file which will contain vital information on every person in the country. Somerset House is a very limited, and therefore harmless, institution providing only the most rudimentary and innocuous, data. But to be completely on tape, warts and all—medical history, police record, financial ups-and-downs—who does not shudder at this possibility of being exposed so nakedly to public view?

The problem, however, is not information, but who will have access to it. Information is power, it is true. But it enables us, too, to make rational decisions instead of fumbling in the dark. We live, for better or for worse, in



# R REVIEWS

a mass society. Short of a nuclear catastrophe, which nobody could wish to happen, we shall continue to live in a mass society. We want to safeguard a reasonable degree of privacy under these conditions—a task which is already confronting us in the big cities, with their pollution and overcrowding. Think of the people who are so unlucky as to have houses near a motorway!

The invasion of privacy and the surveillance of the individual by a government computer service must certainly be kept within very narrow bounds. But I cannot see—and I don't think the authors of this book do either—how a universal computer system can be avoided. The possible advantages are too great, however great are also its potential dangers. This is always true of every step in technology or scientific advance. People are a bit too paranoid about the innovations which science brings. A few days ago, I read a letter written to the editor of an evening newspaper complaining that we "are driven to despair by what science is making of the world". Do we want to go back to the Stone Age, or live like the Amazon Indians today, starving, miserable, in fear of every kind of superstition and a prey to every disease?

The last six chapters of this book are devoted by the authors to the discussion of how to avoid the dangers with which the computerised society is confronted. Nothing human beings do is ever safe against abuse and error. The greatest danger is political; and it arises from the ignorance of science which is so characteristic of the politicians of all parties. The politicians and civil servants—the "manipulators" of society—have not enough knowledge to see how the processes of social and mental-emotional evolution work which shape Man's future. Our "masters" are still guided by Jewish-Christian demonology and antiquated, political ideologies. If they were to realise that mankind is growing into a single, global organism (and that the present conflicts are the unpleasant growing pains), then they would be able to make use of the computer's power for the survival and improvement of life on earth.

ERNEST H. HUTTEN

## THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF REGIONAL PLANNING by Peter Hall. Pemberton Books, 30s.

Professor Hall has become well known as a lively and persuasive commentator on the expanding world of regional planning in Britain. In the theory and practice of regional planning, he gives a lucid, though not particularly original analysis of the concept of "national/regional planning" and points to some of the problems it raises at both the theoretical and practical level. In defining the sequence of operations in regional planning, he readily admits the not insignificant part played by subjective difficulties in quantifying aesthetic value: a recent notorious example of riding rough shod over such delicate ground was provided by the Roskill Commission which recommended Cublington as the site of the third London airport. The Cublington affair also illustrates the conflict of interests that may arise in planning development and the frequent difficulty in resolving them.

Following Boudeville, Professor Hall distinguishes two categories of region—homogeneous and nodal. Similarly, there are, at least in Britain, two major concepts of regional planning: the first is economic, with emphasis on investment allocation; the second is aesthetic and social, concentrating on the alleviation of environmental degeneration. Needless to say, these two concepts may often conflict. In his final section, Hall outlines the practical experience of Britain, France and West Germany in regional planning: I only regret he does not take an example of experience in any of the Iron Curtain countries to demonstrate that regional planning problems are common to all advanced industrial states. They may, of course, vary in intensity and in some extent in nature from society to society.

Reason may enter into every department of life; but Professor Hall, in these reprinted Charles Beard memorial lectures (endowed by the Rationalist Press Association), has not given us a rationalist schema for regional planning; and with all due respect to the RPA and its associated company, this book might have been more appropriately published by a body less concerned with attacking religion and supernaturalism.

MARTIN PAGE

## CARRY ON FOETUS

*Laura Clayton writes:* Foetuses are in the news again. A large picture of a foetus, surrounded by the usual horrendous blurb, appeared as an advertisement in the *New Statesman* on 11 December, 1970, paid for by LIFE, the fundamentalist organisation that has now sprung up to promote the extreme anti-abortion position in the hope of securing support from that section of the community that finds the aims of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children too limited to appeal to the way-out fringe. (A letter from Martin Mears, general secretary of Life, appears on another page.) Whether or not the Abortion Act has proved useful in actually saving life must be a somewhat academic question to people who believe that abortion is *always* sinful. The advertisement (now converted into a leaflet) was accompanied by an editorial in which Mr Crossman justified its acceptance on grounds of the freedom of the Press, while admitting that it would undoubtedly give offence to many *New Statesman* readers. When the Abortion Law Reform Association took space in that journal some years back, it solemnly called on all good citizens to write to their MPs to support abortion law reform. It did not, as it probably should have done, picture a desperately afflicted pregnant woman, the mother of two or three existing children, with a sick husband, a slum flat, at her wit's end, creeping along sleazy back-streets to the criminal abortionist . . . But, this is the level at which the anti-abortion campaign is being run, and perhaps it is time ALRA descended into the gutter to join the other participants.

The foetus turned up a gain in a New Year's Eve Mystery Story, *The Great Foetus Mystery*, which Madeleine Simms wrote for *New Scientist* (31 December). All the heat, scandal and general nonsense that was generated on the subject of "live" foetuses being used for the purposes of sinister medical experiments ended not with a bang but a whimper. As reported in last week's *Freethinker*, Sir Keith Joseph, when asked whether there was any truth in the various allegations which the Department of Health had

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## MEMORIALS TO CHARLES BRADLAUGH

BASIL BRADLAUGH BONNER

Apart from paintings, such as the two by Walter Sickert in the possession of the National Liberal Club and Manchester Corporation, there are five memorials to Bradlaugh in England today. The earliest is at Brookwood Necropolis in Surrey, where a bronze bust by F. Varheyden was erected in 1893. This bust was stolen for the second time three years ago, so that only the pedestal remains at the moment. However, thanks to the National Secular Society, the stolen bust is likely to be replaced by another within the next few months.

The second memorial to Bradlaugh is the statue in Abington Square, Northampton, which was unveiled in June 1894. Many floral tributes were placed there in 1966 at a demonstration to mark the centenary of the foundation of the NSS.

After World War I, the London County Council (now the Greater London Council) decided to erect a plaque on the house in Circus Road, St John's Wood, where Bradlaugh had resided from 1877 onwards, but the owner refused them permission to do so. However, in November 1961 an LCC plaque was unveiled by Antony Wedgwood

Benn at 29 Turner Street, Whitechapel, which Bradlaugh had inhabited between 1870 and 1877.

The largest edifice to bear the name of Bradlaugh is a specially designed block of flats erected by the London Borough of Haringey at a cost of £175,000 and opened in March 1967. The Council chose the name Charles Bradlaugh House in view of its proximity to Elysium Villa, where Bradlaugh had lived from 1859 to 1862, and also to Sunderland Villa, where he had lived from 1867 to 1870. There are 55 flats and maisonettes, housing some 170 people. The long low block, which has extensive frontages in both Haynes Close and Willoughby Lane, is less than five minutes' walk from Northumberland Park railway station.

When the National Secular Society moved to 103 Borough High Street, in 1959, the premises became known as Bradlaugh House. The recently opened collection of relevant books, pamphlets, papers, portraits and scrolls in the Bradlaugh Room at this address now serves as a fitting memorial to Charles Bradlaugh, the Society's founder, and will be of particular value to those engaged in historical research.

## LETTERS

### Police and Demonstrations

The recent demonstration in Blackburn seems to have been both policeful and peaceful; but if uniformed policemen are to be present at demonstrations in the name of God, on morality as well as of the law, the question is: "Who is to do what to whom and why if violence breaks out?"

CHARLES BYASS.

### Captive Audiences

Blind and crippled have their social activities but the deaf who need it most have to be content with religious sponsored welfare. This near monopoly is sustained by many local authorities who evade their obligations by providing funds to the existing missions and some help in providing new premises incorporating a chapel and presumably a captive congregation.

Like the general run of the community, deaf people vary in religion and prefer to take their problems and pleasures as far away from clergy as possible.

Some local authorities do make an effort to make life more tolerable for deaf people and provide centres and welfare workers independent of religious influence, for which they deserve thanks. In areas where this is not done, they should be prodded to undertake their legal responsibilities.

This is an opportunity for humanists and freethinkers to counteract the dead hand of the churches and bring pleasure and happiness to their afflicted and less articulate fellows.

RALPH F. CHAMBERS.

### Mr Mears Objects

I must object again to your statement that "unhappily an abortion is sometimes the only true remedy if the mother's life is to be saved". You must be aware that the mother or child dilemma is now practically non-existent. In any event, this situation was covered by the pre-1967 law and cannot, therefore, provide justification for the 1967 Act. Can you please, therefore, stop publishing statements which are not only false but palpably and demonstrably false.

I simply cannot understand why you should think that abortion is the sort of cause that should, as a matter of course, be taken up by secularists and humanists. It really seems as though some inner compulsion impels you to support whatever the Roman Catholic Church opposes.

MARTIN MEARS, *General Secretary, LIFE.*

### Press Freedom

I have just read your approval of Lord George-Brown's swipe at the *Evening Standard* workers for objecting to an offensive (to them) cartoon.

You write of the need for "freedom for newspapers". But "newspapers" are mere media for owners, and neither the owners of the *Evening Standard*, nor the editor, represent the people of Britain by virtue of any democratic process whatever. The rich owners (a tiny fraction of the population), through their appointed editor, are able, in virtue of wealth alone, to indoctrinate millions of people. Why should they do this except in virtue of "freedom for wealth"?

The majority of the workers on a newspaper outweigh the editor many times over. If a "newspaper" is to be "free" why should not the freedom of those who produce it, or their majority at least, take precedence over a millionaire-appointed dictator called the editor?

It is sad to see the non-affluent *Freethinker* coming down on the side of press plutocrats and against at least one attempt at democratic control by those who produce the thing.

PAT SLOAN.

### CARRY ON FOETUS

(Continued from previous page)

now investigated, replied: "These allegations were investigated by my predecessor, and I do not consider any further investigation is called for".

Meanwhile, the schoolgirls of Bolton had fun and games, and got their pictures on telly and in the *Irish Independent* to boot. Between 100 and 500 of them (according to which paper you read), chivied by prefects from Adelphi House Catholic Girls' Grammar School, protested against abortion by demonstrating wearing black armbands. In Greenock, senior pupils of St. Columba's High School did likewise. "A noticeable aspect of opposition to abortion in Britain", commented the *Irish Catholic* (31 December, 1970), "has been the leading part played by schoolgirls." The *Irish Catholic* can say that again.