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PUBLIC HEALTH OR PUBLIC ORDER

N.C.C.L. SLAMS NIGHT ASSEMBLIES BILL

The National Council for Civil Liberties has described the Night Assemblies Bill (which went into its Committee Stage on 8 March) as "a threat to civil liberties both because of its stated objects and the hidden implications that we believe its sponsors and the Government know full well are contained in it. It is, as Keith Waterhouse wrote in the *Daily Mirror*, 'a sinister piece of law making', and 'a furtive measure'. We share, too, his concern that 'the appalling relationships already existing between young and old should be made even worse by Act of Parliament.'"

Law and Order/Liberty

The N.C.C.L. believes "above all . . . that the Bill encourages attempts to stifle political opinion and prevent political activity at a time when law-and-order is seen by many to be more important than law and liberty". The Council is therefore calling upon the public to make their views known to their M.P.s, especially members of the Standing Committee on the Bill, and it has also called upon Members of Parliament to oppose the Bill "and to stand up for a tradition of civil liberty in Britain that this Bill will further diminish".

The Night Assemblies Bill, sponsored by Mr. Jerry Wiggin, M.P., makes it a criminal offence to hold a gathering of a thousand or more people in the open air, for any period of three hours between midnight and 6 a.m., without applying to a local authority for consent four months beforehand, and without giving certain financial guarantees.

The N.C.C.L. points out that for some time past a small number of M.P.s have tried to legislate against the holding of pop festivals. "One such successful attempt was the Isle of Wight Corporation Act originally promoted by Mark Woodnutt, M.P., in 1971 . . . This new bill . . . since it has Government backing, could become law by the autumn of 1972."

Mr Wiggin says that the aim of the Bill is to control pop festivals, banning them only if the site is unsuitable or if the local authority thinks the festival would not reach proper health and fire protection standards. "Yet", says N.C.C.L., "nowhere in the Bill is the phrase 'pop festivals' used and it is drafted in such a way that extends its scope to many different kinds of assemblies". As Peter Waterhouse said in the *Daily Mirror* (28 February): "The Night Assemblies Bill does not have the guts to say that its intention is to stamp out pop festivals".

Assault on Right of Assembly

Mr. Arthur Davidson, M.P., has commented that the

proposed Bill "impinges on the basic right of Assembly". The National Council for Civil Liberties concurs: "The Bill will be not only to ban pop festivals but to restrain political activity. Intentionally or not, it is a direct assault on the right of assembly and a danger to civil liberties in Britain".

A "night assembly" can, of course, mean much more than a pop festival, and whilst relatively few events held in recent years would have come within the scope of this Bill, such "assemblies" could have a serious social or political purpose. "The assembly might take the form of a trade union rally, an all-night rally, a charity walk, a protest demonstration or march. Thus a Bill ostensibly intended to protect public health could in fact be used to protect public order."

The Bill's requirement for four months' notice, says N.C.C.L., "will severely frustrate freedom of assembly for political purposes. Moreover, there is an important principle at stake, since peaceful political and similar protests ought not to be subject to veto by any public authority, at least not unless there are compelling grounds".

Specific Legislation for Pop Festivals

The N.C.C.L. suggests that there could usefully be a Bill that specifically dealt with the health and fire hazards of pop festivals. "Such a Bill would need to construct a definition of pop festivals, perhaps as 'an entertainment for a commercial purpose'—though this might unfairly affect charity concerts for which the promoter might receive a commission. Perhaps a further clause would have to be added ensuring that a gathering which was not expressly for entertainment, but at which there happened to be some music, was exempted from the Bill. However, if the sponsors of the Night Assemblies Bill are genuinely interested in dealing with pop festivals day and night, and *only* with pop festivals, they should have no objections to a Bill of this nature."

HAS CHRISTIANITY DESTROYED RELIGION?*

AVRIL FOX

* The substance of this article was originally delivered as a talk to the National Secular Society on 21 January 1971, under the title "Religion—Has Christianity Killed It?"

The story goes that one day a bright young man described to Charlie Chaplin an original notion for a scenario. The master shook his head sadly. "No, I'm afraid it wouldn't be any good", he said. You see, it's quite a new idea."

I have been stumping around peddling two new ideas. That is, two fresh re-arrangements of old facts, which is all any new theory amounts to—and I know just what Chaplin meant. Put an original conception, or an original person, before a number of people, and they will devote all their energies not to roaring with laughter at its witty content, not to a serious discussion of its merits, but to worrying at it as a dog worries at a bone, trying to get it to fit their pre-conceived ideas. Still, if one thinks it has value one soldiers doggedly on, hoping that occasionally someone will get the point.

One of my notions concerns the definition, significance and role of maturity in contemporary society. The other, which is the one I want to discuss here, is the true definition and character of religion and of its relevance today.

A century ago the National Secular Society came into being in an honourable fashion, alongside the revolt of such great characters as Bradlaugh against the illogicality, hypocrisy and unethical content of Christianity as demonstrated in Victorian Britain. It was a natural swing of the pendulum away from an established but outworn and shabby creed. What I would like to suggest is that Christianity, by calling itself a religion when in fact it was a code of sexual and social ethics with very little religious content, has brought true religious feeling into contempt, and with our natural revulsion from the Christian creed as witnessed in the mediaeval and Victorian Church we have tended to turn our backs also on something of genuine value to society; a quality recognised in the pagan religions, which were very little concerned with ethics, which they left to the community to arrange.

The Bridge to Ecstasy

True religion could be described as a mechanism by which we contact that which is beyond our material existence. Each person seems to have his or her particular path over this bridge to ecstasy (for an analysis of ecstasy, I recommend Marghanita Laski's scholarly tome of that name); one will escape momentarily into it while singing carols in King's College Chapel; another will lose himself in it as he roars a hymn along with a thousand fellows at a Cup Final; yet another will briefly exceed the limits of personality and merge with the rest at a pop concert, where you or I might only fear damage to our eardrums.

I came to these conclusions through my personal experience and the exercise of common sense. Beginning in a Christian framework where I earnestly pretended to find food for intelligence or admiration, and having failed truly to discover either, I went on to become a communist, and with equal assiduity decided to embrace atheism. This brought more self-respect, but the theory failed to contain within it sizeable chunks of experiences. I found that if one

brought this experience to the notice of convinced and rigid atheists they simply waved it away and told me it did not exist. Then one day I discovered a sense of the holy—the seventh sense, I prefer to call it, and began to investigate this interesting element something in the manner of a middle-aged duck discovering water for the first time. I asked myself why I had not found this in Christianity and decided that the reason was something furtive, shame-making and negative about that creed, probably arising out of the Christian attitude to sex. Whereas our pagan ancestors recognised the power of sex and fertility, and often elevated this into sacred ritual and symbolism, Christianity merely said it was nasty and second-rate compared with celibacy and chastity. While preaching an admirable social ethic, outlined in the Magnificat, and genuinely revolutionary at the time (one must recognise the virtues even of that which one opposes), though since far more honoured in the breach than in the observance, the Church, fearing sex and the flesh as it did, also feared and distrusted ecstasy, and thus cast away all bridges to the "oceanic" experiences of earlier mankind and deprived society of a most valuable outlet. The Trinity, castrated by the changing of the gender of The Holy Spirit of Wisdom, *Sophia*, became a barren and meaningless symbol.

Tragic but perhaps inevitable

I believe this was the most tragic occurrence in the development of the mind of mankind. Though it may be that it was a necessary stage of growth, because all the great "establishment" religions have to some degree elevated celibate, intellectual and patriarchal *Logos* to the detriment of creative, accepting, carnal *Eros*; even Buddhism, which once decried the value of asceticism. But I believe that if we had a healthier attitude towards the side of religion exemplified by Dionysus, if we replaced the priestess and the prostitute to their respective and healing places, if every jury, every municipal authority and every legislative body in the world had to contain as many women members as men upon it (for the barren patriarchal state "religion" always means a male-dominated, too theoretical, and warped social structure) we would be a lot nearer the solution of our problems today.

When I get this far I am usually told I am advocating free sex and orgies as a cure for all ills. Let me make clear as well as I can in a few words what I am actually advocating: a recognition of the value of the instinctive side of ourselves as well as the organising side; of the social value of the great seasonal feasts; of the value of respect for the flesh as equal partner of the intellect, sex being for pleasure and not for immoral procreation (when Christians can accept that Mary could have known joyful sex in conceiving Jesus and still have been "pure"—they will be on the road to mental health); of the absolute and urgent necessity to recognise the social value of woman. But when I remind myself how far the world has to travel before returning to such pagan sanities, and how short is the time we have left to us to make the journey, I am not hopeful we shall ever reach the goal. Procreation and pollution will engulf us first, and the rich and delightful world of Nature will go down with us as well, because in our foolishness and obscurantism we refused to recognise her laws.

THOSE GREEN AND PINK STAMPS

MARGARET SIDDALL*

Many people are against trading stamps—or simply don't get enough to make collecting them worth while. So all over the country, the thin green or pink strips—or wide perforated sheets—are dropped into the nearest litter bin. Since the shops/garages/supermarkets have already paid for the stamps, this seems a terrible waste.

In January of 1967 I suggested, through the Humanist papers, that the collection of unwanted trading stamps might be used to benefit Humanist charity organisations. The response was very encouraging, with envelopes containing a couple of dozen loose stamps—to several whole books, dropping through my letterbox from time to time. Since then individuals and Humanist Groups have regularly contributed to this collection.

The first books of stamps were exchanged in July 1968 and with them, two pillows, four pillow cases, two single sheets, a bedside lamp and two hot water bottles were obtained for the guest room of the Humanist Housing Association's latest project, the old people's flatlets at Rose Bush Court. In July 1969 eight lightweight garden chairs replaced the old ones at Burnett House, with more garden chairs to follow in September of 1970.

In between times, the residents of Rose Bush Court had

settled in and were organising their own weekly social evenings. But small tables had to be gathered from all over the building for each occasion. So in March 1970 enough stamps had been collected to get five card tables.

With the new extensions to Rose Bush Court just completed, and the prospect of further social evenings, more card tables were needed. Sufficient stamps had been collected by February of this year to provide ten card tables—with a collection of 12 "pink books" still to be exchanged.

By belonging to the trading stamp companies' "community savings plan"—or similar projects, a discount of one book in six is given to recognised charities. With this discount, and the many small and large contributions of stamps, given by Humanists all over the country, it has been possible to get these "extras" and thus help many older people.

I have often wondered what an isolated, individual humanist can do, with no Humanist Group and few local humanist contacts around. Obviously it's sticking in green and pink stamps—so please continue sending them! Many thanks.

*2 Hutchings Road,
Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire.



HALO-CINATION?

COMMENSALISM, OR, A MODUS VIVENDI

Kitten: I don't know why
I put up with you!
Your terrorise the garden,
Tear up the furniture,
Eat and drink me
Out of house and home,
And then waltz off
With a chop I'd cooked for my dinner!

Kitten: there's another thing.
It was cold last night,
And after inveigling
Your furry frame
Through the blankets,
Jousting with the sheets,
And savaging my ankles,
You curled round my feet
And kept them warm.

I suppose, kitten,
I'm duly bound
To admit you have your uses
After all!

L.G.B.

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Editor: NIGEL SINNOTT

103 Borough High Street,
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Telephone: 01-407 1251

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses.

London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Manchester: Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

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.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mout, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 19 March, 6.30 p.m.: W. Hynes, "Insurance Funds and their Impact on the National Economy".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 19 March, 7.30 p.m.: Ken Harrison, Dr. Justin Schlicht, and Lesley Mitchell will lead a discussion on Laing's theory of psychotherapy.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 19 March, 11 a.m.: Prof. Hyman Levy, "The Logic of Experience". Tuesday, 21 March, 7 p.m.: Alec Wilding-White and Adrian Liddell Hart, "The Psychology of Punishment".

Thorndyke Theatre, Leatherhead, Surrey. 18-25 March: paintings by Oswell Blakeston and Halima Nalecz.

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Hand-side Lane, Welwyn. Thursday, 23 March, 8 p.m.: Russell Stephenson, "The Relevance of the Buddhist Faith for Modern Western Man".

NEWS

AID FOR BANGLADESH WOMEN

For Bangladesh the war of liberation from the Pakistanis is over, but the appalling suffering is not. Those of us watched the "24 Hours" programme on television a fortnight ago must have been relieved to hear that the Bangladesh government has legalised abortion for rape victims many of whom were, as Dr. Malcolm Potts pointed out, little more than children. The emergency abortion service being set up by the I.P.P.F. will do something to ameliorate the pall of misery that hangs over the poor women of East Bengal, but for many of the rape victims their pregnancies are too far advanced for abortion, and the consequences will almost inevitably follow a pattern of infanticide, ostracism, despair and suicide for a generation or even more, like some revolting Greek tragedy. "It is pitiful", wrote Jill Tweedie in a *Guardian* article (6 March). "It is also entirely logical—the inevitable nadir of a systematic treatment of women as virtual slaves with no identities of their own."

One ray of hope is the formation of the Bangladesh Women's Emancipation Programme, which aims to give assistance to rape victims, widows, and orphans, and tackle the long-term business of giving the women of Bangladesh the means of achieving social and economic equality. The immediate need is for money, and in view of the vast scale of the human suffering in Bengal, the Programme deserves every penny that can be spared. Please be generous. Donations to the Bangladesh Women's Emancipation Programme can be sent c/o the International Planned Parenthood Federation, 18 Lower Regent Street, London, W.1.

VASECTOMY BILL

Phillip Whitehead's N.H.S. (Family Planning) Amendment Bill is now out of Committee, where it has been improved by a number of minor amendments, and comes up for the Report and Third Reading stages in the House of Commons on Friday, 24 March.

"There is a small but determined minority opposing the passage of the Bill", says Alastair Service, Chairman of the Birth Control Campaign. "It is therefore vital that not less than 100 supporting M.P.s are present throughout the sitting on 24 March to bring to a close the debate on each amendment and to enable a vote to be taken. Otherwise all day could be taken up discussing one restrictive amendment with no conclusion. The Bill would then make no further progress since only one day has been allowed for the Report and Third Reading stages."

The new Bill is intended to provide an important extension to the present contraceptive services by enabling local authorities to add vasectomy (male sterilisation) to the range of birth control facilities available through their own clinics, or alternatively to pay for vasectomy through the Family Planning Association.

Please write to your M.P. and ask him to be present throughout Friday, 24 March, and to vote in favour of the Bill as it now stands. This is something that can be done both by individual readers and local Humanist groups.

S AND NOTES

"INTERCESSION" FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The National Secular Society said in a press release this week that the "Ecumenical Service of Intercession for Northern Ireland", which was held in Westminster Cathedral on Tuesday, was "a deliberate and calculated attempt to divert attention from the role of Christianity in Ireland's troubles, past and present".

Cardinal Heenan, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council participated in the service, which was attended by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The N.S.S. statement concludes: "As we observe the murderous activities of Ulstermen—united only in their adherence to the Christian faith—we should be thankful that England is, in the words of Cardinal Heenan, 'a post-Christian nation; a land of former believers.'"

SCIENTOLOGISTS WOO MINISTERS

According to a recent survey carried out by the Church of Scientology, "65% of the population have not been to Church recently: 31% do not know what the purposes of the varying religions are: 45% see no value in going to Church anyway, and 30% there is a gap between society generally and religion".

"We can bridge that gap", claim the Scientologists, who are offering "scholarships" in "communication and counselling techniques" to ministers in any religion. "We are experts in the field of communication", say the Scientologists modestly. "We have the staff to instruct, the premises and the wherewithal . . . Now others can share in our success."

The March number of *Freedom (Scientology)* says that the offer has been made "because the Church of Scientology views with great concern the current decline in the Church's sphere of influence in the United Kingdom".

BEELZEBUB'S BROADCASTING CORPORATION

The B.B.C. is not, as we had all naïvely imagined, administered directly from the summit of Mount Sinai. The sulphurous fumes of a locality like Mt. Vesuvius would appear to be more in keeping with the conclusions reached by the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis, which says that the Corporation has done "more to lower the morals and contaminate the atmosphere of the nation with the virus of irresponsibility" than any other factor. The Presbytery further adds: "One cannot but conclude that the 'Prince of the Power of the Air' is in almost complete control of the B.B.C."

Only one thing for it: the Gathering of Gloom will have to send for Batman to purge Broadcasting House!

JUST AS WE THOUGHT . . .

"When you mention the Shankill Road it is very emotive and quite often the more vocal elements of the Shankill Road have held the headlines, but the Shankill Road people are the best example of sincere, church-going Protestant people."

—The Rev. Jack Stewart, interviewed recently by the *Methodist Recorder* (2 March).

UNITARIAN "SEX KIT" VICTORY

The Unitarian Universalist Association of America has won a major court case over its controversial Sunday School teaching kit, entitled *About Your Sexuality*.

According to the British Unitarian paper, *The Inquirer*, "The case arose in Milwaukee, after the District Attorney had threatened that the church there could be prosecuted if it started to use the kit without 'establishing ground rules from his office'. The church . . . sought an injunction halting the threatened prosecution, which was granted. The judge who issued the injunction commented that because people may, for reasons of embarrassment or on moral grounds, object to the discussion of human sexuality, this was insufficient reason for curbing the truth."

A decision has yet to be taken, says *The Inquirer*, as to whether the kit should be used in Unitarian Sunday Schools in Britain.

MALE CHAUVINISM: SKYE'S THE LIMIT

The good ladies of the Isle of Skye, who held a Women's World Day of Prayer for peace recently on the theme of "All joy be yours", gave scant joy to some of the local Free Presbyterian and Free Church ministers. One minister, from Struan, denounced the prayer day "because Roman Catholics are taking part." The clergy, needless to say, were also able to cite unimpeachable scriptural authority for their disapproval, namely and to wit:

1 Corinthians 14:34. "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law."

1 Timothy 2:11. "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection."

Reports have also reached us that Commandant-General Fiona MacDrumnadrochit ("The Boadicea of the Braes") whose Scottish Libertarian Volunteers have won resounding victories in the field in recent weeks (see "News and Notes", 26 February), has despatched her élite Amazon (Women's Lib.) Brigade along the road to the isles. We are unable to ascertain whether their orders include "no quarter", but the Skye ministers would do well to take the first "bonny boat" to Northern Ireland . . .

THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

20p (plus 3p postage)

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BOOKS

LAST OF THE TSARS.

By Richard Tames. Pan Books, 40p.

This very readable, well documented, and splendidly illustrated booklet tells the tragic story of the last Romanoff Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II (1894-1917) and of his ill-fated wife and family. It accomplishes this task with essential accuracy, though if one requires a deeper understanding of what was ultimately an impersonal tragedy, one would have to turn to a more detailed study, such as, for example, Bertrand Wolfe's *Three Who Made a Revolution*, or the masterly opening chapters of Trotsky's unique *History of the Russian Revolution*. As a less ambitious "bird's eye view" of the last phases of the Tsarist Empire, Mr. Tames's summary admirably fulfils its introductory purpose.

This heavily documented summary is almost entirely factual in content. It has no pretensions to ideology. Consequently, perhaps, the best way to review it is to make a précis of its essential contents.

THE LAST ROMANOFFS

The Romanoff dynasty reigned over the vast Russian Empire for just over three centuries (1613-1917). In general, their ruler was autocratic and medieval, though the dynasty did manage to produce one extraordinary man; that great organiser Tsar Peter (1681-1725), who laid the foundations of present day Russian sea power by himself working in the London docks. There was, however, nothing remarkable in his last reigning descendant Nicholas II, a weak man entirely dominated by stronger personalities. In particular, by the Anglo-German Tsarina, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, who actually arranged the marriage between Nicholas and Alexandra. The Tsarina, rather than the Tsar, represented the real ruler of Russia in the final, inglorious, imperial phase. It was she, and her confident, Rasputin (that hypnotic manipulator of E.S.P.), who finally ruined the last hope of survival for the Russian monarchy.

A BANKRUPT REGIME

Mr. Tames clearly demonstrates the personal tragedy of the last Tsar and his family, and summarises the tragedy of the bankrupt régime of which Nicholas II as the last official representative. Two centuries previously, Tsar Peter, a Romanoff "Stalin", had laid down with the ruthless efficiency of his modern Bolshevik antitype the foundations of a modern empire. But his successors were too reactionary or incompetent to complete the task. As a result, Russia entered the industrial age as "A giant with feet of clay"; as a still semi-medieval, semi-Asiatic autocracy marooned in a modern world of advanced technology with which Tsarist Russia could not hope to compete in either peace or war. The Tsarist Empire needed another Peter, if the régime was to survive. What it got was Nicholas II!

THE LAST TSAR

Nicholas himself succeeded Alexander III, a more capable and ruthless Tsar, and at first attempted to carry on the autocracy unchanged. But the "Achilles Heel" of his historically obsolete régime was soon demonstrated, notably by Russia's spectacular defeat by the hitherto unknown Japanese Empire in 1904-5. (As the author demonstrates, the Japanese also began with a "Pearl Harbour" before declaring war, by a surprise attack on the Russian Fleet anchored in Port Arthur!)

FREETHINKER

REFORM VERSUS REVOLUTION

This total and totally unexpected Russian defeat immediately sparked off a revolution in Russia herself. Nicholas was forced to grant a limited Constitution, and a Duma (parliament) enjoyed a brief existence. This reform represented the last hope of adaptation by the old discredited régime. But Nicholas soon dismissed his able minister Count Witte, the political leader of rising Russian capitalism. Another able Russian statesman, P. A. Stolypin, embarked on a policy of land reform. In particular, he aimed at breaking up the old Russian communal land system by transforming the Russian countryside into a system of individual proprietorship (Kulaks). N.B. In 1908, Jacob Richter, alias Ulianof Lenin, applied for a ticket for the library of the British Museum specifically in order to study "the Land Question in Russia"!

STOLYPIN VERSUS LENIN

Some historians have argued that, had Stolypin's reforms had time to mature, they would have ultimately prevented the Socialist Revolution in Russia. However, the assassination of Stolypin (1911), and then the outbreak of war in 1914, gave an entirely new turn to Russian history, one that decisively put an end to the Tsarist régime.

THE DOWNFALL

One cardinal fact emerges clearly from this lucid narrative; both the fall of the Russian monarchy and the 1917 revolutions were not primarily caused by socialism, but conversely, by social collapse! As far back as 1878, the English Tory, Lord Salisbury, had predicted the socialist revolution in Russia in the event of a future defeat in war. The military débacle in the 1914-17 war was similar to that against Japan but on a far vaster scale. It was not merely nor primarily a military collapse; but an organic social collapse of an obsolete social system. The collapse came in 1917 first in March, then more decisively, with the Bolshevik revolution in November. A terrible civil war marked its death agony, claiming, amongst innumerable victims, the last Tsar, the Tsarina, and their pathetic children. It was the end of a lurid chapter of history ending in a wholesale massacre worthy of a Shakespearean tragedy. These pages furnish an admirable summary of this spectacular prologue to the Russian Revolution represented by the last days of the Russian Monarchy.

F. A. RIDLEY

DAVID TRIBE'S PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, M.P.

David Tribe . . . is well-placed to tell the story of Charles Bradlaugh, who founded the [National Secular] Society in 1866 . . . He has had ready access to the files of The Freethinker, the only freethought periodical to survive until today, and has consulted many unpublished Bradlaugh family papers.—Encounter

£4.00 + 20p postage

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REVIEWS

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SEX.

By Dr Philip Cauthery and Dr. Martin Cole.

W. H. Allen, £3.00.

Books written for adults about sex do not seem in general to be any better than those written for children and young people. The appalling *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* has demonstrated that the older generation are likely to find it almost as difficult to gain accurate information about sex as it is for the young.

The Fundamentals of Sex goes some way towards fulfilling the need for factual and enlightened books about sex. Written by Dr. Philip Cauthery, and with illustrations supplied by Dr. Martin Cole, it covers most aspects of sexual development, sex expression, reproduction, contraception, abortion, venereal diseases, and the so-called "deviations". Unfortunately some topics are treated in less detail than they should be, and, most regrettably, the treatment is not always as enlightened as one might have hoped. On the question of homosexuality Cauthery recognises that "it is possible that we are all potentially homosexual", but then contradicts this with the statement that "homosexuality does not make biological sense".

In general, however, the author is well-informed and avoids moralistic prejudice. At the end of the book there is a glossary of some 150 terms. As well as definitions of these terms there is a guide to their pronunciation. Cauthery has looked for amusing phonetic equivalents, (e.g. "Endomorphic—End-oh-more-fick"), and some of these are particularly memorable—which is, of course, just the point; the humour is deliberate and not unconscious, as some short-sighted reviewers have suggested.

The Fundamentals of Sex is not without its faults but it is nonetheless a very useful reference work.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

LETTERS

People First

I am appalled by D. C. Taylor's letter objecting to the humanist principle that "all people are entitled to a decent home, enough food, etc." Assuming that *he* has a decent home, enough food, etc., I should like to know whether he will be one of the first volunteers to relinquish them and die of exposure and/or famine. Humanists believe that we must drastically reduce the number of babies born, but that, once born, they all have the right to the necessities of life.

The slogan "People First" does not, of course, imply the total exclusion of other species from "the scheme of things entire": on the contrary, the quality of human life would be greatly impoverished if we did not share the earth with a wide variety of wild animals. But we could certainly do with, for instance, fewer pet dogs (for whose tinned food kangaroos and whales are slaughtered), though I would not vote for killing off even dogs by starvation.

BARBARA SMOKER.

The Base, Brutal, and Bloody Saxon

In your front page editorial of 4 March, "The Aldershot Tragedy", you relate how Free State troops killed their prisoners and how Northern Ireland Protestants shot Catholic children. You then hint that British people might have been found to indulge in bestiality, in a purely hypothetical case, of course, bestiality and terrorism being no part of a true Briton's make-up. Perhaps you have not heard of the Black and Tans?

It is this self-righteous, tutorial and hypocritical attitude of the British towards the Irish which we find exasperating and a stumbling block towards understanding and co-operation. How, too, can Englishmen see the Northern Ireland crisis in historical terms when they close their eyes to unpalatable facts or regard themselves as the infallible gift of God to mankind in general and to the Irish in particular.

J. P. ROCHE.

The Editor replies:

In writing editorials I try, within the limitations of my talents, to bear in mind the words of the founder of this paper: "There is no nation like the English for humbug and hypocrisy. I suppose I may add also, there is no nation likes the English for humbug and hypocrisy".

Mr. Roche, could, however, have had the courtesy to chastise me for what I really wrote. I said nothing about "might have been found . . ."; what I wrote was "would have found". I also said that "no nation has a monopoly either of nobility or bestiality".

I am indeed familiar with the story of the Black and Tans, and, for that matter, Cromwell, whom I am surprised Mr. Roche did not cite as well. I preferred to use the Nazis because they were a recent phenomenon, and I often used to hear it said, "It couldn't have happened here".

Mr. Roche's final comment is true of Englishmen; I would have also thought it to be, in general terms, a universal weakness of human nature. Perhaps our correspondent would have us believe that Irishmen, however, are never "self-righteous, tutorial and hypocritical".

Irish Nationalism and Catholicism

Pádraig O Conchúir's letter contains little new, being mostly a repetition of well known arguments manipulated to portray a personal point of view.

Has not every modern community been influenced by the French Revolution and the writings of Tom Paine? But where a community is steeped in "control by fear" methods as indoctrinated by the Roman Catholic Church, is it not obvious that comparable methods will emerge in other communal activities? (Take for example Italy and the Mafia.) Whether members of the I.R.A. are now sectarian or not, these methods must run parallel to the beliefs of the stock from which they come, for neither branch of the I.R.A. could have operated at this or any other time without the goodwill of the "masses"—on both sides of the border.

And would not Pádraig O Conchúir admit that Tom Paine would have been the first to agree that even a minority of Protestants are entitled to have a "point of view"—and the right to assert it? For if a United Ireland is ever to be achieved, I am sure it will not be as the result of a reign of terror, and the Protestant case is rarely presented.

It would have been better if the Editor had been able to find room for all my original letter, for I believe the views expressed could have done with the same airing as Mr. O Conchúir's views got.

BEN MARCATO.

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The 1872 Ballot Act

Eric Glasgow, in his article of 26 February, remarks on the defects of the process of counting heads, but does not suggest any improvements.

It is certainly possible to improve the process, partly by making possible the expression of some of the ideas that are in the heads, and partly by making sure that each head will count as much as any other.

At present, we vote with Xs, as if we were illiterate, and all we can do is to express total approval of one candidate and the party for which he stands. We are asked to think about all sorts of complex questions—the Common Market, education, Industrial Relations, etc., but all we can do is to decide that, on the whole, we would rather that such and such a party formed the government, and then vote for the one candidate of that party, no matter what may be his opinion of any of those questions or his personal fitness to be an M.P. The Electoral Reform Society seeks to change the system so as to give the voter a free choice among different candidates of each party, and therefore every encouragement to think out their personal merits and opinions.

The second big defect of our electoral system is that even if the voter does completely approve of candidate X, it is an even chance that his vote for that candidate will not help to elect him. In every British general election, nearly half the voters vote for losing candidates and have no more effect on the result than if they had stayed at home or been left off the register, and many thousands of these are in the same position in every election throughout their lives. A Conservative living in Southwark, or a Labour supporter just across the river in the City of London, is lucky if he ever elects a Borough Councillor, let alone an M.P. of the kind he wants. That is inevitable, so long as we elect only one M.P. from each constituency.

The remedy is to elect several M.P.s together (say, all of those for one of the larger London Boroughs, or better still for two or three of those Boroughs put together) and to do it by numbering candidates in the order of the voter's preference. The effect of this is not only to give each party seats in proportion to the votes cast for each candidate, but also to fill those seats with the particular candidates whom the voters consider the best.

ENID LAKEMAN, Director,
Electoral Reform Society.

Low, Lenin, Lunacy and Lightheadedness

I think a protest is necessary regarding the article by I. S. Low on "Lenin's Lunacies" especially when Lenin's book on Imperialism is described as "such tripe".

That so much space should be devoted to such a controversial political subject in *The Freethinker* is to say the least rather bewildering.

J. W. FRETTON.

I am sorry that Mr. Fretton is bewildered, but ever since it first appeared The Freethinker has, in fact, dealt with "controversial political subjects", particularly on social law reform. On party politics in the narrowest sense, the paper remains, as far as possible, uncommitted. (Ed.)

If I. S. Low ("Lenin's Lunacies", 4 March) wishes to propagate his World Government idea then surely it would be advisable for him to use a more simple type of "spruader" than the Marxian version—the mechanics of which seem a little too complex for his mental tool-kit.

The title of Lenin's, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, explains that author's concept of imperialism, yet nowhere do we find I. S. Low doing the same. We can only assume he considers it to start with "expansion by conquest", and he is quite entitled to that thought. But to imagine that his idea disproves Lenin's theory of monopoly capitalism is fatuous indeed. His papilionaceous mental waftings and flittings hardly disturb the dust on Lenin's "monument" still less reduce it to "ruins".

So "... Lenin had a problem after the Revolution". But how Stalin could have been elevated to power amidst the panoramic scene of ever recurring catastrophe that must have constituted Lenin's vision, is beyond my comprehension. Surrounded with internal famine, hunger and civil war; external American, British, French and goodness-knows-who-else's invading forces; and the whole, draped with the steel curtain of the British navy; I would think that Joe Stalin could hardly have raised a meaningful sigh.

On reflection, I. S. Low's conclusion of Lenin's book, "... I was astounded: it is such tripe!" brings to my mind the profound quip of an old friend: "Never contradict an expert in his own subject".

TREVOR MORGAN.

Low's lightheaded caricature of "Lenin's Lunacies" simply demonstrates his own sloppy reading and conscienceless quotation-clipping.

He sophisticatedly dismisses Lenin's *Imperialism* as "tripe" and then summarises Lenin's conception of the evolution of the domination of the world by capitalist monopolies as has been confirmed by facts. But Lenin wrote, says Low, that "capitalists decide they need not export goods any more. They export capital".

This "tripe" is the direct result of Low's not noticing that Lenin's reference to *goods* (which he put in italics) was to *consumers' goods* only, for he went on to say of capital export: "The most usual thing is to stipulate that part of the loan that is granted shall be spent on purchases in the country of issue... the export of capital abroad thus becomes a means for encouraging the export of commodities". Who on earth could have guessed this from Low's castrated quotation?

Also Lenin (not as portrayed by Low) is quite explicit that modern imperialism has evolved from competitive colonialism. He writes that the "imperialism of the beginning of the twentieth century completed the partition of the world... Embryonic imperialism has grown into a dominant system" from one when the "free grabbing" of territories was possible".

Yet again, Low triumphantly discovers that Lenin described one piece of German legislation as annoying the "magnates" as if in the Marxist-Leninist view capitalist states must please all capitalists all the time. This view of Marxism is nonsense. Capitalism is itself full of conflicts—in Britain today we have a capitalist state and a capitalist government but many capitalists are rightly concerned at Heath's proposed Common Market sell-out.

Finally, it was no more "lunacy" to Lenin to co-operate with Stalin (or Trotsky) when he felt that this would be beneficial than it was for Stalin, in his day, to co-operate with Churchill and Roosevelt; or for that matter, if Low hates the Heath government as much as I do, for me to co-operate with Low for such a common purpose as the dislodging of Heath.

PAT SLOAN.

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