

MPs HEAR THE FACTS ON SCHOOL RELIGION

'SITUATES TRUTH IN A VERY LOW AND INDIFFERENT PLACE'—EDWARD BLISHEN

Edward Blishen, educationist and author, told a gathering of MPs at the House of Commons on Monday evening that he once had a strong desire to find himself underneath the House. "I was then working in a secondary school in Islington: an experience to bring out the Guy Fawkes in anyone", he said. Mr Blishen was speaking as guest of honour at a dinner organised by the Humanist Parliamentary Group, which is sponsored by the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association. He continued: "If I'd actually got here, I'd have put a match to the fuse largely out of impatience with the legislation that imposes on the schools what a secondary schoolchild once called the 'ultimate hypocrisy'. She was describing her ideal school in one of the 1,000 essays from which I edited extracts for a book called *The School I'd Like*. Let me tell you that in those 1,000 essays not one child's voice was raised in defence of religious instruction in its present form, or the religious aspect of school assemblies". A shortened version of Mr Blishen's speech is published below.

Harmful Hypocrisy

I imagine most of us would wish that hypocrisy should play as small a part as possible in the life of a school, where so many of the attitudes that influence the character of our general life are formed. And what used to dismay me when I was a practising teacher, and continues to make me angry when I look round the schools, is that the compulsory religious requirements places a really rather dreadful hypocrisy somewhere near the centre of a school's life. The religious assembly was widely resented, both because it required apparent assent in a field where there was much dissent or doubt, and also because it was so often an affair of (as one child put it) "familiar soporific droning". Now, it shames us, I think, it shames their elders, that none of these young writers—objecting to having a particular form of religion forced upon them, as they saw it—was anxious to leave a gap. In fact, they felt frustrated; they wanted very much to consider the nature of religious experience, to be helped in their search for a philosophy, to be enabled to compare one belief with another. They weren't seeking escape from this field of study and inquiry—but for some better and worthier way into it. One child wrote, typically: "At the moment when an individual is searching for a philosophy of living, he has learned nothing of the main philosophies and religions of the world at school".

What a tangle of hypocrisies there is here! First there's the pretence, which virtually every child sees through, that it makes any sense, any honest sense, in the second half of the 20th century, to attempt to tie a whole nation to a single belief about the nature of life. What astonishes me is that any Christian should wish this to continue, since the plain result of this provision is to produce, in very many of those for whom the provision is made, not a readiness to examine Christianity sympathetically but instead a bored revulsion from it. No device for producing non-Christians has been invented more effective than compulsory RI in the schools. If those who object to this provision were motivated by simple hostility to Christianity, they could do no better than leave things as they are. But it seems to

me that, in order to cling on to this arbitrary and indefensible hold it has on the wincing soul of the nation, the Church has made itself resolutely blind to what actually goes on in the schools.

You will have seen, perhaps, that fat report of the Durham Committee, *The Fourth R*, which reaches out, enfranchised, almost permissive, into the future, with its shattering proposal that RI should cease to be a statutory requirement, and instead should be made obligatory. I don't invent that: though you must dig for the epigram, in a vast benevolent blur of verbiage. I thought, when I did a television programme about it with the Bishop, what a nice man was behind the Report, and how innocent he was of almost all real knowledge of what happens in the schools: and I was also struck by a touch of the last ditch that there seemed to be in this quite epically evasive document. At least it must be said that casuistry can't be pushed much further in defence of an impossible claim.

The Reality of RI

The reality is that shameful one which is reflected in all those children's essays I spoke of. The blunt truth is that RI is thought of as virtually a non-subject. The Plowden Committee satisfied itself that most teachers were anxious that the religious obligation should continue. But I know, and all teachers know, what lay behind the Plowden collection of opinions. A vague, respectable, anxious conformity comes into play, if you ask people if we should continue the Christian pretence. I've been in enough schools to calculate how widely it happens that teachers in fact groan when they find some RI on their timetables: groan because they have no gift or inclination for teaching it, or because it is notoriously an even more difficult subject on which to focus their pupils' interest than many other subjects. There are places, as I know, where in fact it is not taken at all: behind the classroom door you drift into some general discussion of other topics, or take the opportunity of having yet another go at fractions.

(Continued overleaf)

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There are a number of teachers, one can't guess how many but it can't be few, who feel deeply insincere when they step into a classroom to take RI. Of course, they have the right to refuse to take it, as the children have the right to refuse to attend such lessons. But to claim the right of withdrawal, in most schools, requires considerable courage on the part of teacher or child. There are schools in which a teacher may start under something of a cloud if he claims the right not to teach RI. Perhaps no one feels very passionately about it, and of course the teacher's claim may be accepted in a perfectly civilised way. And yet given the prevailing atmosphere, in which the most un-Christian people are able to feel that such a refusal is a sign of something less than respectable in the person who refuses—there can be an odd sense of disgrace about it. A teacher may not feel it is worth while risking even such an indefinable sense of disfavour for a reason that may seem to him, in relation to his whole career, so peripheral.

Many teachers are modest about their beliefs, and would see the taking of such a stand as a sort of immodesty, a demonstration. And there are school situations in which the refusal to take RI would mean that a teacher was creating actual timetabling difficulties, he would be making things awkward for his colleagues. So here is a school subject, to look at it only in that light, which is preventively the cause of a good deal of bad, half-hearted or downright cynical teaching. I say preventively because by its abolition as a subject all that poor teaching could be brought to a halt. There is casual and unconvinced teaching in other fields, but that cannot be ended so simply.

A Morally Inventive Community

Children know about their teachers. They know how many undertake this task sceptically, reluctantly, or cynically: and I don't know how we begin to calculate the harm this does.

Then there's the general effect on the life of a school of this requirement that the school profess Christianity. Obviously, one of the purposes of a school is to introduce children to the moral elements in human existence, as also to those elements in it which are concerned with views as to what we are here for, what it's all about. Now, it seems to me that a school can best do this in much the way in which it can best introduce children to man's intellectual and emotional nature: that is, by providing experience which enables discovery to take place, discussion of discovery, reference to sources, and so on.

But here is a field more sensitive even than the intellectual field. We have a mass of wisdom, mingled with a mass of folly, about moral matters, and about matters of belief. But of this none of us is a master in the sense even in which a man might be a master of physics, or mathematics, or geography. The moral world has to be sorted out afresh, every day. And for most of us, if not for all of us, the most persuasive learning in these spheres comes from our experiences of behaviour, our own and that of others: that, certainly, where morality is concerned. And as to belief, that is the most delicate matter of all, and the seeds of any belief about the nature of the world might lie anywhere, probably in many places: it might be something we put together very slowly over many years, and it will be based on observations we have made in the field of morality, but also on our experience of relationships with other people, of literature, of music, of the physical world itself.

The school ought to be a morally inventive community. Now, what really happens in most schools? The place of morality is marked out: the area of moral effort seems to be defined: and RI, and the compulsory religious allegiance of the school, form the place, the area. Of course no school could be completely satisfied with that: but in the main, my observation goes, the notion that a school might be a place of very flexible, properly disputatious, moral discovery, and discovery in the matter of beliefs and philosophies, that notion is obscured by the religious gesture. It's all done in RI. It's all done in the morning prayers. The point is that the real moral life, the real struggle towards a view of human existence never takes place in many schools because it is all looked after by RI, and the assembly.

Standing Truth on its Head

Here is a subject that cannot be justified as other subjects may be. Here is a subject to which, in the nature of pure statistics, many of those who teach it, or shuffle their way through it, cannot bring anything like conviction or enthusiasm, and to which they may bring, indeed, a dreadful demonstration of insincerity, or of making the unheroic best of an awkward moral dilemma. Here is the school taking advantage of its captive population to suggest, usually quite without discussion, that one out of the whole range of human beliefs is beyond all doubt the one true belief. Here is a demonstration, to children with all their moral passion intact that in the most vital of all spheres the grown-up world will allow itself to be at the mercy of a powerful special group. The powerful special group itself suffers deeply from it, because, I suggest, few children can feel any admiration for those who use their power to thrust aside the immensely obvious existence of dissent and doubt. Well, you remember Donne on doubt:

Doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and must go . . .

Anyone who says that the religious obligation laid on our schools stands Truth on a huge hill is misunderstanding the spectacle before him; instead, it situates Truth in a very low and indifferent place, and interferes most powerfully in one of the main aims of the school, morally, intellectually, and in all other ways—the aim of setting children off, gladly, on that roundabout and openminded journey.

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THE BEST ATTESTED FACTS OF HISTORY

R. J. CONDON

"Christianity affirms, through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, that this is a world in which 'that sort of thing' can happen, because it has happened . . . the Resurrection stands as the best attested miracle of the New Testament." Thus writes a London vicar in the Easter number of his parish magazine. Such clerical pronouncements are usual at this time of the year, and of course the faithful never dream of checking them. They would find, if they did, that no first century secular writer knew anything about the Resurrection, or indeed about Christianity. Outside the New Testament writings, of uncertain authority and date, the "history" of Jesus is not attested at all.

Some scholars, notably J. M. Robertson, have argued that the Easter story in the gospels is based on a play. Such a play had been in existence for more than 900 years. In 1903-1904 German excavators at Kalah Shargat, the site of the ancient Assur, uncovered two tablets giving details of the passion-play of Bel Merodach, the Babylonian sun-god. During their Babylonian captivity the Jews would have witnessed its performance each year on Easter Day, and they could hardly fail to have away a vivid memory of its on their release.

In the play Bel is taken prisoner and tried. He is smitten and led away to the Mount, as Jesus is scourged and led away to Golgotha, traditionally a mount. Bel is put to death together with a malefactor; a second malefactor is released. Tumult breaks out in the city, corresponding to the earthquake at the death of Jesus. Bel's clothes are carried away, and a woman wipes away blood flowing from where a weapon has been withdrawn. Bel goes down into the Mount, and is held there as in a prison (cf 1 Peter 3, 18-19). Guards watch the imprisoned Bel; a weeping woman seeks him at the Gate of Burial. Bel is brought back to life, and rises out of the Mount. His resurrection as the sun of spring is celebrated as his triumph over the powers of darkness. The play so closely resembles the Passion story in the gospels as to leave little doubt that the latter is based mainly upon it.

The True Saviour of Mankind

The death and resurrection of Osiris were dramatically represented, as were those of Dionysus and other pagan saviours, and always at the vernal equinox, when the sun crosses the equatorial plane. Although crucifixion was not the method of execution in the Babylonian plays, there was mythic precedent for it. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* the god had been crucified to a rock with hammer and nails for centuries before the Christian era. According to the third century Christian father Minucius Felix, the Roman pagans worshipped a crucified human figure. At Philae, in Upper Egypt, a four-barred cross bears the head of Osiris; his sisters Isis and Nephthys mourn at the foot of the cross. This is not far removed from some Christian paintings of the Crucifixion.

To the ancients, the sun at the vernal equinox seemed to be transfixed on the cross formed by the intersection of its path with the equator. Below the equator the sun is, as it were, dead in the "hell" of winter. It suffers for a short time on the cross, then rises above it, its increasing power bringing a resurgence of the vegetable and animal life on which the existence of humanity depends. It is the true saviour of mankind, as our own churches sometimes unwittingly demonstrate. London's Russian Cathedral, for instance, has the crucified sun on its spire.

Easter is linked in the gospels with the Jewish Passover, originally a "first fruits" festival held at the full moon, the Jews having been influenced to some extent by the lunar cult which preceded the solar in Babylonia. Easter Day is therefore the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

"The Bands of Orion"

The two thieves crucified with the sun-god present us with a problem, to which a tentative solution is here offered. The American scholar Alvin Boyd Kuhn writes: "The jackal of Anup and the cynocephalus of Taht-Aan, which figured (in Egypt) as types of the dark lunation, were conceived as having stolen the light from the bright moon. As the dark period before and after the illumination, they stood on either side of the Christ (sun) light on the moon. They were dubbed 'thieves of the light' . . . In the zodiac of Denderah just where Horus is shown on the cross or at the crossing of the vernal equinox, these two thieves Anup and Aan are drawn on either side of the sun-god".

This zodiac, dating from about 30 BC, was formerly in the Temple of Hathor, and is now in the Louvre. Kuhn's description is not quite accurate, the thieves being together on a cross to the right of Horus. If this is a crucifixion scene, as Kuhn suggests, it indicates the astral identity of the two thieves, for they here illustrates the sign of the Twins, Castor and Pollux. In Greece the Twins were regarded as robbers and cheats, but they were not equally wicked. Pollux symbolised summer and life, Castor winter and death, "good" and "bad" thieves corresponding to those executed with Jesus.

The constellation Orion was anciently regarded as a giant bound crosswise to the "world-tree" of the Milky Way. Job 38, 31 has: "Canst thou . . . loose the bands of Orion?" As such, it was an astral type of the crucified sun. And next to Orion are the two thieves, Castor and Pollux, arms outstretched as though they too have been crucified.

Far-fetched? Possibly, but it does fit in with the known astronomical basis of ancient religions. And there is ample evidence that Christianity is no exception to the rule.

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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 sought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Guildford Humanist Group, Guildford House, Guildford, Thursday, 15 April, 7.45 p.m. J. G. Moore (Unitarian): "An Almost Humanist Religion".

Humanist Holidays. Easter Holiday at Belgravia Hotel, Bournemouth, is now fully booked. Details of other holidays from Mrs. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 642-8796.

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NEWS

FAMILY PLANNING FUND

In the whole of biological history there have probably been less than 80,000 million individuals born. By the end of the century there may be 6,000 million people. This means that eight per cent of the total number of human beings ever born will be alive at one time. The Family Planning Association believes that the vital task of bringing family planning aid and education to those who need request it should not be left to Governments alone. The Association thinks it possible to match the £1 million being given by the Government in the next financial year to international organisations concerned with family planning and population growth. Since the first international campaign was launched in 1963, raising £270,000 over five years, there has been a revolution in public attitudes illustrated by the now general acceptance that family planning is an essential aid to responsible parenthood, and by the realisation of the threat to the quality of human life from the unprecedented acceleration of all population growth.

To help solve the suffering caused by the world's growing population a new Family Planning International Campaign was officially launched last week. The campaign, which aims to raise £1 million for family planning work in developing countries, is under the chairmanship of Lord Caradon and the sponsorship of the Family Planning Association. The Campaign's policy is to enlist financial support in this country for the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the Family Planning Association and the Margaret Pyke Memorial Trust. Its theme is the need to help people all over the world to ensure that for humanity's sake every child born is a wanted child.

Lord Caradon, chairman of the Campaign, said he had learnt two lessons about population, first as Governor of Jamaica and second on his recent visit to Iran as chairman of a United Nations Mission. The first lesson was that development in a developing country without control of population was a delusion, a failure, a waste. The second lesson was that population control is not only a matter of economic necessity but also very much a matter of human compassion. "The price of the complacency and prejudice of the educated and the affluent", he said, "is being paid by those least able to protest, by bewildered women and unwanted children."

Lord Caradon said he was no lover of the present British Government. In race matters and relations with the third world "it was the worst Government since Lord North". But in this question of population control all parties could and should act together in unity—and he praised the support for the family planning campaign from the Minister of Overseas Development. He believed that Great Britain had a unique opportunity to give leadership to the world in international affairs. The previous Government and the present one had given a lead in the question of population. Now it was for the British public to play its full part by supporting the campaign to raise a million pounds.

"We hear much talk of British interest", Lord Caradon said, "I am all for British interest, but I emphatically deny that British interest is in a narrow nationalism. We were the best colonialists. Now we should be the best internationalists."

S AND NOTES

LAW REFORMED

Just three months after the passing of the Divorce Law in Parliament relations between the Italian Government and the Roman Catholic Church have taken another knock. The Ministry of Health has announced that all State hospitals will, in future, provide free birth control information to any woman who requests it. This decision was made after the Constitution Court, the country's highest judicial body, had reversed laws forbidding the sale of contraceptives and the dissemination of information about birth control.

The 1930 Penal Code, passed in the days of Mussolini, treated the propagation of birth control, spreading of venereal disease and abortion as crimes punishable by terms of up to 12 months imprisonment. The Roman Catholic Church, through its priests and organisations, successfully defied all efforts to relax the law. The show-down came when Dr Luigi Marchi was prosecuted for opening Rome's first family planning clinic. He appealed to the highest court, and it is known that his work is supported by Ministry officials.

It is reliably estimated that about one million abortions are carried out in Italy every year, and that 30,000 women die as a result. One of the problems now facing Italy's family planners is the training of doctors in birth control practices. The 1930 law prevented any teaching of the subject, although some doctors kept themselves informed by reading foreign medical publications.

A Vatican spokesman said the Roman Catholic Church's position on the question of artificial contraception is well known. It is indeed! Pope Paul denounced it in his Encyclical *Humane Vitae* (1968), and in January he instructed his diplomatic representatives throughout the world to oppose birth control programmes. The Roman Catholic Church, lumbered with the teachings of neurotics and staffed by celibates with no experience of parenthood, has used its power and influence to exploit the fears of the poor and ignorant. Fortunately the world is taking less notice of what the Pope says and, with increasing numbers of Catholics secretly or openly defying his instructions, Pope Paul will soon discover that St Peter's Chair has become a "hot seat".

A COURAGEOUS CHURCHMAN

There was a significant demonstration in Cape Town last Sunday when two cricket teams walked off in protest against the South African Government's refusal to allow the selection of two non-white players for the forthcoming Australian tour. The Minister for Sport described the demonstration as a gesture for overseas consumption. Certainly it hit the world headlines, and will encourage those in Britain who organised and supported the campaign which led to the cancellation of the Springboks tour last year. It is also a tribute to the magnificent courage of those in South Africa who have opposed the evil policies of the Government.

We are pleased to publish a review of Peter Hain's book, *Don't Play With Apartheid* (page 118) in which he

chronicles the campaign against that tour. It is reviewed by the Rt Rev Ambrose Reeves, formerly the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg who was deported by the Nationalist Government in 1960. This was after the "emergency" which followed the massacre by the South African police of 70 unarmed Africans at Sharpeville. With great courage, Bishop Reeves personally investigated the tragic affair, and later published a book on the subject.

During his years of service in Johannesburg, the Bishop consistently showed his sympathy with the aims and aspirations of the African National Congress. This representative body was outlawed in 1960, but it still maintains an office in London. Bishop Reeves won the trust of the African and Asian leaders by his brave championship of their cause, and to this day they welcome him warmly on their platform.

And we warmly welcome him to the columns of the *Freethinker*.

PRIESTS RESIGN

There is consternation in the Vatican over the "staff turnover". Professor Houtart, director of religious sociology at Louvain University, Belgium, says that in 1970, 3,800 petitions from diocesan and religious priests all over the world who wanted to give up Holy Orders. There were only 167 such petitions in 1963.

It is estimated that about a third of those who leave the ministry do so without seeking Vatican permission. This would bring the number of those who gave up the priesthood to over 20,000 in the last seven years. Professor Houtart estimates that 80 per cent of those who resign are in the 30-45 age group.

In Britain Archbishop Beck of Liverpool said in a pastoral letter that the shortage of priests is becoming acute. This is a time in which young people are questioning accepted forms of society and authority. Many have no confidence in organised religion. "Amidst uncertainties of this kind, it is understandable that the ideal of the Catholic priesthood seems less attractive to both boys and their parents".

MAHON OVERBOARD

The defeat of Peter Mahon, the "Labour and Against Abortion" candidate in the Liverpool Scotland division bye-election, will cause much gloom in Roman Catholic and "anti-permissive" circles. It is another indication of the growing reluctance of Catholics to vote for a candidate simply because he is one of the flock. Frank Marsden, the official Labour candidate who was elected, will be the first non-Catholic MP in the history of the division.

The result was a real blow to the anti-abortion enthusiasts. Here was an ideal opportunity for the electors to register their disapproval of abortion. Their champion comes from a well-known Catholic family, and was standing in an area where there is a large Catholic community. He announced that the election would be fought on the great moral issues of the day and, in his election address, referred to the need for Christian morality in politics. But all to no avail; less than 1,000 votes were cast in Mahon's favour, and he lost his deposit.

BOOKS

DON'T PLAY WITH APARTHEID

by Peter Hain. George Allen and Unwin, £2.25.

The purpose of this book is primarily to record the development of the movement to stop the South African Cricket Tour in 1970 from its small, and somewhat uncertain beginning, through the turbulent months that followed until, at the request of Her Majesty's Government, the MCC decided to call off the tour on 22 May. As such it is worthy of an honoured place in the ever-growing mass of literature concerned with the racial struggle in South Africa, not least because it is told with frankness and modesty.

But any who want to understand the background to the struggle against apartheid, both within and outside South Africa, ought to read the earlier chapters of this book with care because they deal respectively with Apartheid and Apartheid Sport and the International Scene. In particular I would draw attention to the very first of the chapters in these two parts of the book because this chapter sets out briefly but accurately the terrible human effects of apartheid.

Yet when I had finished reading this record of the progress of the Stop the Seventy Tour Campaign certain questions remained in my mind. While there are a number of references to the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United Kingdom I have the impression that the author of *Don't Play With Apartheid* has not fully realised how much his own campaign owed to the ten years' work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in helping many British people understand more fully the implications of apartheid for those who have to live in what for years has been virtually a police state. This has been especially true in those periods in the last ten years when there was no single issue which would fire people's imagination and crystallise their opposition to this fascist ideology. To say this is in no sense to attempt to belittle the achievements of the STST campaign. It is simply to ask the question: Would this campaign have ever achieved the result that it did if the ground had not been prepared by the persistent though often unspectacular work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement?

Even more, I asked myself if the STST would ever by itself brought about the *volte face* of the MCC. It is no doubt arguable that it would because of the threat that the STST campaign posed for law and order. But my guess is that there was another and in some ways probably more important factor causing the MCC to back down. I refer to the Fair Cricket Campaign, led by a former England cricket captain, now the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich. In his book Peter Hain recognises that the importance of the contribution of the group led by the Rt Rev David Shepherd has been underestimated. But I doubt if even he realises just how decisive the intervention of the Fair Cricket Campaign in fact was.

This raised a third question in my mind. Has Peter Hain any adequate understanding of the British scene? Certain statements in his book led me to doubt this. For example he states (p 219) that the STST campaign was of crucial importance, because for the first time the British Establishment had been forced openly and actively to condemn racialism and its possible effect on British society. This seems to me a very debatable statement, as indeed is the

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claim of one observer quoted by Peter Hain that the campaign had awakened the "English Conscience" which has lain dormant so long on domestic racialism. Surely both Peter Hain and the observer he quotes cannot be unaware of the massive report, *Colour and Citizenship*, published in 1969 which, among many other matters, deals with what those whose consciences have been awakened have been doing in these last years in Britain. It serves no useful purpose to make exaggerated claims for any campaign, and this I fear the author is in danger of doing so far as the STST is concerned. In so far as such a criticism is justified it is a pity, for this particular campaign was indeed a notable event in the struggle against apartheid; one which will long be remembered and one for which thousands will be grateful for the leadership of Peter Hain.

✦ AMBROSE REEVES

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIPS

by E. S. Turner. Michael Joseph, £2.

The author of this book had earned his reputation as a social critic by several entertaining books. I recall his *History of Courting*, *Roads to Reform*, and *The Shocking History of Advertising*. Being specially interested in the behaviour of judges, I opened this study with great expectations. Disappointment followed. I suspect that Mr Turner found their Lordships too thorny a subject for his taste, which safely leans to the conservative side here. He has contented himself with anecdotes and other bits and pieces that put the judges in all too human a light, from King Alfred's day to the present.

It is not until page 200 (out of 240) that we come to the heart of the matter. This chapter is headed The Judges are Prejudiced. For a moment I thought Mr Turner had finally redeemed himself. Not so. Although he has perceived that there is a question to discuss which is conventionally evaded by lawyers, he handles it much too gingerly. He rightly quotes Harold Laski "who was fascinated by the links between law and politics". He even refers to the notorious case involving the Poplar local authority. Under Labour's control, the council resolved in 1924 to pay its unskilled workers the princely wage of £4 a week. This wage, above the rate prevailing in the locality, was regarded as excessive by the district auditor, and he surcharged the councillors personally. An Act of Parliament allowed councils to pay wages they deemed reasonable. But the House of Lords, reversing the decision of the Court of Appeal, held that the proposal to pay £4 was unreasonable, being prompted by "eccentric principles of socialistic philanthropy". I doubt if Mr Turner has digested Laski's scathing essay on this judicial decision. If he has, it is astonishing that his own comment is this: "It would be wrong to suppose that the elected majority (in the country?) in that decade was necessarily in favour of such 'philanthropy', though it may well have been in Poplar". Perhaps Mr Turner has forgotten that the Labour Party took office for the first time at the beginning of that very year.

R REVIEWS

The Poplar case illustrates how difficult the judges find it to divest themselves of prejudice, especially when controversial issues of social policy arise. Many examples could be drawn from the experience of trade unions in the higher courts in the last 70 years. The interpretation of the words used in a statute offers plenty of opportunity to push policy in one direction rather than another. You need not be a lawyer to guess in which direction judges belonging to our political elite will tend to push.

Nobody should be surprised by this marked tendency. In England there has always been more than a link between politics and law. The offices of the Lord Chancellor, the Attorney-General, and the Solicitor-General are, of course, held by men chosen by the Prime Minister for political reasons only. Moreover, Laski produced figures showing that out of 139 judges appointed between 1832 and 1906, no fewer than 80 were members of Parliament at the time of their elevation, and 11 others had been candidates. Of 83 judges who left Parliament for the bench, 63 were appointed by their party while in office. To this day, only a small proportion of barristers or judges are in sympathy with the Labour Party.

By avoiding a sociological analysis, Mr Turner has reduced his book to the level of reading enjoyed by barristers too tired to think after a hard day in court.

JULIUS LEWIN

SEX EDUCATION — THE ERRONEOUS ZONE

MAURICE HILL and
MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Foreword: BRIGID BROPHY

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LETTERS

Trade Unions

The postal strike delayed delivery, hence this belated protest at Philip Hinchliff's broadside against trade unions in his review of Lord Balogh's pamphlet, *Labour and Inflation*. The demand for "statutory control" over trade unions is, in fact, the thin edge of the wedge for a Fascist Britain, bringing us into line with Mussolini's Italy, Nazi Germany and the contemporary Greece of the Colonels. I am surprised at a "freethinker" advocating a straight jacket for the organisations which have fought to defend the interests of those who work by hand and brain throughout their history (not always wisely or consistently perhaps) thus representing the interests of an absolute majority of the working population of Britain.

True, trade union leaders may make mistakes, and democratic votes may sometimes go (in our view) the wrong way. Nevertheless, making of trade unions more democratic should surely be aimed for and the fettering of them by legislation should be rejected as fascist.

As a Marxist with an orthodox economics training, I would agree, in principle, that no economic system can work really efficiently if *spending* is constantly running ahead of production, i.e. inflation. Hence, in theory, a prices and incomes policy would be in the general interest if it covered all prices and all incomes. But outside a socialist planned economy this is impossible. In this country it is quite reasonable to expect industrial workers not to fight for wage increases when they read in their papers that: (a) top executives often get salary rises equal to an ordinary man's wage for four years' work; (b) Heath's "sixpence off income tax" gave some top executives an extra £4,000 a year (as one millionaire newspaper honestly pointed out); (c) policemen are given, without putting up any struggle, a greater wage increase than the postmen were striking for; (d) no statutory limit is placed on divided income, and if it were, the shareholders would benefit from a rise in the value of their shares through accumulation of capital to compensate them. But as regards restrictions on wage increases, insult is added to injury by rising prices of consumers goods and services.

So long as there is one law for the dividend receivers, price-fixers top executives and policemen; and another for the vast majority of the working population, we will have to face either continued struggle by the trade unions for better conditions, or fascist-type curbing of trade union activity. I would have expected freethinkers to reject the latter.

PAT SLOAN.

New Thoughts on Ulster

In his article, *The Common Market and the RC Church* (*Freethinker*, 27 February), F. A. Ridley fired a beautifully timed and an accurately placed shot above the heads of the theoretical cavalry of Balaclava desperation that seem hell-bent on producing a secular-political emulation of that great tragedy. I refer, of course, to the prevailing "Ulster thinkers".

What we are witnessing now is the crushing of worker resistance prior to Britain's entry into Europe. And the thought of Spain, Portugal and a united Ireland (dominated by Canon Law) bringing up the rear, does not appeal to this religious escapist.

When the whole national media is blasting away at the Ulstermen, and when freethinkers find themselves shouting the same slogans as Rome, surely the time has come for re-thinking.

The abolition of the Orange brigade may be, in theory, politically just. But within the context of the present situation they form the only rallying point in Europe around which a stand could be made against the encroaching Roman octopus.

TREVOR MORGAN.

Children's Liberties

Taken to its logical conclusion, the demand by the National Council for Civil Liberties for basic civil liberties for school-children means they should be allowed to choose whether to go to school or not. Certainly that once they have reached a level of physical maturity that they should not be compelled to stay on to a later age.

A good deal of trouble in school arises from compelling unwilling pupils to stay on when they would prefer to be at work. No adult would tolerate such interference in his civil liberties.

DOROTHY ROBERTS.

Communion

In their article *Sex, Love and Jesus*, Angela Gilhespie and Beverly Halstead acquaint the reader in a dignified and matter-of-fact manner with a strange religious perversion. They have observed it in an academic Christian sect aiming at bringing people together to be "baptised in the Spirit". They assemble in a member's house. The climax of the ritual seems to be a physical orgasm being obtained by individuals imagining a union with Jesus.

Differing in their views from Maurice Hill, Michael Lloyd-Jones and Brigid Brophy, who in their otherwise excellent pamphlet on Sex Education hold a mainly physiological viewpoint, the authors of this article are more broadly humanistic when saying that "sex is something shared. It is a union of two separate individuals. One gives of self and one receives. There is a communion of two beings. There is warmth and there is love".

I also appreciate that they admit the possibility of a genuine spiritual experience. In the one they described, "the theory is love and no sex; the practice is sex and no love". But I think that also the mechanistic determinists and the materialistic rationalists amongst freethinkers may have experienced, and would admit feelings of elation transcending themselves towards a solitary mankind, where alienation is reduced to a minimum.

May I say that only in recent years I felt really enlightened on the problem of transcendence when studying what Erich Fromm, a Humanist Socialist, writes about the "X-experience" in his book *You Shall be as Gods* (London: Cape, 1967). For those who might be repelled by the title, may I add that its subtitle is: "A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition"—which makes it "hot stuff" for every freethinker.

PAUL ROM.

CONFIDENTIALITY

An attempt by Mrs Sally Oppenheim (Con., Gloucester), to amend the Family Law Reform Act, 1969, was defeated in the House of Commons last week. Section eight of the Act gives a right to persons over the age of 16 to give valid consent to medical treatment. A Birmingham doctor was recently brought before the Disciplinary Committee of the General Medical Council in respect of a breach of confidentiality of a 16-year-old patient, who had been put on the Pill by the Brook Advisory Centre. Mrs Oppenheim said although the Pill forms a considerable part of the problem, it is incidental to the much more serious medical considerations which are involved.

"The opponents of this Amendment will say that it will result in girls being scared to consult their doctors and clinics. Far from discouraging them, the recent verdict in favour of Dr Brown had prompted an unprecedented rush of business at a well-known Birmingham clinic", Mrs Oppenheim declared.

Miss Joan Lestor (Lab., Eton and Slough), opposed the Amendment. She referred to Mrs Oppenheim's statement that this had very little to do with the Pill, "but it was not until the question of the young girl getting the Pill came up that this was ever raised". She said that such an Amendment "would not stop young people indulging in sexual relationships but from seeking effective advice". She also pointed out that one of the reasons why it had been possible to encourage people to seek treatment for VD is that they know it will be completely confidential. The VD figures in the 16-18 age group are very high.

"This is also true on the whole question of illegitimate births. A total of 15,000 live illegitimate births were recorded in 1969 to girls between the ages of 11 and 18. This is a very drastic increase. The same argument applies exactly. One will not stop the new attitude to sex relationships among young people. One will discourage them from taking advice."