

# The FREETHINKER

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## ABORTION ACT VINDICATED

—LANE COMMITTEE UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTS THE ACT AND ITS PROVISIONS

MADELEINE SIMMS

"We have no doubt that the gains facilitated by the Act have much outweighed any disadvantages for which it has been criticised. The problems which we have identified in its working, and they are admittedly considerable, are problems for which solutions should be sought by administrative and professional action, and by better education of the public. They are not, we believe, indications that the grounds set out in the Act should be amended in a restrictive way. To do so when the numbers of unwanted pregnancies is increasing and before comprehensive services are available to all who need them would be to increase the sum of human suffering and ill health, and probably drive more women to seek the squalid and dangerous help of the back-street abortionist." These are the conclusions of the Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act, whose report was published on 3 April. It had investigated the working of the Act for three years, and its principal conclusion came as a shattering blow to the religious pressure groups that had been responsible for calling it into being. Back in 1971, Mr. Norman St. John-Stevas, M.P., organized the political lobby that forced Sir Keith Joseph's hand in the matter. "There is little chance of getting amending legislation without a preceding full scale inquiry," he observed in the columns of the *Catholic Herald*. "I have concentrated on obtaining this. I have worked for it for more than three years." Well, he got it. And now, by a nice political irony, it has torpedoed him.

### Unanimous Report

The chairman of the Lane Committee was a High Court judge of conservative reputation. The best known gynaecologist on the Committee was a pillar of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and a veteran of previous official committees. Her views on abortion were widely believed to be of a highly traditional kind. Nonetheless, the Committee, faced with this controversial subject, was able to come to a unanimous conclusion. This was more than the Birkett Committee on abortion was able to obtain in 1939, and no one expected agreement this time either. Mrs. Lane's achievement is a considerable one, and the Report in consequence will have to be taken very seriously indeed. Even *The Times* leader writer realized there was nothing left but character assassination. If the Lane Committee reported in favour of the Act "perhaps that says something about the selection of the members of the committee." Naughty Sir Keith. He should have consulted the hierarchy before assembling his team. Or failing that, Mr. Ronald Butt of *The Times*, who divulged his views on birth control to his readers the very same week: "It is not going too far to say that there is a vested interest in sexual activity without procreation, just as there is in smoking cigarettes." Alas Mr. Butt may well be correct. (He, presumably has twenty children—or lives a life of flawless chastity.)

### Day care

The Committee stated that abortion should remain within the mainstream of general medical care, and that there should be greater equality of opportunity for women to obtain abortion within the National Health Service. To facilitate this, its most important recommendation is that day care facilities should be encouraged:

The provision of adequate facilities for early day care abortions could provide a useful step towards the solution of many other problems in the working of the Abortion Act and would remove some of the pressure from gynaecological wards while at the same time keeping abortion within the mainstream of gynaecology.

Nor need day care remain the prerogative of the National Health Service:

In principle there is no reason why a distinction should be made between the provision of day care abortion services in the N.H.S. and in the private sector. However, the owners of private nursing homes approved for abortion wishing to provide a day care service would need to fulfil all the requirements set out above.

These requirements are listed in full and include providing adequate counselling, returning patient to the care of a local general practitioner, sufficient beds in the event of the patient requiring a bed after all, and much else.

### Abuses

On the negative side, the Committee found some evidence of abuse in the private sector, chiefly where foreign patients were concerned, though it believes this to be confined to some twenty to thirty doctors in all. To prevent the possibility of taxi-touting and advertising abroad, the committee recommends that the referral agencies be brought under statutory control and licensed:

We can see no justification for the existence of any fee-charging service which provides information only . . . We recommend that only those agencies or bureaux which provide medical consultation should be licensed.

The Committee recommends that there should be an upper time-limit for abortion of twenty-four weeks' gestation. (This would affect about 100 abortions a year.)

## THE FREETHINKER

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It also wishes to stiffen penalties for contravening the Act (imprisonment for twelve months or a fine of £1,000 or both) and to include the new method of menstrual aspiration (or uterine evacuation) under the provision of the Act, even though the method is used before pregnancy has been diagnosed.

### Myths

The Report explodes a good many popular abortion myths. The risk of mental disturbance after therapeutic abortion "appears to be slight". The incidence of illegal abortion has fallen since the Abortion Act came into force. Two researchers, not wholly unconnected with certain anti-pressure groups, "provided much detailed information about late morbidity from abortion particularly from Eastern Europe". In a devastatingly dead-pan rejoinder, the Report comments: "The Committee noted that the publication referred largely to adverse effects said to result from the termination of pregnancy: other evidence which *was not quoted* (my italics) suggests that the incidence of late complications of therapeutic abortion was often no greater than the incidence following childbirth." The Committee urges further research into these and other matters, stresses the need for abortion counselling, and urges more intensive contraceptive education.

The second volume of the Report consists of statistics and is likely to be of interest chiefly to persons working in the field. The third volume consists of a most interesting survey of abortion patients made by Dr. Ann Cartwright and Susan Lucas of the Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care. They interviewed a random sample of women having abortions in the Spring of 1972, to find out how they had been treated as abortion patients, and how much they knew about contraception. This brings out a mass of useful information about the women who *succeeded* in getting abortion under the Act. (It does not of course tell us anything about those who failed to do so). The important fact that this survey reveals is that 87 per cent of these women applied for abortion *very early* (before nine weeks). If they were ultimately terminated late, this was not their fault but the fault of the system. It may well be this finding that encouraged the Committee to advocate day clinics which are obviously feasible if most women are already applying for abortion early in

pregnancy. Another finding of interest to freethinkers will be the confirmation that Catholic women are as likely to apply for abortions as anyone else, given the opportunity: "Catholics opt for abortion as often as other women when faced with another pregnancy." And this, despite the deluge of propaganda to which they are subjected. Such women constitute the silent majority who make nonsense of the SPUC and LIFE marches and demonstrations and petitions.

### Comments welcome

In her statement in the House of Commons on 3 April, Mrs. Castle, the Secretary of State for Social Services, said:

The Committee's Report provides a detailed analysis of the working of the Abortion Act and we are writing to a number of interested organizations inviting them to submit comments on the recommendations it contains. I would also welcome comments submitted within the next three months from any organization not specifically invited to do so.

The National Secular Society submitted evidence to the Lane Committee. It will now be submitting comments to Mrs. Castle. Any members of the Society who have views they would like to be considered in this context, are asked to send them to the secretary without delay (698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL).

*Report of the Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act (Cmnd. 5579). H.M.S.O. Vol. 1 £1.75, vol. 2 £2.15, vol. 3 £0.79.*

## N.S.S. ANNUAL DINNER

On Saturday 30 March over one hundred members and friends of the National Secular Society assembled for the Society's sixty-eighth annual dinner at the Paviour's Arms, Westminster. Barbara Smoker, the Society's President, was in the chair, and welcomed guests from all over the country, from abroad, and from kindred organizations. Besides introducing the speakers she delighted the audience with samples from a seemingly endless fund of anecdotes about the many branches of her Catholic family.

The first speaker was John Calder, a long-standing friend of the N.S.S., and prominent member of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society. He said that we were not living at a happy time, and this not merely in relation to the economic crisis. There was a general apathy, an unwillingness to face up to the issues, and a preoccupation with trivia. At such a time it was good to be with humanists and rationalists who do not rely on "someone-up-there", whether God or party leader. During the 1960s society seemed to be becoming more tolerant. Now authority was totally discredited. One finds students unable to argue rationally, spouting jargon they do not understand. "The biggest threat to democracy comes from those unwilling to look at any other point of view, who follow modern prophets in much the same way as their grandfathers took up religion." Proposing the toast to the guest of honour, Tony Smythe, Mr. Calder said that he first met him on C.N.D. marches. This body has killed from within because it stopped speaking reason. As general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, Tony Smythe made it a really effective body for looking after the ordinary rights of the individual. It had pushed for every humane right obtained in the last fifteen years. It

must be militant, but not to such an extent that it appears doctrinaire. Tony Smythe's present work in the field of mental health was very important; he would never be far from protecting the liberty of the individual.

Mr. Smythe said that there was a danger that running a pressure group one would become a bureaucrat. He had been very lucky that when he went to the N.C.C.L. in 1966 he had a small team of good people to work with, and the work was not bogged down with personal squabbles. He himself was something of a pessimist, and so he was grateful to John Calder for the enthusiasm he brought to the executive committee. It might be thought that the N.C.C.L. was fighting on too many fronts, but civil liberties was such an important issues that this was an inevitable development. A good example of a successful pressure group was the Abortion Law Reform Association, where a determined group of people with an important and relevant subject could campaign and achieve a change in the law. Tony Smythe drew attention to the problem that most lawyers stood for the interests of middle-class property owners, but that if trends in the United States were repeated here the situation might improve. Now that he was working in the field of mental health he found the situation little better. In the United States the suicide rate among psychiatrists was higher than that among inmates of mental hospitals. He had recently read in a learned journal an article advocating that the practice of exorcism should be brought back into psychiatry. When in January he came to the National Association for Mental Health he found that they were in the process of compiling a hymn book for the mentally handicapped. Each day on the radio he listened to "Thought for the Day"; although "the biggest load of gibberish" it put him in a combative mood for the rest of the day. The godless organizations, he said, had consistently supported the N.C.C.L. and the time when their issues came up for discussion was known in the trade as the "god spot".

The most severe civil liberty issue in this country, said Mr. Smythe, was the fact that this was not a country of free speech. The frightening thing was that Watergate probably couldn't come out in Britain. The "D" notice system and the Official Secrets Act would see to that. Privacy was another matter of concern: the state and industry have the capacity to store and make available personal information, and sooner or later this will be used for political purposes. Generally speaking this was a bad time for civil liberty. Last year was terrible for the vulnerable and deprived in society. It is necessary to remove jargon from political and social affairs; we must speak directly and without exaggeration on these issues. Fortunately, there had already been improvements in the short time that the new Government had been in office, most noticeably in the field of immigration. The survival of the individual in the corporate state should be the priority issue on everybody's personal agenda. The mentally ill and handicapped, for example, in many ways had no rights. It is imperative to support those who cannot take up cudgels on their own behalf.

The proposer of the toast to the N.S.S. was someone well known to readers of *The Freethinker*. Introducing Madeleine Simms, Barbara reminded the audience that she had participated in a debate on television with Cardinal Heenan on the anti-social nature of the Roman Catholic Church. Barbara Smoker hoped that there no connection between Madeleine Simms's admirable performance there and the Cardinal's subsequent heart attack. Mrs. Simms

began by welcoming the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security's recent announcement of a free family planning service. This was an issue with which freethinkers had historically been associated. However, there was, she said, no reason to be complacent. Catholic organizations were becoming increasingly sophisticated; in virtually every constituency there was a Catholic pressure group, often innocuously labelled a Catholic Parents' Association, campaigning on such issues as education and abortion. When Mr. Edward Short said before the general election that giving more money to Catholic schools was an educational priority he was obviously responding to local pressure. In Bradford the Public Health Committee had gone so far as to provide public money for the local "Life" group. In anticipation she welcomed the findings of the Lane Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act (at that time still unpublished) but warned of the probable backlash. Already it had been suggested that the Committee was of insufficient standing; already a 100,000 demonstration was planned in London at the end of April, a significant proportion of which would be made up of schoolchildren. There was need, she said, for local counter-reaction supported by national voluntary organizations to resist this pressure.

Responding for the Society, Bill McIlroy, the General Secretary, thanked Mrs. Simms for her co-operation with the Society. The N.S.S. was often criticized, being told that the battles over the issues it stood for were finished—this both by well-meaning friends and patronizingly by religious opponents. The latter sort never suggested, however, they disband *their* organizations. Mr. McIlroy gave two examples of the continuing need for vigilance on the subjects of church school and sex education. Soon there would be separate Muslim schools in Yorkshire and Lancashire—the ghetto schools of the future. Secondly, it had recently been seriously suggested that canoeing should be encouraged in schools because it kept the sexes apart and in any case cold water was always at hand! The young are often criticized, he said, but the older generation too had things to answer for. There was the case of the headmaster of a north London school, now a Conservative M.P., and possibly a future Minister for the Arts, who had claimed that the height of human experience was the sound of the band of the Royal Marines on the deck of an aircraft carrier playing "Anchors Away". The important things was to be young at heart, not to jump on to every bandwagon, to be serious without being long-faced.

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## GOD'S INFAMOUS PROGENY

The activities of the religious sect known as the Children of God have prompted William McLroy, the General Secretary of the National Secular Society, to protest in an open letter to the Home Secretary. He points out that while many regard the methods of indoctrination employed by the Children of God hierarchy as very dubious, in a free society people are free to choose their religious affiliation and mode of life, whatever the social and psychological consequences to themselves. However, the methods used to collect money in the street are a matter for public concern. He writes:

I know from personal experience in the streets of North London that people are being hoodwinked into donating money to the sect. A member of the public is offered a leaflet, ostensibly free of charge, and if it is accepted payment is then demanded. The distributor often adopts a truculent attitude towards anyone who does not pay (or does not pay enough), and I have noticed that old people are sometimes perplexed and frightened by such tactics.

Mr. McLroy goes on to describe an even more objectionable practice adopted by the collectors. Often it seems they suggest that the money is "to help our work for children". There can be little doubt that the children to be helped are in fact themselves, the Children of God. In view of the strict rules governing flag days, carnivals and street collections, Mr. McLroy urges the Home Secretary to investigate the situation, especially as in the long run genuine charities will be damaged.

The Home Office have so far made no statement, other than to intimate that the letter was being studied and that a reply would be made in due course. The letter received widespread publicity in national and local press and radio. There was especially adverse comment on the sect and its activities in areas where they have or have had communities. Readers who have been pestered by such people in their area may wish to raise the matter in the correspondence columns of their local newspaper. The legal financial rackets of the established religious sects are enough to have to contend with, without having to let pass the dubious activities of an upstart sect such as the Children of God.

## FREEDOM OF SPEECH THREATENED

Freethinkers will be among the first to regret the National Union of Students' decision to prejudice the principle of freedom of speech by denying this freedom to groups which they consider "openly fascist or racist". A motion to this effect was passed at their annual conference and the policy was further pressed in a document published on 16 April. These moves are doubly regrettable: firstly it is regrettable that this freedom should be denied on university campuses, where one had always hoped that an almost total freedom of discussion was not only possible but desirable; secondly it is sad that this should have been done for the reason it was—as a stand against such fascist and racialist views. The students wish to fight against discrimination, against racialist legislation, for a stronger Race Relations Act, and for all that would make possible a multi-racial, multi-cultural society.

Unfortunately, the methods adopted are playing into the hands of their opponents and are among the worst that their opponents might adopt to prevent views contrary to their own being put forward. Already Mr. Jonathan Guinness, a spokesman of the Monday Club, has accused the students of being "in the state the Nazis were in before they attained power". He went on to wonder whether if

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they had the power they would exterminate their opponents. His view is unfair, but it is to be expected. It will do the cause the students support no good, when they are seen to be almost as intolerant as their opponents. It may be frustrating to let your opponents put forward their views, and peaceful means of reply may seem an inadequate response to the hateful views being expressed. However, it is to be hoped that the students will learn that it is a price that must be paid. The alternative—the denial of freedom of speech—is the beginning of the very road down which they would not want society to go.

## SEXUAL FREEDOM THREATENED

On 2 April the National Secular Society held at Caxton Hall, London, the first of its series of meetings on the theme of "Threats to Freedom". This first meeting was concerned with threats to sexual freedom. A powerful panel of speakers spoke on various aspects of the issue.

Mrs. Renée Short, Labour M.P. for Wolverhampton North East and a member of the Labour Party National Executive, said that all matters to do with sex, abortion, birth control and advice, and the proper informing of young people in these matters affecting their own lives and their relationships with others, are the subject of much hypocritical and hysterical distortion by individuals and groups who generally want to stifle open, frank discussion.

They seek to compel the majority of the population to accept their views, even though the majority of people are much more intelligent about these matters especially since the Abortion Law Reform Act was put on the Statute Book. I am glad we have a broadminded woman as Minister of Health who will certainly not allow herself to be pressurized by the intolerant section of the community. She has just announced in Parliament that a free family planning service within the National Health Service will start on 1 April.

We must not allow consultant gynaecologists to thwart this progressive move and we must press that general practitioners as well shall carry out this important service to the women of this country. We must be a pressure group to make sure that the benefits of a widespread free family planning service are available to all those women at risk and that medical students are properly trained to play their part in this.

Antony Grey, Secretary of the Albany Trust, claimed that the most pervasive threats to sexual freedom are still, as they have always been, ignorance and fear.

More and better sex education—in the widest sense—is the first essential. Even in this allegedly permissive age, far too many people—young as well as old—remain astonishingly ignorant about such basic facts of life as how their own bodies work . . . When it comes to the emotional side of sexuality, ignorance is even more widespread and profound; passion may be all right in novels, or clinically scrutinized on the analyst's couch, but most of us are afraid of its disruptive effect in real life. Sex rampant, or even sex subterranean, is a dangerous revolutionary and no respecter of persons. It sets the status quo at risk—which is perhaps among the reasons why our neo-puritans seek so strenuously to suppress it, or at least to contain it within the conventional confines of marriage and romanticized love . . .

I think the need for all sex to be 'loving' can be overdone as a concept and can sometimes obscure the truth that sex had with mutual enjoyment, though without love, can sometimes be healthier than sex accompanied by over-intense or too-possessive emotional involvement. A threat to sexual freedom is lack of balance between the physical and the emotional—in either direction . . . I believe it is high time for both the law and public attitudes to be brought more into line with the democratic principle that the State exists for the individual, and not vice versa; and that the citizen's private consenting sexual activities, whatever their nature and however morally reprehensible

# AND NOTES

sible they may seem to others, should be acknowledged to be his or her own affair unless they involve force, fraud or visible public nuisance.

Caroline Woodroffe said that we had to realize that because of the population explosion one of the greatest threats we now face is the threat to our precious right to have children.

For many years we have worked for the right not to have children, but we have not won the race against the population explosion and it is the freedom to have children that is now threatened. We must defend our right to make love and not have babies.

To preserve both of these freedoms we must control our own fertility. To do so we must have a third freedom which is the right to advertise means of fertility control. This freedom does not yet exist. For example, although we can advertise contraceptive services on television we are not yet allowed to advertise contraceptives.

Alastair Service, Chairman of the Birth Control Campaign, said that real N.H.S. family planning began only the previous day. He added:

Make no mistake about it, there are forces at work directly opposed to progress in this field. The Pope's confidential circular to the Roman Catholic Church urging every effort to oppose the introduction of contraceptive services in Population Year was a serious matter for the ten per cent of the United Kingdom population that is Catholic. There is a surviving school of right-wing thought at Westminster which is opposed to family planning, particularly for the unmarried.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, a collection of religious fanatics, moralizing bigots and misguided idealists form a considerable threat to the relatively liberal abortion law in this country. They bombard M.P.s with misleading literature and petitions. Because we, the progressives lack the vast resources of the Churches, there is every risk that a restricting Bill will be introduced to Parliament next autumn.

## POPULATION PRESSURES

Readers will welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security that the Government intends to introduce forthwith a free comprehensive family planning service. Freethinkers have long campaigned in this field and it is gratifying to see the policies they advocated being adopted. It will perhaps be no surprise that as usual the doctors are dragging their feet. Give the doctors an advance in medicine of great social significance and the chances are that they will be found resisting for one reason or another. This will mean that for the time being the free service will not include general practitioners and hospital doctors. However, clinic services will be available immediately. This change coincides with the administrative re-organization of the health services. The situation is that where the independent Family Planning Association provided an agency service for the old local health authorities they will continue to do so for the new Area Health Authorities for at least a year, when the services will progressively be taken under direct control. In other areas the services will be provided directly by the health authorities. In preparation for a diminishing rôle in the direct provision of family planning services the F.P.A. is now to concentrate on sex education. The need for comprehensive family planning services backed up by adequate sex education, the F.P.A. say, is shown by the experience of workers in the field who find shame, fear, ignorance, distortion and misinformation surrounding unwanted conception. "The reason six out of ten brides go to the altar pregnant is because they feel they cannot talk

to their parents about sex." And far too often there is no reliable source of information to turn to.

On a world perspective the International Planned Parenthood Federation stress the need for World Population Year by pointing out that less than a third of the world's five hundred million women at risk to pregnancy are adequately protected, and that only half the world's population have access to organized family planning services. As a result, they say, "Abortion is the most common form of birth control." It is against this background that the intervention of the Roman Catholic Church in World Population Year must be seen.

In March a confidential communication from the Vatican to Catholic hierarchies around the world was leaked to the press by dissident Catholics. The document urges Catholics to put pressure on governments and international agencies to jeopardize the aims of World Population Year. It reiterates the arrogant Catholic doctrine that whatever the Pope decrees is binding not only on Catholics, but applies to all mankind. It might be thought that the Catholic Church has been soft-peddling on this issue, which is unpopular even with its own followers. So it is just as well the true situation should be made clear, and the potential threat to the liberty of non-Catholics seen for what it is.

Presumably prompted by this document early in April the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales issued a statement on World Population Year. This statement takes the same line as the one circulated by the Vatican. It tries to direct attention away from issues of family limitation towards wider issues of social justice. These wider issues are, of course, important, but the ploy is seen for what it is when no problem is seen in the millions at present being born to a life of total frustration. Again, the same potential threat to the liberty of non-Catholics is incorporated in the statement that "No government is justified in promoting, still less imposing, solutions which are an affront to human dignity and an unwarranted intrusion into family life" (italics supplied).

Commenting specifically on the introduction of free family planning services in Britain Cardinal Hecnan trotted out the old irrelevancies about family planning services encouraging promiscuity and promoting the spread of venereal diseases. It was, he said, an insult to youth to suggest that they cannot refrain from fornication. As a correspondent to the *Guardian* asked why, if he really thinks so, does he do just that? It all goes to show just how out of touch with ordinary Catholics the hierarchy is. As a Catholic mother of six is reported as saying (quoted in the *Daily Express*). "I still get angry that the Church nearly destroyed my relationship with my husband. What right do they have to tell us we can't have sex without babies? Sex isn't dirty. It's beautiful—and as close to heaven as I care to be for now."

## FREETHINKER FUND

We are grateful to those readers who contributed to the Freethinker Fund during March.

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# RADICALS, REDS AND RELATIVITIES

PHILIP HINCHLIFF

Writing two weeks before Mr. Healey's budget and several more weeks before these words can be read, I may be proved dead wrong. Mr. Wilson's minority Labour government might get the unions to agree to a social contract; Labour's social policies might buy off strikes; the unions might not follow the thirty per cent rise the striking miners squeezed out of the Coal Board; and inflation could conceivably abate. As of now, though, I doubt it. Mr. Wilson's government is not exactly stuffed with reds, but there are enough of them in the unions to make life difficult for him, especially when the left-wing socialists in the cabinet are numerous enough and powerful enough to back the "militant" policies of wage free-for-all long espoused by the extreme left. It is therefore going to be important that radicals speak up common sense, which in this context means support for the "relativities" principle outlined by the Conservative government's pay board.

## Power jungle

I imagine few people, whatever their political views, can really support the present system of wage determination under which only those with powerful unions to look after them can maintain the real value of their incomes in the face of inflation. Public-spirited or unmilitant unions lose out all along the line, whilst those who do not, or can not, organize themselves are made relatively poorer and poorer. This is what a hundred years of union bargaining have led to, in 1974: surrenders to industrial force, a worsening income distribution, no real advance in the position of the poorest, and cynical exploitation of low-paid public servants who cannot strike. Noises are continually made by trade unions and governments alike about the low paid, but they remain noises. No radical or humanist can defend this jungle, yet how to escape from it has been for thirty years the great unsolved riddle of British politics. The report of the Pay Board on relativities promised a possible way out. It is unlikely that reds and extreme socialists would ever agree to a relativities-based incomes policy, but they are a tiny minority of the people of this country who represent only themselves. Radicals, on the other hand, should I think be prepared to consider the idea seriously.

What a debate on pay relativities needs above all, as the Pay Board's report made clear, is precisely what the miners' strike took away from it—a non-crisis situation. It is therefore an enormous pity that the report happened to coincide with the coal strike, and even more that a discredited Tory government should have seized on the report to extricate itself from an impasse it should never have got into. For if the Tories had won the election, they would have had to end the miners' strike by a settlement based on the relativities report, just as Mr. Wilson did. In this sense, as Enoch Powell made plain, the election was fraudulent; Stage Three would not have survived a Tory win, just as it will not survive the minority Labour government. Yet these twists and turns of policy and the overwhelming political pressure put on the pay board to rush out a surrender-type report giving the miners what they demanded made a rational discussion of the relativities principle impossible. One can only hope now that the whole idea will not crumble away in the great rush of inflation in the months ahead. For thirty per cent given to the miners when the national income will not rise at all this year, and

when no undertaking has been given that other unions will not follow suit, is inflation, pure and simple.

The relativities report put forward three main points. The procedure would work most effectively if wage and salary claims could be discussed in a calm atmosphere without the threat or reality of strike action hanging over the heads of the negotiators. The examination of a claim should take into account the economics of the industry or service. And—most important—the extra given to relatively favoured groups of workers should then be specifically withdrawn from the claims of other workers in the wages queue. This last is really a point of logic; if group A is acknowledged to be a special case relative to groups, B, C and D, it follows that group A should be paid more compared to B, C and D, which in turn means that these latter groups then restrain their own claims. This is the crucial point on which Mr. Heath's long and tortuous negotiations with the trade unions foundered time and again, for the unions give no such undertaking. Yet not to do so is to fly in the face of logic, for if B, C and D were to restore their own position vis-à-vis A the relative position of A would not in fact have improved at all; which is exactly what happened following the Wilberforce settlement after the last miners' strike in 1972. It was not thought polite in this latest trial of strength to point that out. I don't hold any particular brief for Ted, but I do see why he lost his patience.

## Orderly procedure

The attractions of an orderly relativities procedure for settling wage claims and perhaps other income changes are many. Government, unions and employers could continually negotiate about the distribution of the national income and how any extra slices of the cake resulting from economic growth could be shared out. There would at last be some real hope that low-paid groups would have their relative position improved permanently. Public servants would surely gain tremendously. Special cases like the miners—and they are a special case—would benefit, because their relative position in the wages league would be universally agreed and upheld without need to resort to the gladiatorial combats we have had to put up with in recent years. To examine a claim in the light of the economics of the industry would call for a much better fact-finding procedure than we have now: witness the ridiculous muddle over what the miners really earned and what the original stage three offer really amounted to. It does seem to me that either the country moves in this direction or we slide further and faster into Weimar-style inflation, whose outcome in Britain could well be the kind of repressive right-wing regime that neither reds nor radicals could want. Alternatively, I suppose, the outcome could be the long-postponed revolution the reds still want, but that is another story. Better to settle for bringing sense and moderation into wages, salaries and industrial relations and thus hold out some hope of fighting inflation and securing greater social justice. I hope Mr. Wilson thinks so too.

*"All union militants should be executed if they persist in striking"—Rev. Andrew Hallidie-Smith, Rector of Alresford, Essex. (Daily Telegraph).*

# JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS: THE EVIDENCE OF JOSEPHUS

G. A. WELLS

John the Baptist is unmentioned in the Talmud probably because, like the Essenes (also not mentioned there), he was on the very fringe of orthodox Judaism. However, the Jewish historian Josephus, who died *circa* A.D. 100, mentions him as a "good man" who exhorted the Jews to "join in baptism" and was put to death by the tetrach who feared the seditious effect of his preaching. The passage is almost certainly genuine. It is true that the text of Josephus was retouched by Christian scribes in other passages but if this one had been interpolated by a scribe familiar with the gospels—the only other early source of information about the Baptist—then its account of the motives for his imprisonment and execution would not (as they in fact are) be entirely different from those specified in the gospel version of these events.

I shall not discuss the passages about John which occur in the Slavonic version of another of Josephus's works, extant in manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth century which were discovered in 1866. The Rev. C. H. H. Scobie has given a good summary of the reasons for rejecting these passages as interpolations.<sup>1</sup> What is, however, of interest about them is that, when they give information also contained in the gospels, they are in harmony with the latter. This is what one would expect from an interpolator familiar with the gospels. But it is not what one finds in the passage about the Baptist which I have summarized in the first paragraph of this paper. Hence this passage is likely to be genuine.

## Interpolation

Josephus does not link John with Jesus. He does indeed make mention of Jesus in two other passages, but the longer of these two has been shown fairly conclusively to be wholly a Christian interpolation. It is a glowing description which no orthodox Jew could have written. If he had really believed what he is here represented as saying, he would not have restricted his remarks to a paragraph of ten lines. Furthermore, the passage occurs in a context concerning the misfortunes of the Jews, with which it has no connection, except from the standpoint of a Christian, who would naturally regard Jesus's condemnation by Pilate at the demand of the Jewish leaders as the very worst misfortune ever to have befallen the Jews. Attempts are still made to defend some of the statements in the passage by regarding it as a Christian reworking of something much less complimentary that Josephus wrote about Jesus at this point. (This is the view argued by the late Paul Winter in the revised English edition of E. Schürer's book<sup>2</sup>). But this defence does not do justice to the fact that if the passage is excised, the argument runs on in proper sequence. These objections also apply to a more plausible version of this passage about Jesus which is quoted by the tenth century Arabic historian Agapius. This version, because less complimentary to Jesus, has been taken by Professor S. Pines to represent what Josephus actually wrote. On this view, the familiar Greek text of Josephus in the extant manuscripts of his book is a Christian reworking of this original report.<sup>3</sup> But even the version quoted by Agapius makes Josephus say that Jesus "was perhaps the Messiah"—a statement which is still too friendly to have been made by one who was, on his own declaration, a follower of the Pharisees, as Professor Morton Smith points out in his review of Pines's book<sup>4</sup>.

The other passage in Josephus which mentions Jesus consists of half a dozen words in a paragraph about an intemperate Sadducean high priest who in A.D. 62 brought a number of men before the Sanhedrin as "breakers of the law" and "delivered them to be stoned". The victims are described as "James and certain others" and James is further specified as "the brother of Jesus, him called Christ". Now it is unlikely that Josephus would have mentioned Jesus here simply—as it were—in passing, when he mentions him nowhere else. Nor can his silence be defended by alleging that he habitually suppresses mention of leaders of Messianic proportions. Professor J. C. O'Neill gives details of his mention of "perhaps ten leaders who gathered followings and might have been considered Messiahs by a people who were looking for the Messiah".<sup>5</sup> None of these men actually called themselves Messiah, but neither—according to O'Neill and other theologians—did Jesus. In Josephus's entire work the term "Christ" occurs only in the two passages about Jesus and his brother James. This hardly strengthens the case for their authenticity.

Schürer, Zahn, von Dobschütz and Juster are among the scholars who have regarded the words "the brother of Jesus, him called Christ" as interpolated, and I have given elsewhere some account of the evidence on which they based this view.<sup>6</sup> The words have the character of a brief marginal gloss, later incorporated innocently into the text. Josephus probably wrote of the death of a Jewish Jerusalem leader called James, and a Christian leader thought the reference must be to James the brother of the Lord who, according to Christian tradition, led the Jerusalem Church about the time in question. This reader accordingly noted in the margin: "James = the brother of Jesus, him called Christ" (cf. the wording of Matthew 1:16—"Jesus, him called Christ"); and a later copyist took this note as belonging to the text and incorporated it. Other interpolations are known to have originated in precisely such a way. And it is also of interest that even a second century Christian account of "James the brother of the Lord" (that of Hegesippus, preserved as a quotation in Eusebius) represents him as in some respects a Jewish rather than a Christian saint. This lends some force to my suggestion that the James of whom Josephus wrote was within Judaism.

## Different vocabulary

The passage in Josephus which mentions John the Baptist differs significantly—as Professor C. K. Barrett has shown—from the gospels in the vocabulary with which it refers to him; and this is an additional argument for its genuineness. But it also qualifies John with the phrase "him with the byname the Baptist", and Barrett thinks that this particular phrase may be "a Christian explanatory insertion".<sup>7</sup> If interpolation is admitted as a possibility here, it can be urged also in the case of the phrase qualifying James.

My argument, then, is that Josephus's statement about John is serious evidence that he existed, whereas his two references to Jesus are Christian interpolations. I do not, of course, claim that this in itself proves Jesus a fiction. Josephus may well have failed to mention Jesus, as he fails to mention Christians, because Christianity was still relatively insignificant when he wrote. Mr. Condon (letters,

November 1973) thinks that, "even if the Josephus paragraph [about John] were genuine, and we have nothing else, it would prove only that a tradition of the Baptist was current in the last decade of the first century" (italics mine). I would reply that the gospel of Mark—of about the same date—provides something else; for my argument has been that Josephus and the evangelists are *independent of each other* in their witness to John. I do not wish to deny that the way the evangelists link him with Jesus is legend. But the independent testimony of a Christian and a Jewish writer about the existence of a baptizer counts for something.

### Common phenomenon

Mr. Condon's article on John (August, 1973) tries to refute his historicity by arguing that "enough mythic material existed for the construction of at least an outline" of him. We are to suppose, then, that Mark went to work by putting together Babylonian and Egyptian ideas about gods in order to portray a personage whom he did not represent as divine and whose historical existence is perfectly plausible at a time and place where ritual lustration was a common religious phenomenon.<sup>8</sup>

The only rational grounds for suspecting that John might nevertheless be mythical would be not remote pagan parallels, but the fact that the earliest Christian account of him (in the gospel of Mark) is modelled on Jewish expectations of that time. John, says Mark, fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3. That what Isaiah here says is paralleled in Egyptian mythology would not have interested Mark. John also declared the end of the world to be imminent (Mark 1:15), as did Paul, who wrote considerably earlier than Mark. This Jewish apocalyptic thinking does not make either John or Paul equivalent to the dog-headed Anubis in his capacity as "god of the day of reckoning". Mr. Condon finds John "remarkably" similar to Anubis also because the latter was the son of Osiris and

therefore a cousin of Horus, "whose career in Egyptian mythology closely parallels that of Jesus". Does it? Finally, one of the Christian details which Mr. Condon finds to be pagan-inspired owes its origin to the fact that Matthew was embarrassed by what he read in Mark. Matthew could not believe that the sinless Jesus simply submitted (as Mark alleged) to baptism "for remission of sins". And so Matthew deleted this phrase from his account of John (and instead placed it on the lips of Jesus at the Last Supper!); and he also made John, as the lesser of the two men, reluctant to baptize Jesus. This reluctance is intelligible as a reworking of Mark, independently of any unreadiness on the part of Anubis to purify Osiris.

An eminent theologian, Professor E. Trocmé, has recently complained of the "picturesque fantasies of those who deny the historical existence of Jesus", of their "contortions, allegedly based on a study of comparative religions", and their "cavalier attitude to the texts".<sup>9</sup> I myself deny Jesus's historicity. But on reading Mr. Condon's paper, I can see Professor Trocmé's point.

### NOTES

- 1 1964. *John the Baptist*: pp. 21-2.
- 2 1973. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1: pp. 432ff.
- 3 1971. *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications*.
- 4 *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 91 (1972): pp. 441-2. Cf. Dr. E. Bammel's evidence (*Expository Times*, vol. 85 (1974): p. 147) that what Agapius wrote "originated in an Islamic environment".
- 5 *New Testament Studies*, vol. 15 (1968-9): pp. 158, 165.
- 6 1971. *The Jesus of the Early Christians*: pp. 192-4.
- 7 1970. *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*: p. 26.
- 8 See THOMAS, J. 1935. *Le Mouvement Baptiste en Palestine et Syrie*.
- 9 1972. *Jesus and His Contemporaries*: p. 7.

## CIVIL LIBERTY: A YEAR TO FORGET

DAVID REYNOLDS

"1973 was a year which civil libertarians would have been better off without," writes Martin Loney, General Secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, in his Introduction to the recently published N.C.C.L. *Annual Report 1974*. The report provides an excellent and concise summary of the sorry story of civil liberties in 1973. As becomes clear from Loney's introduction the blame for the backward steps which civil liberties took during the year falls squarely on the government. Its legislation, its lack of regard for the reports of its own committees, and its insensitive handling of many issues from immigration to "illegal picketing" left a very great deal to be desired. It will be hard therefore for anyone concerned about civil liberties not to welcome the downfall of the Tories. It is to be hoped that Labour can find enough strength to continue the tentative steps it took in the right direction in the late sixties, when the laws governing abortion, homosexuality, capital punishment and obscenity were all reformed.

There can be no doubt that the new government will be unceasingly lobbied and encouraged by the N.C.C.L. if its record of activity in 1973 is anything to go by. In a chrono-

logical account of the year published at the back of the report one gets a clear picture of a pressure group working efficiently, consistently issuing statements to the press and to ministers when anything of importance arises.

The body of the report however, consists of summaries of the current position in the various fields where civil liberties are an issue. Under the heading "Search" one finds that the police have frighteningly wide powers enabling them to search people and places. This can be done on suspicion of possession of drugs or explosives and on suspicion that a person is an illegal immigrant. All three of these grounds for search would appear to have been abused. For example, in the Metropolitan area only 2<sup>3</sup> per cent of people stopped and searched on suspicion of possession of drugs are actually arrested.

An example of the abuse of the laws regarding searches for explosives is perhaps more worrying: "In one particular raid carried out in North London in September 1973 the police conducted what amounted to a general search of a whole street. Following a complaint the Metropolitan Police confirmed that 'no evidence was found that



any occupants were engaged in any (bombing) activities', no explosives were found; nor were any arrests made under the Explosive Substances Acts."

Similar abuses seem to occur regarding searches for illegal immigrants. Much heavy handed and even illegal behaviour by police has been recorded. In one example between sixty and eighty people were questioned. Eight were arrested. Then seven released.

During 1973 the law regarding "Conspiracy" came to be used more widely than before. In the case of Kamara the defendants were convicted of conspiracy to trespass, the existence of which offence came as a surprise to most English criminal lawyers. The then Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, stated that conspiracy to trespass could be used "for the vast majority of the squatting cases or the 'sit-in' cases, or many of the cases in which sports grounds are frequently occupied or disrupted."

In the Shrewsbury Workers trial the defendants were charged with a rarely used common-law offence of conspiracy to intimidate. Intimidation by itself is punishable by a maximum of three months' imprisonment. The use of conspiracy charges allows a maximum sentence of life. The court sentenced one of the workers to three years. This and other instances given in the N.C.C.L. *Annual Report* suggest that the law is being stretched in a frightening way which seriously curtails civil liberties.

**Information concealed**

In an excellent analysis of the position with regard to "Official Secrecy" the report discusses amongst many other things the farcical situation which arose when the identity of the head of MI6 was disclosed in German and U.S. newspapers. Despite these disclosures 'D' notices were issued in Britain which in the circumstances the British press chose to ignore. The N.C.C.L. comment: "The issue of a 'D' notice on a subject already covered in foreign papers is an admirable comment on a system which is more concerned with concealing information from the British public than any foreign 'enemy'".

The report on "Women's Rights" includes the welcome news that N.C.C.L. has stepped up activity in this sphere to the extent of appointing a full-time women's rights officer.

On "Mental Health" the N.C.C.L. has submitted evidence to the Committee on the Mentally Abnormal Offender (headed by Lord Butler) recommending major changes in the Mental Health Act. They proposed a complete reform of the release procedures, and an end to both compulsory treatment and the imposition of indeterminate sentences. That much needs to be done in this field is highlighted perhaps by the sad and sorrowing case of Philip Brew who waited for fourteen months in Broadmoor hospital for the Home Secretary to order his discharge, only to be told that an administrative error had been made and his discharge would have to be arranged by a different department, which in effect postponed any prospect of release for a long time to come. "Brew was found dead a few days after hearing this news. After the release of information by the N.C.C.L., the Coroner attempted to reopen the inquest but was prevented by the Home Office."

In a long section entitled "Police" the report makes the important point that although complaints are made about

police behaviour, the problems the police have to deal with are not of their own making but rather of the government, the executive and the judiciary. "The disastrous effects of the 1971 Immigration Act on police/community relations must be attributed not to the police but to the Government which introduced the Act." Many points are raised in this section: the procedure for investigating complaints against the police; the photographing of people held in custody in police stations; the possible use of videotapes taken by the police at demonstrations as evidence in a court of law; the use of special picket squads; the position regarding the twenty or so "private" police forces such as the London Transport police who have police powers but are not subject to Home Office control; the mainly secret activities of the special branch; and the eighteen month reign of Sir Robert Mark as Commissioner of Metropolitan Police.

There is much material regarding Northern Ireland, including an attack on the recently introduced Emergency Provisions Act, which, amongst other effects, suspends trial by jury in many instances, and continues to permit detention without trial. Perhaps of particular interest to freethinkers is the report of the Channon Committee which accepted many of the N.C.C.L.'s recommendations as to what should be done to hinder religious discrimination in the private sector of employment in Northern Ireland. The N.C.C.L. argued that these recommendations be extended to the public sector and the government agreed to do this. It is to be hoped that the new government will push these measures through.

The examples of N.C.C.L. activity, and the dire need for it, that I have picked out here are only a small bite at the cherry. The Report also contains important sections on: "Trial by Jury"; "Censorship"; "The European Commission of Human Rights"; "Privacy"; "Immigration"; "Children's Rights"; "Industrial Relations"; "the Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy"; and the research and education arm of the N.C.C.L., "The Cobden Trust".

The Report is well worth reading, both as a review of the state of civil liberties in this country, and as proof of something which cannot be over-emphasized, the crucial importance of the work of the N.C.C.L.

*Annual Report 1974, National Council for Civil Liberties (186 King's Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE), 15p*

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# CENSORSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

RON BAILEY

On 25 March a press conference was called in London to launch the National Co-ordinating Committee against Censorship. The Committee which will pursue a national lobby campaign is sponsored by various organizations which oppose censorship, such as the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, the National Council for Civil Liberties, and the National Secular Society. The campaign has six immediate objectives: to achieve a change in the obscenity and indecency laws to allow adults to see and read what they choose; to abolish film censorship for adults; to amend the Official Secrets Act and the D Notice System so that they are strictly confined to matters of national security; to investigate the censorship powers of the I.B.A., B.B.C. and advertisers; to liberalize the law of contempt of court; and to investigate secrecy in national and local government. An appeal to raise £5,000 has been made to finance its activities.

Among speakers at the press conference was Martin Loney, general secretary of the N.C.C.L. He said that the British Government was among the most secretive in the world, so that it is able to withhold information even from Parliament. He mentioned as an example of the misuse of the Official Secrets Act the Railway Gazette affair, and maintained that what was needed was a Freedom of Information Act such as exists in Sweden. The recently retired secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, John Trevelyan, said that with an eighteen-year age limit for "X" films, no further censorship was necessary for adults. He claimed that the present obscenity laws were so confused that they resulted in a great deal of injustice. Miss Brigid Brophy described the supporters of this campaign as the rescuers of freedom. The deviants, she said, were those who tried to stop other people enjoying sex, and from so doing such people derived their own very great sexual pleasure.

The campaign organizer, Ron Bailey, has contributed the following article to The Freethinker. At the press conference, rejecting the claims of the censorship brigade, he said that if there were a silent majority it was largely on our side. As the Committee's manifesto states: "Most people are probably against censorship but believe it only occurs 'in other countries'. Unfortunately this is not the case." (National Co-ordinating Committee Against Censorship, 186 King's Cross Road, London WC1 X 9DE.)

In any society there are four freedoms which are of fundamental importance—freedom of speech, choice, information and discussion. Any society that restricts these freedoms cannot call itself democratic, and thus any move towards restriction must be totally contrary to the concept of a free society.

It is from this standpoint that the newly formed National Co-ordinating Committee Against Censorship starts. Censorship is undemocratic: this point must be hammered home during the next few months.

The fact that the Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill has died a death leaves no room for complacency. There are already many laws, which are being used by the pro-censorship forces (the police, the Whitehouse-Longford brigade and others) to restrict the freedom of people who are old enough to vote, judge their fellow men and even die in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Whitehouse herself is using the Vagrancy Act of

1824 to prosecute the manager of the Curzon Cinema in London for showing *Blow Out*—a film licensed by the Greater London Council. The same Act has been used against art galleries and sex shops. The Disorderly Houses Act of 1751 is also being revived for similar reasons. Recently the High Court has ruled that such vague concepts as "conspiracy to corrupt public morals" and "conspiracy to outrage public decency" are offences known to the law.

Seizures under the Obscene Publications Act are on the increase. Magazines like *Mayfair*, *Men Only*, *Playboy* are under threat of prosecution. Where does it all end? Even *Last Tango in Paris* is being prosecuted under this Act.

But censorship is not confined to matters such as these. Harold Evans of the *Sunday Times* has complained about lack of freedom that newspapers have. The laws of contempt, the D Notice system and the Official Secrets Act all combine to keep information, not from "foreign agents" but from the British public.

And what of our right to know what is being done in our name by central and local authorities? "Open Government" is a myth. The Home Office even refused to allow anyone (from governor down) working in British prisons to give evidence to the Jellicoe Committee on prison reform.

The Whitehouse lobby are even moving into the field of education. They want sex education restricted, and they have asked the political leaders to ensure that all children receive religious education based on the Christian faith!

The freedom of speech, choice, information and discussion are certainly in jeopardy in our society. The Co-ordinating Committee Against Censorship intends to fight this trend; to campaign for freedom and democracy. We want to organize local and national lobbies, petitions, surveys and meetings. We want to publish in-depth studies of all these matters, and organize top-level discussions and conferences. Freedom must be made an issue at all levels in society. Members of Parliament, official bodies (such as the I.B.A. and B.B.C.) and central and local government must be made aware of a strong campaign against censorship and for freedom.

But it is up to everyone. This is a new campaign: please help, we cannot succeed if you do not. I hope to hear from all interested groups and individuals.

## N.C.C.L. GENERAL MEETING

Among the motions on the agenda of the annual general meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties held in Birmingham on 6 and 7 April were two proposed by humanist organizations. One calling for the repealing of obsolete Sunday observance laws proposed by the National Secular Society was passed without discussion as it was held to reiterate existing N.C.C.L. policy.

Unfortunately an emergency motion sponsored jointly by the N.S.S. and the British Humanist Association was not discussed or put to a vote as it was held that the matter of the motion did not justify its emergency status.

Readers of this journal would probably disagree and so the motion will be recorded in full.

This A.G.M. views with alarm the expressed intention of the Secretary of State for Education and Science to invite "representatives of the denominations to meet him to discuss the possibility of some further financial assistance to the voluntary aided schools". The N.C.C.L. opposes the dual educational system, as an infringement of the basic right of children to be part of the undivided community, especially in view of the continuing violence in Northern Ireland, where creed-segregated education has perpetuated the division of the two communities. Moreover, any increase on the present 80 per cent direct subsidy to church schools must bring the total very close to 100 per cent, resulting in a proliferation of religions able to set up their own sectarian schools and force segregated education upon their children. Already, it is reported, the first two Muslim schools in Britain are under construction—and these will, in effect, be triply segregated: by race, by sex, and by religion. We therefore call upon H.M. Government to end the present aid to denominational schools, rather than to increase it.

The N.C.C.L. *Annual Report 1974* is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

# REVIEWS

## BOOKS

**SUPERNATURE: The Natural History of the Supernatural** by Lyall Watson. Hodder and Stoughton, £3.25.

With his publication of *The Naked Ape* in 1967 Desmond Morris must have inspired many other biologists to produce a similar blend of scientific fact and scientific speculation to such excellent advantage. One of his apprentices at London Zoo was Lyall Watson, who wrote *The Omnivorous Ape* before turning to *Supernature*. I do not know whether *The Omnivorous Ape* was as profitable as *The Naked Ape*, but I see from the Introduction that Dr. Watson is also no stranger to the Mediterranean.

After reading his latest volume with considerable care—and pleasure—I confess I have little notion of what the author chiefly sets out to demonstrate, or even what he means by "supernature". The book's subtitle is "The Natural History of the Supernatural", which suggests an evolutionary account of supernatural beliefs or an attempt to systematize them inside phyla, genera and families. From the blurb we might have expected a "debunking" penetration of "the fog of mysticism and superstition that surrounds the 'occult' to demonstrate a sound, scientific basis for many so-called supernatural happenings", and this may be found in many chapters. Hypnotism, the Indian rope trick, ghosts, clairvoyance and precognition get short shrift largely, it seems, on the grounds that they are not associated with specific physiological states and they would offer little biological advantage to living organisms. So far, so good. The fundamental thesis of the book, which seems prepared to resurrect Lamarck, is however a good deal less satisfactory, and a good deal more muddled, than a freethinker might hope for.

In his Introduction the author offers a definition of "Supernature" which seems at variance with the subtitle and the blurb: "Between nature and the supernatural are a host of happenings that I choose to describe as Supernature. It is with these go-betweens that this book is concerned." He proceeds to an "outrageous" thesis:

The supernatural is usually defined as that which is not explicable by the known forces of nature. Supernature knows no bounds. Too often we see only what we expect to see: our view of the world is restricted by the blinkers of our limited experience; but it need not be this way. Supernature is nature with its flavours intact, waiting to be tasted. I offer it as a logical extension of the present state of science, as a solution to some of the problems with which traditional science cannot cope, and as an analgesic to modern man.

The occult simply means "secret knowledge" and describes "something that we have known all along but have been hiding from ourselves." In brief:

This natural history of the supernatural is designed to extend the traditional five senses into areas where others have been operating undercover. It is an attempt to fit all of nature, the known and the unknown, into the body of Supernature and to show that, of all the faculties we possess, none is more important at this time than a wide-eyed sense of wonder.

This muddling amalgam of the known and the unknown, the borderline and the encompassing, the immanent and the transcendent is not perhaps more confusing than general talk of the occult, where the "supernatural" always reveals itself naturally and the "paranormal" is distastefully mundane.

Outside his limited range of scepticism Dr. Watson is more than willing to "reinterpret" old wives' tales in the light of new scientific knowledge and I must admit that he has made me more aware of the likely impact of gravitational fields and cosmic rays on ordinary biological processes. But bodily electromagnetic fields are a long way away from astral bodies and the "vibrations" beloved of nineteenth-century mediums, and circadian rhythms from astrological charts. In the past scepticism and light were said to radiate hostile vibrations on psychic phenomena; now it is postulated dark beneficially keeps the sensory activities of sensitives low and their brain alpha rhythm high; "seekers after truth" never appreciate that dark also keeps the sensory activities of investigators low. Though there now exists an alphaphone to foster alpha waves and induce "instant meditation", and Professor Rhine at Duke University uses every sort of gadget to throw his dice for him, the fundamental questioning process that underlies all good science and philosophy seems strangely lacking today. Thus Dr. Watson can report the observation that no one has ever seen an object manipulated by poltergeists start to move as evidence the movement is an unconscious psychokinetic phenomenon (nothing superstitious like a spook) instead of making the deduction that might be expected of any police cadet.

There are many interesting quotations from unimpeachable sources on incontestably natural, if bizarre, events but whenever we do seem to be verging on the inexplicable we are confronted by "evidence" from such sources as the *Journal of Parapsychology*, *Fate Magazine* and a New Jersey publisher's offering on *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*. Naturally, this is not counterbalanced by quotations from Maskelyne, Scarné and Hansel.

It is no doubt true that "nineteenth-century" scientists paid too little attention to psychosomatic conditions, hallucinogenic drugs, natural hallucinations and the theory of relativity. It may also be true they paid too little attention to the need of ordinary people for the "certainty" advertised by the multi-faced mumbo-jumbo business, whether it be foretelling the future, "control over self" or other forms of instant solution of life's problems and perplexities. If that is so, as Lyall Watson evidently thinks, I doubt if his semi-rationalizations will prove the "analgesic" he imagines. The magical must be allowed to remain magical.

DAVID TRIBE

**THE FREETHINKER**, Vol. 93 (1973) edited by Nigel Sinnott and Christopher Morey. G. W. Foote, £2.50.

In 1973 *The Freethinker* became a monthly publication, moved to new premises and changed its editor. But in spite of these changes, its reputation as the "canny old tomcat of fighting freethought" in the apt words of Nigel Sinnott the retiring editor, has been well maintained by Christopher Morey—who deserves congratulations for successfully editing the paper in addition to doing a full time job.

The move from a weekly to a monthly format has not made the leading articles any less topical or relevant, and they have kept a sharp astringent eye on SPREE, SPUC church schools, Northern Ireland, and the Indecent Displays Bill. New forms of religious irrationality have been attacked, with Bill McIlroy effectively demolishing the pretensions of the Divine Light Mission with its teenage gurus "travelling by jet plane and Rolls Royce car" and taking advantage of charity status to extract money from the gullible public.

Perhaps the main *raison d'être* of *The Freethinker* is the fact that it is the only publication consistently to draw attention to the close association between religion and reactionary social and political ideas. This is illustrated in articles on Roman Catholic support for American intervention in Vietnam, on religious opposition to birth control and abortion, and on women's rights—Barbara Smoker appropriately described God as "the original male chauvinist pig". The essentially right wing nature of religious views is something which most organizations and periodicals (even left wing ones) are only too anxious to ignore.

Well worth preserving are articles by Eric Glasgow, not only on well known figures such as J. S. Mill, but on less prominent freethinkers like Arthur Clough the nineteenth century poet. These articles are valuable as a corrective

to the usual impression given in history books that secularism in the past, if not actually non-existent, was fairly unimportant.

Probably few secularists today have the detailed Biblical knowledge which nineteenth century freethinkers felt obliged to absorb before setting out to challenge the churches; and any readers likely to be involved in arguments with Christians on the historical existence of Christ or the accuracy of the Gospels cannot afford to miss the excellent articles on these and related topics by Professor G. A. Wells, R. J. Condon and R.W. Morrell.

In contrast with the articles and reviews, the correspondence pages of *The Freethinker* sometimes appear a little arid and pedantic. However, addicts of David Holbrook will be pleased to note that he has written on sex, censorship and the possible sexual allusiveness of the pop-song "My ding-a-ling". And Judex and Pat Sloan are still locked in a seemingly never ending battle on the merits of Marxism.

But any slight defects are more than compensated for by the overall high standard of writing. Readers will find plenty of information on censorship (with articles by Richard Handyside, publisher of the *Little Red Schoolbook*), church privileges and Secularist movements abroad, and also a great deal of encouragement to campaign for secularist aims.

PATRICIA KNIGHT

## CINEMA

**THE EXORCIST** (X Certificate) directed by William Friedkin. General release.

Some years ago, I saw an American newsreel of a Vietnamese woman being burned alive by napalm. It seemed as though she would never die. I have just seen the American film *The Exorcist*, and I can find no voice to protest about it. Its only evil is, to me, its lack of artistic integrity. Protest and mass hysteria feed on each other, and both reach dimensions, and a level of meretriciousness, that are an affront to sane values. This film hardly invites empathy more than *Dracula* does. True, its graphic clinical detail (a hypodermic being sunk into the "possessed" girl's neck, and the blood drained off) causes the squeamish to faint and vomit. The ill-effects are manifest, but why should we so readily assume that they are lasting? (The Manager of the Warner West End told me he had never seen a response like it, not since the screening of a documentary about hair transplants.) Perhaps some people even enjoy this form of titillation. The long queues of people, who have been warned about the content of the film but who are nonetheless prepared to pay handsomely to see it, hardly refute this theory.

Other films and plays, less sensational, and more firmly rooted in reality, could be more deeply disturbing to our susceptible young—Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. These key works of our century, by virtue of their being more *recherché* have fortunately escaped ghoulish publicity, and the attendant over-reaction by audiences and by the self-appointed guardians of our morals. It has been suggested that because some of us still believe in the Devil, this film should be banned, by which token all films about war atrocities, murder and other ugly facts of life would have

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R. A. HASHINI (*Counsellor, U.K. Immigrant Advisory Service*)

DAVE CLARK (*Assistant Editor, Race Today*)

*Wednesday 29 May*

#### THREATS TO CIVIL LIBERTY

BENEDICT BIRNBERG (*Solicitor, Ex-Chairman, National Council for Civil Liberties*)

The meetings will be chaired by BARBARA SMOKER

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to go too. Besides, Friedkin's fiction doesn't even give the Devil his due; it's so far fetched.

William Peter Blatt's screenplay is based on his novel, which in turn is based, but with great embellishments, on actuality. In 1949, a demon was said to have been expelled from the body of a fourteen-year-old Maryland boy. In Blatty's book, the victim is a twelve-year-old girl, Regan, the daughter of a successful movie actress. Regan seems a perfectly normal, happy tomboy. Her father, travelling in Europe, shows little interest in her, but it is not made clear in the film what the relevance of his neglect is. Her life seems idyllic, till the manifestations begin. First there are animal noises in the loft then the violently rocking bed, the screams in the night, the unbridled violence, Regan's gory masturbation with a crucifix. A nearby church is desecrated, and mother's film director is found dead below Regan's window. Doctors are mystified, and the girl's mother grows more and more distraught. At last an exorcism is suggested and carried out. The two officiating priests die in the process, but Regan is restored to normality, if subdued. Perhaps the film's best moment comes when, after the strident havoc of the exorcism, Regan is left crouching in a corner of her room, sobbing with complete abandonment. The film works by alternating tension with release; after the more horrific sequences there are gusts of nervous, relieved giggling from the audience.

As the visitations increase in violence, the effects department takes over completely. What could be a truthful, moving study of a young girl subjected to the pressures of modern living, becomes an outrageous piece of cinematic trickery. There is a touch of the Monty Pythons—without the jauntiness—about a good many of these effects. Furniture moves itself purposefully about the bedroom. Regan's eyes swivel round, her head revolves grotesquely, and, for want of better ideas, there is plenty of levitation. The hideous little monster on the bed spews out the obscenities and the viscous green vomit with great ferocity. We rarely get inside Regan's head, even at the beginning, so this film is nothing more than a ride in a ghost train. It may be tarted up with colour supplement locations and clever-clever editing, but it's still basically mindless; like much of the furore it has aroused.

VERA LUSTIG

# THEATRE

**KING LEAR.** Actors Company. Wimbledon Theatre.

The completely satisfactory version of *King Lear*, which truly encompasses the massive range of the play, only exists in each observer's mind. The strength of the Actors Company's production, directed by David William, is that it offers a completely straightforward version that may speak directly to us and allow a full confrontation between the text and our imagination. The tendency in Shakespearean productions of the last decade has been to proffer interpretations forcing Shakespeare into the straightjacket of a particular director's insight into a single strand of the whole work; this may be legitimate and even illuminating at times, but it is a relief to see a production where no *idée fixe* incessantly sledgehammers home one single aspect. If Shakespeare is all things to all men, at least this production allowed the play to be many things to many of us. And, whatever criticisms I may offer, my congratulations to the Actors Company for that.

Lear himself, the "man more sinned against than sinning", moving from petulant insistence on an authority he is determined to renounce, through colossal rages to those extremes of emotional experience which we call madness, to a complete restructuring of his perspective on the world and his place in it, requires an enormous range from an actor. Robert Eddison, as King Lear, moves a long way towards, if not entirely meeting, this challenge. In the early scenes he seemed to have that strong misguided sense of self that has got to be shattered: a thinly-based imperiousness was well conveyed, suggesting both the authority he had for a lifetime come to assume and the insubstantiality of it that would lead to its collapse. His appeal to the gods was riveting. On the heath battling against the storm that reflects his own inner turmoil, he rather failed to imply the vastness of his internal conflict, but this was partly due to the staging of the storm itself which seemed not to reach the requisite pitch. But Robert Eddison was at his best when reason had left Lear and in the cruel scene where he taunts the blind Gloucester he skilfully showed a man utterly disorientated and yet still groping for an awareness of himself and the world around him.

Two other particularly notable performances were Ian McKellan as Edgar and Edward Petherbridge as the Fool. Edgar is an extremely difficult rôle to play since the development from credulous son to feigned madman and finally to a strong figure important in resolving the action is far from easy to portray. Ian McKellan was at his best as "Poor Tom", so convincing in fact that one almost forgot he was but feigning. His strength as an actor is his ability to act with his whole body, his weakness an occasional rather mannered delivery of the lines. Edward Petherbridge is a superb clown and his Fool was genuinely funny, so that some of the obscurer puns elicited laughter. I was impressed by the modulation from "all-licensed fool", using his ability to amuse with clowning to take advantage of the opportunity of pointing out unpalatable truths, to a rather pathetic figure remaining loyal to Lear on the heath, but quite out of place with no court audience. The indication of illness that was perhaps to lead him "to go to bed at noon" was a plausible touch. My one reservation was the Bradford accent which had not entirely appropriate shades of music hall. Matthew Long's Edmund was light and lissom and aptly demonstrated the attractiveness of wickedness; Juan Moreno's Cornwall was a study in sadism; Sharon Duce's Cordelia, however, unhappily failed to establish itself.

Since we infrequently have the opportunity of seeing this masterpiece performed, the chance to see this more than adequate production should be seized. It is a long play, but it is not for this reason that one feels exhausted at the end, rather that the range of emotion that the company has presented is so considerable.

JIM HERRICK

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**A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE** by Tennessee Williams. Piccadilly Theatre, London.

**KNUCKLE** by David Hare. Comedy Theatre, London.

Tennessee Williams's early masterpiece, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, has not dated. It is a stinging accurate but poetic tragedy about the over wrought and predatory Blanche Dubois, whose circumstances can never measure up to her dreams and fabrications. Blanche, having lost the family estate through her improvidence, comes to stay with her sister and brother-in-law, Stella and Stanley Kowalski, in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Everything there, the paper-thin walls, the naked light bulbs and shabby furniture, Stanley's brutish habits and his beery companions, are calculated to make Blanche shrink still further into her fantasy world, and to precipitate a crisis.

My fears that Claire Bloom might be too thoroughbred to portray Blanche's sexual cravings proved groundless. Miss Bloom brings out the lady—and the little girl—in Blanche quite admirably, with the febrile woman always present below the cool, preened surface. Miss Bloom's great, haunted eyes contrast darkly with her blonde wig, and her aching look of appeal is unforgettable. Her voice has a habit of trailing away forlornly at the end of sentences, as though she can no longer maintain her cracking veneer. Fragile and panicky, she flits from image to image: the shoddy glamour of a vamp, the pampered gentility of a Southern heiress, the quaint, jokey flirtatiousness of a small-town schoolmistress—with consummate skill Williams evokes the many facets of one character, and Miss Bloom breathes life into them. When Blanche sheds all facades and recalls her short-lived, disastrous marriage to a homosexual, the sense of emptiness is total.

This production is no mere star vehicle, though. The American director, Edwin Sherin, highlights the play's sharply theatrical rhythms as well as its undercurrents of feeling. Patrick Robertson's spacious, gauzy set is in tune with Williams's style, too, with its picturesque naturalism. The play's jarring expressionistic effects: nightmare sequences with flashing lights and weird sounds, are played down. This makes those scenes rather lame, but it gives greater impact to quieter, more telling moments, like the dark figure of the blind Mexican woman, moving from one lighted doorway to the next.

Miss Bloom is given strong support by the rest of the cast. Martin Shaw, half pugilist, half urchin, brings an engaging insolence to the rôle of Stanley, as well as a threatening presence, pronouncing the name "Blanche" with a provocative, gum-chewing twang. Joss Ackland as his friend Mitch, an awkward, diffident bachelor gives a very strong performance happily devoid of corniness. As the stable, philosophical Stella, Morag Hood is interestingly miscast. She is too young, too much the refined gamine, and the earthbound plod she assumes seems incongruous. Lack of the common touch is a weakness of this otherwise very strong actress. Miss Hood has a quality of stillness, a honed-down, almost angry intensity that is very striking. If she doesn't quite grasp the womanliness of Stella, Miss Hood makes her an accepting, and deeply loving girl.

There are many plays at present in London that are more original, more politically aware, more questioning, but *Streetcar* does not aspire to be any of these things. What this magnificent revival does offer is the time-honoured but rare experience of catharsis.

*Knuckle* is a bizarre, critical excursion into the realm of Micky Spillane and Raymond Chandler. The plot is basically that of a whodunnit: an arms dealer investigating the disappearance of his younger sister, but the play moves beyond that, and explores the suburban underworld of property speculation and blackmail, concluding that life is little more than a "plush abattoir".

Hare's writing is workmanlike and mature; but without Michael Blakemore's incisive direction, and the teamwork and spot-on interpretations by the whole cast, *Knuckle* might well have appeared groping and disjointed.

Mr. Blakemore is exceptionally intuitive in coaxing the dramatist's own personality out of his script and lets the play, as it were, breathe for itself. There is a lot of dry wit and the play, though rich in ideas, is never tendentious or undergrad. Though it is an amalgam of styles and techniques from cinema theatre and the novel, the play has clarity and flow. It is played with an unblinking Brechtian detachment which is just right. A very satisfying production.

VERA LUSTIG

## LETTERS

### Underlying causes of children in care

*From the Publicity Officer, Mothers in Action, 9 Poland Street, London, W1V 3OG.*

I hope Mrs. Sybil Silver is not typical of freethinkers. The admittedly unsatisfactory situation of many children in care, has received unprecedented media coverage more or less supporting Mrs. Silver's one-sided view.

Firstly, why do children go into care? About two-thirds of them are in care through homelessness or because one parent is absent, or both. The majority are the children of working class parents or parents who have "deviated" from the norm and whom the authoritarian structure of society does not support.

When we talk about the "paramount welfare of the child" we must recognize that there is no such priority embodied in our constitution. All the basic essentials—housing, food, income—are controlled by the capitalist class and the ability to meet one's own and one's children's needs, decline with class.

The Children's Bill redistributes children *not* resources. Unless the Government is able to ensure that the availability of resources to disadvantaged families is increased, particularly in the areas of housing, incomes and day-care facilities—all the things that the middle-class bourgeoisie take for granted—the Children's Bill will have an unattractive fascist connotation masquerading as children's rights, a con-trick in fact. The sickening sentimentality displayed recently has in no way helped the public to understand the causes of children being in care.

Part of our work this year will be to educate the public about the facts behind the facts of children in care, to encourage parents to resist "care" as an expedient solution and to make demands on a system which mercilessly exploits the working class, including the sub-classes of blacks and women.

At best the Children's Bill will cure the symptoms, but the disease will still be there.

SHIRLEY FROST.

### Death by referendum

Regarding Geoffrey Webster's reflections (article, March) upon "planetary euthanasia" as "an existential possibility and option for man", there is perhaps a certain "facile optimism" in the thought of future "man" agreeing to a man, even on "the discontinuance of the species"—let alone the best way of "achieving" it. Presumably, Mr. Webster's "through global determination" would mean a majority decision by way of a referendum—all nice and democratic; but what about the minority—say, one man and one woman . . . ?

CHARLES BYASS.

### From preoccupation to prosecution

It has been reported that a spokesman for the Attorney-General, having announced that no official action was being taken against the showing of the film *The Exorcist*, added that "This doesn't mean that other people cannot bring proceedings against it in a private capacity"—and Mr. Peter Thompson, chairman of the film committee of that body of self-appointed guardians of our morals, the Festival of Light, taking the hint, responded "I shan't now hesitate to prosecute".

Mr. Peter Thompson, like Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, seems to spend a great deal of time watching films and readings books and magazines that disgust him, so that he can then prevent other people from watching or reading them. If, as these people claim, the films and printed matter that they get banned (or try to get banned) are likely to "deprave and corrupt" you and me, how is it that Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Whitehouse, who make it their business to see every allegedly "obscene" film, book, and magazine that there is to be seen, are not themselves depraved and corrupted? Or are they?

Personally, I have no intention myself of going to *The Exorcist*. Having read the reviews of it, I am sure I would not enjoy it. But every adult person has the moral right to decide for himself or herself what he or she is willing to pay money to see. And it is high time that the laws relating to so-called "obscenity" were repealed; and that Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Whitehouse, and their busybody friends, were all told to mind their own business, and allow the rest of us to mind ours.

BARBARA SMOKER.

### Counter-revolutionary Stalinism

An awful lot of trouble would be saved if Pat Sloan kept to the facts, and was better acquainted with the literature on Marxism. What my February letter made clear was that Mr. Sloan had deliberately suppressed the statement in Robinson and Eatwell's *Introduction to Modern Economics* that the Marxian apparatus "is a plentiful source of confusion" unless it is readjusted. As anyone can see, I said nothing about duplicating the idea of "adjustment", which is an evasion resorted to by Sloan in his March communication.

Mr. Sloan now talks about "bringing Marx's theory of Value and Prices up to date". On page 51 of the February 1974 issue of *Marxism Today*, in an article on Monopoly Prices, etc., he gives a quotation from Marx taken from precisely the same passage on precisely the same page (1003) of precisely the same (Kerr) edition of *Capital Volume III*—as that quoted by Paul Sweezy, when he was also discussing the question of monopoly prices, on page 272 of his book *The Theory of Capitalist Development* which was first published in 1942, thirty-two years ago. Mr. Sloan is evidently still trying to reconcile the basic Marxian theory of "Value"—criticized by Professor Robinson and others as "metaphysical"—with the actual phenomena of the real world. The whole point of Marx's argument was to try to vindicate the "law of value" (that value governs price) by showing that despite the admitted divergencies of prices from values, the sum of the prices of all the commodities produced in the economy must equal the sum of their values, and the sum of profits must equal the sum of "surplus-values". According to Mark Blaug (*Economic Theory in Retrospect*) and A. Emmanuel (*Unequal Exchange*, see p. 400), however, Marx was mistaken and, in general, if one of these two equalities holds, the other does not. Generations of Marx scholars have attempted to uphold Marx's solution, but Marxist economists such as Howard Sherman (*Radical Political Economy*) and the communist Maurice Dobb (*Theories of Value and Distribution*, 1973, pp. 158-9) are now forced to admit that this theory cannot be sustained. The "defence of the cause of socialism stands to lose efficiency by clinging to outworn tools" (Schumpeter).

Mr. Sloan is a Communist Party propagandist for the Soviet Union which many, including citizens of the U.S.S.R., describe as a barbarous police state, armed to the teeth, and with low living standards for the working class—the very antithesis of socialism, humanism, and freethought. He still talks about Stalinist "abuses" when he means killing, torture, and the extermination of some twenty million human beings, and uses the Stalinist argument of "capitalist encirclement" as an excuse—an excuse decisively rejected by the Yugoslav Marxist S. Stojanovic (*Between Ideals and Reality*, 1973, p. 54). Mr. Sloan's assertion that I will never recognize that capitalism means exploitation and oppression is a patent fabrication. As I stated in my October 1973 letter, "Unlike latter-day Stalinists, Freethinkers are concerned about censorship, oppression, and terror whether in the Soviet Socialist Republics or anywhere else".

The quotations in my writings represent an extremely wide range of opinion, including that of communists, marxists, and Soviet

citizens. Humanists would do well, in my view, to remember the words of Louis Althusser, a professional philosopher and member of the French Communist Party: "Historical materialism, as exposed in Marx's later works, implies a theoretical anti-humanism" (*for Marx*, 1970, p. 251). JUDEX.

### Parents' right to eradicate disability

The review in February's issue (p. 28), concerning abortion, makes the point that in many cases what we still lack is client self-determination. We saw very recently the horrifying case where a baby was born with its left side badly deformed, no left eye or ear-channel, and unconscious since birth. The parents asked that it should be left to die. The doctor overruled them and had the baby made a ward of court, so that he could then operate on it, despite the parents' expressed wish. The only comment made in the Press, as far as I could see, was to say that doctors should make wiser choices in future.

But there is another practice of the medical profession which is even more shocking—in that the consequences range much wider. Some years ago a virtually foolproof test was invented, by which doctors can detect any mongol child in the womb. There is therefore no reason why any more such children should be born. But instead of performing this test on every pregnant woman, it is performed only on those over forty—since the incidence of mongolism is slightly greater in women of that age. In women under forty, the incidence of mongolism has not declined at all—apparently for the simple reason that the state is not willing to spend slightly more money on giving such tests to all pregnant women. But that is not all. Parents nowadays have a pretty good idea what mongolism involves. As a result, doctors no longer refer to "mongolism". Instead, they tell parents that their child is suffering from "Down's Syndrome" (the technical expression), in the confident expectation that parents will not realize the two conditions are identical. A less common, alternative custom, is not to tell the parents anything about a child's mongolism until the parents actually notice something is wrong—normally when the child is two or three years old! But these points are of lesser importance than the simple fact that all cases of mongolism could be anticipated now by a therapeutic abortion—if the appropriate test were applied universally.

It is ironic that the greatest worry of pregnant women is, not that they have a miscarriage, but that the child might be abnormal in some way. But that worry is directly attributable to the fact that (as parents realize) the decision over any child's future is entirely out of their hands. It is hard to see how this situation is going to be altered—almost the only parents who are troubled by it, are those who already have such children. And organizations which devote themselves to helping handicapped children are hardly going to start campaigning to avoid such children being born in the future. Apart from humanist organizations, societies which might make a fuss about this issue are perhaps the N.C.C.L. or the Eugenics Society. But it is about time that *someone* started to campaign on these issues—in particular, to have tests for mongolism applied universally, but also to give parents some sort of say in the decision over their own child. NICHOLAS REED.

### At a premium

Now that *The Freethinker* is only a monthly, the space given over to letters is more valuable than ever. Could we therefore please have a little less of Judex and his stock anti-marxist letter, and also I. S. Low's perennial on world government?

R. MULLHOLLAND.

*I think readers would agree that the issues raised by these correspondents are important. If they disagree with the views expressed by them or feel that there are other issues of more importance to freethinkers, the solution is in their hands. So write today and keep the theatre reviews off your page.—Editor.*

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Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL.

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.

Humanist Counselling Service, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG; telephone 01-937 2341 (for confidential advice on your personal problems—whatever they are).

Humanist Holidays. *Summer Centre*, 17-24 August at Hunstanton, Norfolk. Small, quiet town, variety of beaches for all ages. Golf. Country Club Hotel on cliff. Licensed. Will take dogs. Full board (lunch packed if required) £26.50 (single £30), includes V.A.T. and gratuity. Reduction for juniors. Hon. Secretary: Mrs. M. Mephum, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4PD. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). *Thursdays*, 12.30—2 p.m. at Tower Hill; *Sundays*, 3—7 p.m. at Marble Arch. (*The Freethinker* and other literature on sale.)

## EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday 5 May, 5.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Harrow Humanist Society, Gayton Road Library, Harrow. Wednesday 8 May, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Independent Adoption Society, Postgraduate Centre, Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway Road, London N7. Saturday 27 April, 2.45 p.m.: Tenth Annual General Meeting—Chairman, Sir Alfred Ayer; Guest Speaker, LEO ABSE, M.P. All welcome.

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday 5 May, 7.30 p.m.: J. D. NGONYANI (Tanzanian High Commission), "Ujamaa—Socialism in Practice in Tanzania".

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group, University Adult Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham. Friday 10 May, 7.30 p.m.: Dr. ALAN GAULD, "Investigating Ghosts and Poltergeists".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday 28 April, 11 a.m.: T. F. EVANS, "The Value of T. S. Eliot". Sunday 28 April, 3 p.m.: *Forum*: JASON CLAY, "Isolation or Integration" (with film, *The Last of the Cuiva*). Tuesday 30 April, 7 p.m.: *Discussion* (admission 10p): NICHOLAS WALTER, "Forms of Freedom".

Waltham Forest Humanist Group, Senior High School, Handsworth Avenue, Highams Avenue, London E4. Tuesday 30 April, 7.45 p.m.: Professor Sir HERMAN BONDI, "Humanism—a personal view".

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, 12 Elmwood, Welwyn Garden City: Saturday 4 May, 8 p.m.: Discussion on Pacifism. Backhouse Room, Handside Lane, Welwyn Garden City: Thursday 9 May, 8 p.m.: "The Samaritans".

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday 28 April, 5.30 p.m.: FANNY COCKERELL, "The Story of the Progressive League". Sunday 19 May, 5.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

## PUBLICATIONS

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