

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: THE NEW INDOCTRINATION? —THE SECULAR HUMANIST POSITION RECONSIDERED

The first of two public meetings organised by the National Secular Society at Conway Hall, London, took place 1 November when Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS was in the Chair. She explained that this was a debate with a difference, for the interrogatory title of the meeting, *Religious Education: the New Indoctrination?*, would be answered in the affirmative by all four of the platform speakers. "In the past", she said, "NSS meetings have often provided a forum for the whole spectrum of views, including Christian views, on the subject under discussion. But this evening we are restricting ourselves to the differing views within the Secular Humanist movement itself. There are no religionists on the platform, though we welcome any there may be in the audience and will be pleased to hear their viewpoint during the discussion period".

### Possible alternatives

Miss Smoker said that the question which concerned the meeting was what we would like to do about the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act. "There are four possibilities: (1) We could simply leave the law as it stands, confident that it has been an utter failure for Christian proselytism and, in fact, counter-productive. But it is also anti-educational and it forces hypocrisy upon many children and upon non-believing teachers not prepared to sacrifice their career prospects by opting out. (2) We could aim simply at a repeal of the religious clauses of the 1944 Act. This, the traditional NSS position, will be represented this evening by Brigid Brophy and Michael Lloyd-Jones. (3) To avoid leaving a vacuum that might be filled by indoctrination in some schools, we could try to have a law passed actually banning religious teaching in schools, as in France and the USA. But what chance is there of getting such a law through Parliament? MPs know they would lose a considerable number of Christian votes by supporting a Bill of that kind, but would be unlikely to lose votes by supporting the *status quo*. (4) We could aim at a new law subjecting religious education to statutory controls to make it fair and educationally valid. This fourth option is the one that will be presented by our other two speakers, David Pollock and Harry Stopes-Roe".

Brigid Brophy was the first speaker and the text of her speech is published in full later in this issue.

David Pollock, a member of the British Humanist Association Education Committee, said that the important feature of the new religious education was that it was given serious, intellectual attention by people who were primarily educationalists rather than Christian apologists. He went on to say that "if Humanists are to be taken seriously they have to emulate the defenders of RE and examine the subject with open minds in an analytical fashion. The RE being defended most persuasively by educationalists today is not the straightforwardly evangelical confessionalism of the early days of the 1944 Act, nor the more recent "neo-confessionalist" approach, with its child-centred methods masking the same evangelical intentions. It is a

"superconfessionalism" which, in theory at least, treats openly the whole range of religions and thus appears to be properly educational and therefore justified as a school subject.

"What Humanists have to demonstrate to their opponents and to the public is that this approach is still biased. It treats world religions as the complete relevant range of choice, whereas there are non-religious alternatives, such as Humanism, which are equally serious stances for living. If the school subject were further broadened to become an open, objective and balanced examination of all stances for living, it would at last be fully justified.

### Afraid of religion

"We owe it to our children to introduce them to mankind's most serious thought about the nature of life and the universe. But some secularists seem to be afraid of religion to the extent that they would ban all mention of it, save incidentally in history or English literature, from the school curriculum. They say it is not intellectually respectable—'mere superstition'—and should therefore be kept out of school. But the Christians could equally call Humanism names and write it off unheard. Others said arrogantly that Christians thought they knew the truth, while Humanists actually knew it. Such authoritarian certainty betrayed a wish to indoctrinate—i.e. to exclude from serious consideration all but their own opinions or convictions. Humanists and Secularists should beware of falling into the habits of their adversaries, especially now that the latter are going some way to put their house in order. We need less rigidity of thought, more openness, more confidence in our own beliefs and their ability to show to advantage in a fair and balanced presentation".

Michael Lloyd-Jones, a teacher and a former member of the NSS executive Committee, said that "the much-publicised RE revolution has been a sham. Despite all the window-dressing with which the RE propagandists have attempted to disarm Humanist criticism, the new RE is a dishonest attempt to force religious ideas on the young. In primary schools, in particular, the crudest religious



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Editor: CHRISTOPHER MOREY

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brainwashing is still standard practice. Religionists know that it is in the early school years that their best opportunity for Christian recruitment occurs, and they are determined to make the most of this opportunity.

"Infants and junior children are daily inculcated with the notion that this is God's world and that they must constantly thank God for the providence and beneficence of his creation. RE in the secondary schools may be less nauseating but it is equally tendentious and just as irrelevant to the needs of today's young people.

"The small-scale introduction of comparative religion has done nothing to remedy the basic injustice of compulsory religious brainwashing. Any attempt at impartiality is almost certainly doomed to failure and the result is special pleading. Even amongst the most liberal of the RE propagandists there seems to be a peculiar blindness to the contentiousness of religious world-views and the injustice of their demand for a sympathetic consideration of them in the special atmosphere of the classroom.

### Dishonest implication

"The teaching of religious beliefs in schools implies that these ideas are academically respectable and have social as well as intellectual credentials. This implication is dishonest and religionists have no right to use the schools either for the direct purpose of Christian recruitment or even for the more subtle promotion of the idea that these discredited and degrading forms of superstition are entitled to at least sympathy and respect.

"The imposition of compulsory religion in today's schools is the legacy of the shameless horse-trading that preceded the 1944 Education Act. Thirty years later there is still no excuse for using the schools to brainwash children into accepting discredited philosophy and fraudulent history".

Dr. Harry Stopes-Roe, Chairman of the British Humanist Association and Senior Lecturer in Science Studies at the University of Birmingham, said that Humanists have the force of genuine education on their side and should not be afraid of the religious in education. He added: "The more clearly we press this, the more their obstruction and double thinking will collapse. If we think in educational terms, we can show that 'good education' in this area is just what we are asking for—no more, no less.

"The dominance of religion in the past has quite pre-

vented what should have been a significant part of education. Tradition, fossilised in the name 'Religious Education' and the 1944 Act, forces the subject towards indoctrination and educational bad odour. But educational pressures have already forced the RE experts to use arguments which in fact destroy their case. Thus the Schools Council *Humanities and the Young School Leaver* characterizes the subject as concerned 'to pose and invite questions about the meaning of human life . . . making clear the available choices . . . and the consequences of making them'. Exactly: this is a worthwhile thing to do—but it is not religious education! It must not be set up in such a way as to presuppose that there is some externally given meaning to life; that there is only one answer and religion is the only choice. Even the most modern RE has not yet come to terms with this fact.

"If the question is asked—and children do ask this sort of question as they grow older—it must be made clear why Humanists say that there is meaning and purpose to life, just because we give our lives meaning and purpose. What does 'good education' require? It has always been fundamental to the Humanist position that children have the right to think—and that there shall be a fair presentation of material for them to think about. Questions about the nature of man, our relationship with each other and our place in the universe can play a significant part in the maturation process. What is wrong is that they should be taken naively at their face value and left with religious answers.

### Fair discussion

"Good education demands what we demand—namely that if these questions be asked, then they must be fairly discussed; and if the children are told about the answers that people give to these questions, then the range of answers must be presented objectively, fairly and in balance. The requirement that the range of answers be presented does not, of course, imply the absurdity that every answer be presented; any treatment would have to be by example and generalisation. And good education requires also that no answer be taught as a fact; the children shall be told what different people give as answers to these questions, without implying that certain ones are picked out as true. Good education requires openness, fairness and balance. And that is what Humanists demand.

"Many subjects occasionally suffer biased teaching: RE is unique in that bias is required by law. It would be disingenuous of RE teachers now to say that the law can abscond itself, having given them the monopoly in the field. It would be naive of us to do no more than repeal the law, if we could secure a new law which would set out a proper definition of educational work in this area. There should be no compulsion to teach anything; but if 'fundamental questions' and 'ways of life' are discussed, then the treatment shall be objective and fair, and balanced over the secular and the religious stances for living".

Barbara Smoker concluded the discussion by saying that the main disagreement between the two pairs of speakers seemed to be the difference between a long-term and a short-term view: "How, in practice, asked Brigid Brophy and Michael Lloyd-Jones, could the proposed subject of religious or non-religious 'stances for living' be expected to be 'fair and balanced' when those who will be teaching the subject are the existing committed Christians trained in RE? David Pollock and Harry Stopes-Roe, on the other hand, seem to be looking beyond this situation to a time when their proposed new syllabuses will have attracted a more 'fair and balanced' generation of teachers in 'education in stances for living'."



## STATE AID PLEA FOR ROBBER CHURCH

Readers of the *Guardian* letters column (5 November) were subjected to a heart-rending plea by the Reverend David W. Perry for a Government subsidy of £50 millions a year to the Christian Churches, reduced to comparative penury by inflation. But let us look at the facts.

The Church of England "inherited" the vast wealth of the earlier Christian Church in this country and continued for some centuries to milch the whole population, not only through "voluntary" donations as a premium against hell-fire, but also through compulsory tithes payments and other forms of taxation. As recently as the 1820s the Government granted them a gift of almost £3 millions for the building of even more churches, and another £1 million to augment the fund for the benefit of the clergy. To this day the Church of England churches are also free of rates.

Few Church of England churches, however, are today fully utilized, and even the maintenance of many of them is no longer worthwhile. In recent years, therefore, thousands of redundant churches have been sold off to the highest bidder—the Church Commissioners then pocketing the proceeds instead of returning them to the whole community.

In addition to real estate their annual income from invested capital has hitherto enabled the Church of England to employ some 50,000 full-time propagandists who, if financially dependent on the contributions of churchgoers, would all be forced to seek remunerative employment.

All organizations that rely upon investment income are suffering from inflation, and many are having to decrease their staffs and social workers. Why should the Christian churches alone be exempt from the need to cut their coat according to their cloth? Mr. Perry's answer is "the Christian ethic". Insofar as the Christian ethic is humanitarian it is by no means exclusive to Christianity, but will be found in almost all creeds and philosophies—for example, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" merely amounts to "the golden rule" found in pre-Christian Judaism (Leviticus), ancient China (Confucius and Lao-Tse), ancient Greece and Rome, and most other civilizations.

Mr. Perry also mentions "pastoral care". This sounds very commendable, but if it is to be paid for by the whole community, would it not be better for us to spend the money in increasing the number of trained case-workers in the municipal social services? Anyway, interference by a counsellor who is neither a trained psychiatric social worker nor a personal friend and is firmly committed to an ideology which the client does not share, can (and often does) do more harm than good.

"Being a grant to all the denominations", claims Mr. Perry, "it will be a powerful stimulus to unity." But only, of course, Christian denominations. (And probably only the more orthodox of them.) Jews and Muslims, not to mention secular humanists, are thus to be placed at an even greater financial disadvantage than at present. In any case the most powerful stimulus to Christian unity is surely the fact that Christianity as a whole is now making a last-ditch stand against the forces of reason. Hence ecumenism.

Seen from a train window at London Bridge Station: a poster blatantly proclaiming "THERE IS NO GOD"! What! Had the N.S.S. been splashing out on a poster campaign? But no. Closer inspection, craning out of the window, revealed some preceding words, in a different colour—which, unfortunately for the evangelical advertisers, did not show up in the half light. The almost invisible words read: "The fool hath said in his heart . . .".

## OBITUARY

### Mrs. Enid Simmonds

Mrs Enid Simmonds who has died at Ross-on-Wye at the age of 66 took a keen interest in local affairs and she formed the Countryside Protection League to combat further encroachments by commercial interests. She was also an active member of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. Mrs Simmonds was a much-loved member of her family and a good neighbour who was always ready to help others, particularly the old. Our sympathy is extended to her husband, daughter, sister and other relatives.

Mr Jim Little conducted a secular funeral ceremony at Hereford Crematorium.

### Mr. Douglas Molyneux

We regret to announce the death of Mr. Douglas Molyneux at Woodend Hospital, Aberdeen, on 29 October. He had been in poor health for some time, but remained cheerful and maintained a keen interest in current affairs. He was a *Freethinker* reader and a member of the National Secular Society and Aberdeen Humanist Group. He served on the committee of the latter for a time, and remained a group member although he was unable to participate in its activities.

Mr. Molyneux, who was an architect by profession, spent most of his working life in Hamilton, Lanarkshire, but returned to Aberdeen over 20 years ago. He read widely and was particularly interested in local history. He was a widower and is survived by his daughter and five sons. Mr. Molyneux requested that his body should be used for medical research.

## FREETHINKER FUND

The Fund total for the last four months amounted to £111·20, and we are very grateful to those readers who have sent donations. The continuing increase in costs is a great problem, and it is virtually certain that 1975 will not be a financially happy year for publications like *The Freethinker*. We appeal to all supporters to introduce the paper to potential readers and help to meet the deficit which increases every month.

Our thanks to: H. A. Alexander (42p), J. W. Arkell (60p), Anonymous (£4·50), D. Bressant (£1·15), W. Beninson (74p), C. W. R. Byass (£1), J. G. Burden (50p), I. Barr (£1), S. Berry (34p), J. H. Budd (£3·84), R. Bush (34p), D. Behr (£9·44), S. Clowes (£1), J. H. Charles (£2·10), W. V. Crees (42p), J. Cullen (66p), R. Cadmore (£9·25), E. Collins (£1·84), F. Caldwell (95p), A. E. Carpenter (12p), L. Dignam (£1·84), E. Drossos (£1·20), H. R. A. Davies (50p), H. Etherington (£1), A. Foster (£2), A. E. Garrison (68p), W. Gerrard (£3·84), E. J. Hughes (£3), E. C. Hughes (50p), Humanist Holidays (£5), D. Harper (£10), D. Hawsworth (24p), B. W. S. Irwin (£5), C. Jeffery (42p), D. E. Jones (58p), J. A. Kane (£1·64), W. Lazarus (£2·84), R. T. Lawley (84p), I. S. Low (£1), A. E. Morris (£1·84), A. Mackay (£2), A. F. MacLennan (25p), E. A. Mackay (£2), D. J. McConalogue (£3·84), C. J. Monrad (£3·40), H. A. Newman (£2·76), D. Petrie (£3·84), J. G. Peace (£1), A. R. J. Pitcher (40p), R. B. Ratcliff (84p), H. G. Riddall (40p), J. F. Robbins (84p), M. R. Rayment (50p), N. J. Reed (14p), N. Sinnott (£2), L. Sebba (42p), F. G. Shaw (£1·34), A. E. Smith (£2). Total: £111·20.

that things will be back to normal by the end of the year. It is regretted that it has proved impossible to bring "The Freethinker" out to schedule of late. It is confidently hoped



# RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION IN SCHOOL

BRIGID BROPHY

I should like to make it clear that my reason for considering Jesus Christ an unsuitable person to preside over the schooling of the nation's children has nothing to do with the story that he was born to an unmarried mother, under (according to tradition) the age of 16, in socio-economic class four.

I do not subscribe to the political philosophy which believes the words of the marriage ceremony to be a spell which magically guarantees that any children born to the couple will grow up into good citizens. Most of the proper bastards in the world have been legitimately born. And conversely some of the best citizens I know are technical bastards, brought up in one-parent households or, like Jesus if the story is true, in unconventional three-parent households.

## Obscure origins

My reasons for thinking Jesus should be demoted from his statutory position in British education concern not the obscurity of his social origins but the obscurity of his historical—or, as seems more likely, his mythological—origins. There is simply no sober, arguable reason whatever for thinking that the stories about him *are* true—and certainly no reason that doesn't apply with equal force to all the very similar stories that were current in the ancient world about other heroic or divine personages, like Dionysos or Perseus, who were said to be the illegitimate children of mortal women and gods.

The only difference in intellectual standing between the anonymous, undated narratives that recount the magical story of Perseus and those that recount the magical story of Jesus lies not in the stories as such but in the after-history. The religion of Jesus was enforced, and all rival or alternative religions and all non-religions were suppressed, by the ideological tyranny of Christendom, which gripped Europe for a thousand years and ruled by threatening the freedom of the life of anyone who dared in public to doubt.

## No sense of antiquity

When defenders of religious education appeal to the Christian tradition of our country, they are not appealing to tradition in the sense of antiquity. There is little doubt that the oldest still-surviving supernatural belief entertained in this island is the belief that our fates are governed by the stars. However, the traditionalists are not demanding that astrology be taught in our schools. Their appeal is strictly to the Christian tradition, which made itself and kept itself the tradition by force.

And in fact the statutory position of religion in our schools is one of the few relics left in this country of the Christian tradition that religion could and should be compelled. Prayer books still print the Act of 1559 whereby all citizens are obliged to go to church every Sunday or else pay the churchwardens a fine of twelve pence. However, we adults have seen to it that that law is no longer binding on us. Equally, the various chapels, churches, synagogues, mosques and other buildings put up for the purposes of religious worship are not compelled by law to hold religious worship. Whether they do or not is up to the religious organisations themselves. So far as religious organisations are concerned, and so far as adult citizens are concerned, the grip of ideological religious tyranny has

been broken and Britain is now a country that practices religious toleration.

The only people to whom this toleration is not extended are children. And the only institution to which it is not extended is the state education system.

Some of the schools now in the state system were founded by churches. Even though these schools are now financed by the state, religion is enforced in them, and it is religion according to the denomination of the church that originally founded them. Most of the state schools, however, were actually founded by the state. Yet religion is enforced in those too. They were built for educational purposes, but they are forced by law, and they are the only buildings in the country that *are* forced by law, to hold religious worship. At the same time they are forced to provide religious instruction; and in fact religious instruction is, despite their ostensibly educational purpose, the only form of instruction they are specifically and by name required to provide.

The religion practised and taught in the state-founded state schools is non-denominational. However, the syllabus to be taught in the religious lessons has to be unanimously agreed by a local committee on which the Church of England must be represented. Clearly, in the matter of the religion in which the schools have to provide lessons, the Church of England has, at the least, veto rights.

## Children's rights

The children, on the other hand, have no veto rights. They are not free to opt out of either worship or religious lessons. In theory their parents have a right to opt them out—regardless of whether the children want to be opted out. However, the parents' right is meaningless. There is no obligation on the schools or the local authorities to tell the parents that they have the opting out right or, indeed, to tell the parents that worship and religious education take place in the schools.

Many people simply don't know that religion is enforced on state schools. They are used to the state's tolerant attitude to adult religious affairs. It never crosses their mind that the state has picked on children to be the sole target of its intolerance.

This general ignorance makes nonsense of the claim that most of the population or most of the parent population actively want religion in the schools. Of course, you can get Yes answers to questionnaires if you go round asking people if children should be made acquainted with the true, the good and the beautiful. So you can if you put the question in a way that implies that, if the responder says "No" to belief and worship, he will automatically cut children off from the general-knowledge facts of what various religions believe and practise. But the only reliable testimony to adults' view of religion is what they do about it themselves. Some adults may be persuaded, by carefully phrased questions, into expressing a not-very strong belief that religious education is one of those medicines that is in some vague way good for growing children but not necessary for grown-ups. But quite plainly adults believe it to be a pretty nasty-tasting medicine. Adults in this country, unlike children in this country, are free not to go to worship. And the huge majority of them exercise their freedom by staying regularly away.



The compulsion on all state schools, and the compulsion on all state-educated children whose parents don't happen to know of and use the right to opt them out, are not imposed, as you might guess they were, by a medieval statute dating from the great, traditional days of Christian tyranny. They are imposed by the Education Act of 1944. It's often said that the Act was designed to guard against the very considerable danger that the Christian denominations would carry their habit of squabbling against one another into the state education system. That this is part of the truth I don't doubt. Obviously, it's why most state religious education is required to be non-denominational. Obviously, however, that is not the whole truth about the 1944 Act, because the simplest way to keep denominational squabbles out of the schools would have been to keep the denominations, all of them, out: that is, to keep religion out. The Act which decided, instead, to compel religion into the schools was passed by that rump parliament which had sat since before the war without a general election. It was passed in 1944, a year when everybody could foresee the imminent birth of that new type of society in Britain which in fact was born in 1945, as soon as there was a general election. Perhaps the old parliament was afraid, as old institutions often are when reform is adumbrated but hasn't yet been seen in beneficial action, that things were in danger of going too far. If you were alarmed at seeing the old habit of unreasoning obedience to the British class hierarchy about to crumble, you might well think you could shore it up for another generation or two, without the odium of seeming to do so by a blatantly political move, indeed perhaps with the positive plaudits of reformers, if, in an Act apparently concerned with education, you inserted some clauses that would compel children to religion—which is itself an hierarchical system, which insists on unreasoning obedience, and which maintains that unreasoning faith belongs to a higher order of mental activity than reasoning.

### Faith and obedience

A network of state schools was first established in this country in 1870, as a consequence of a large extension of the franchise. It was done on the theory "we must educate our masters"—the theory, that is, which may have some truth in it, that it is not safe to give people a vote unless you also give them an education. The 1944 Education Act worked the argument the other way round. It was itself making an extension of education, and I suspect its authors felt, not necessarily consciously, that it would not be safe to put such a large increase in reasoning power and knowledge at the disposal of the populace unless it was counterbalanced by the enforced inculcation of the notion that faith and obedience are superior to reason and knowledge.

The danger was thought to be, I suspect, that educated citizens might reason themselves into an uppity frame of mind and cease to know their proper places. So the religious instruction in state schools was placed under the aegis of the Church of England, whose catechism (a document designed for the instruction of children) defines my duty to my neighbour as "to honour and obey the queen and all that are placed in authority under her; to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters".

Whatever its political purpose, the imposition of religion on our children was a political act, and it will take a political act to undo it. The line-up will not be straightforwardly party-political. Still less will it be a division between faith and disbelief. There do exist Christians who would like to disown the imperialist past of their religion, who don't seek to manipulate the minds of children, who recognize that,

in a tolerant country, which respects the rights of churches to invite children to visit them of their own free will, there is no justification for demanding that the state education system be used, by force of law, as a regular part-time church.

The debate will be, simply, between those who think that the end—whatever end it is they may have in mind—justifies cheating our children and those who think that the essential (religiously, irreligiously, morally and politically) is that we should be honest with our children.

### Object of worship

The 1944 Parliament didn't specify *who* was to be worshipped daily in schools. All the same it implied an existential proposition. It guaranteed to the children that there is somebody to be worshipped. I imagine that every MP who gave his vote to the clause in fact knew that he was exceeding his competence.

The present duty of the freethought movement is to bring it up to the notice of present-day politicians that Parliament, which so largely secured liberty and toleration in this country by resisting the absurd doctrine of the divine right of kings, only makes a fool of itself, and makes a dangerous travesty of democracy, when it continues to pretend to a divine right of Parliament.

It is also, I think, the duty of freethinkers to resist the seductions of those Christians who now offer to conduct a much more liberal or "open-ended" compulsory religion in schools. That is only the last desperate clutch of the iron grip of Christendom, still trying to keep a fingerhold on its unjustified privileges. It is not for us to strike bargains or negotiate compromises about rights that belong not to us but to children. By all means let us cooperate with Christians, if they invite us to, in devising open discussions in Sunday schools, held in churches, where the children are free to attend or not as they choose. But none of us, neither Christians nor freethinkers, have a right to put over our beliefs, by compulsion, in the schools—any more than the political parties have a right to put over theirs. The business of schools is education, and education is the only thing we are justified in making compulsory for children.

### Apathetic cynics

Until we decide to be honest with our children, we are in danger of subverting democracy. Instead of bringing up educated citizens, we are turning out apathetic cynics. If you tell your child that babies are found under gooseberry bushes, and if, when he asks you why he should believe that, you reply, on the authority of being his parent, "Because I say so", then, when he finds you out, he will consider you—correctly—either an ignoramus or a hypocrite; and he won't see any reason, because you've shown him no reason, to believe other statements you've made to him (such as that it's wrong to hit old ladies on the head) on the same authority. At present we force our schools to tell children a tale about how baby Jesus was born to an unmarried virgin and a god and a star magically located the place where he lay. And when the children ask why they should believe that, we can give them only the resounding inane answer "Because Parliament says God says so". I can think of no quicker or neater way of discrediting, in children's eyes, the whole apparatus of civilisation, intellectual, moral and aesthetic, which is what we profess to be trying to hand on to them in their schooling.

Children deserve better from us than an education subverted on its home ground by the superimposition of anti-reasonable values issued on non-existent authority. They deserve, in fact, our honesty.



# THE DEATH RATTLE OF PURITANISM

ANTONY A. MILNE

Sir Keith Joseph's speech in Birmingham last October on "remoralization" caused quite a stir. Even so, it doubtless did little to advance the cause of Conservatism: even priests of high-toryism like Norman St. John-Steuas were alarmed at visions of great backward leaps and a future of permanent minority party status. But in the person of Sir Keith the latent voice of puritanism had suddenly become vocal when the mulling restraints of vote-catching hyperbole were lifted following electoral defeat. At once, the self-appointed and unelected moral leaders rallied to the cause.

## Middle-aged reaction

Mary Whitehouse was delighted at the return of the limelight to her front driveway. Raymond Blackburn, M.P., Dr. Margaret White, David Holbrook, Lord Longford, Trevor Huddleston and Montague Norman all thrilled to be able once more to exert their purifying influences, now that the stops had been pulled out. Their common denominator is a middle-aged reaction to the "future shock" of rapid material and cultural change. They collectively look with surprise at the (largely illusory) permissive freedoms of the younger generation. Narrowly educated, victims of generations of sexual guilt complexes, with little or no understanding of social processes, their moral fervour is seldom tempered with a little good-natured humanity.

Such people fit into a certain niche and become stereotypes. They reach a stage in life where they feel the need to play a paternalistic role. As Leo Abse, M.P., said in a perceptive letter to *The Times*, they are often parents of attractive daughters, and they adopt an overly protective attitude towards them. Or they fear a son's sexual challenge to their own declining virility:

The reaction of the father (to permissiveness) may not necessarily be directed towards the son but may be diverted to increased assertions of seniority, conservative control and aggressiveness towards all young people.

To our moral leaders, social life has become a decadent whirlpool of rising material prosperity coinciding with a decline in "moral fibre". They view the greater freedoms and tolerance, and the decline in respect for paternalistic authority, only as abuses by those sections of the community least able to use such freedoms properly. For years such puritans have tempered their language to disguise the class prejudice lurking beneath their ill-natured sentiments. Sir Keith Joseph was one of the few who had the courage to bring the concept of social class back into a discussion of the nation's morals where it had surreptitiously belonged as a heritage of nineteenth-century Victorianism.

## Foundations of national life

Of course the "poor" always breed faster than the "rich". This is an assertion that has long antiquity. Yet society has advanced nevertheless in regard to both its material and moral life. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the few who were literate and virtuous were generally ecclesiastical scribes and members of the nobility, and they often did not replace themselves at all. But literacy still spread to all levels of society despite this.

The moral puritans always claim to speak in defence of the family rather than merely to condemn certain types of personal behaviour. Promiscuity, they claim, erodes the firm foundations of our national life. They ignore the fact that the nuclear family is now more the norm than the extended family, with its wider outer ring of filial relatives. Social change affects the pattern of marital customs as it does

other behaviour. Increasing geographical and social mobility, and greater sex equality, engender a higher degree of male/female interaction in society generally. This tends to underline the inadequacies of monogamous institutions, and to put more stresses upon them. Indeed, the widely known practice of "serial monogamy" in the U.S.A. is more likely to be a manifestation of such social changes than of purposive attempts to undermine moral values.

Another theme in twentieth-century puritanism is the "exploitation" of human beings, and this term figures decisively in the anti-pornography debate. Yet it is a term that is abused, since it implies the *coercion* of an unequal party within a power relationship. This can hardly apply to consenting adults, unless used in the metaphysical Marxist sense to mean the withholding of true monetary value or exclusion from the total production process.

## Pornography business

A typical attitude to pornography is shown in the book *The Permissive Society* by the former Conservative M.P. John Selwyn Gummer:

Once (pornography) became a business much like any other, all the modern methods of printing and colour photography would attempt to widen the market opportunities and publicize their wares.

This ignores the fundamental economic principle that says that, beyond the black market situation, supply and demand will equilibrate and the price mechanism will eventually stabilize the price level, a point even admitted by the author:

It is true that the turnover achieved by the Danish industry has fallen from the high peak it reached in its first year of effective legality, but this is largely because greater competition has caused prices to fall.

For any writer thus to ignore the implications of his own analysis is to risk discrediting his whole authenticity. It becomes clear that such writers succumb to their own moral predilections, and no amount of rationalization by the more logical will produce a different conclusion. Moralists continue to campaign in the teeth of the evidence and conclusions of numerous committees of enquiry across the western world which either conclude neutrally or even claim therapeutic qualities for pornographic material.

## Humane concern

Sir Keith Joseph has a legislative reputation for a humane concern for the quality of our national life as a whole. It would be charitable to regard him, as some do, as a latter-day Sir Thomas More. In More's *Utopia* there was praise for a kindly king, and for an advanced and virtuous Parliamentary nation-state. There was condemnation, however, for the repression of the poor and for the corruption of privileged élites. The children of the poor were hanged for stealing bread; the masses were victims of an avaricious and exploitive society in which true compassion and charity, the hallmark of a great nation, were sadly missing.

In essence, it is a society's public morality, rather than its private morality, which the puritans should strive to preserve. We are fortunate to have a reasonable degree of public morality. We have Age Concern, Shelter, Mind and other mental health groups and disabled organizations. Our materialistic society generates surplus wealth for comprehensive welfare schemes and better educational chances for the working classes.

Thomas More showed us how much moralism and hypocrisy existed amongst the sixteenth-century élite, whilst



below there was much grinding poverty and viciousness. At the present time in some eastern countries there is rampant corruption and gross inefficiency at nearly all levels of public life that seriously affect the life chances of the underprivileged. Yet the corruption is tragically persistent, almost historical; very little can be done about it.

In many ways, our society is a lot healthier than many others. We even have the lowest rate of venereal disease in the West. It is, however, still a society that connives at social ills and injustices. It is still weighed down with bureaucratic delays, lengthy court appeals and complex housing laws that exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the

appalling housing problem in this country. It is an immoral society, too, that still allows class and colour to influence what kind of trial we get at law, what kind of profession we can get into, how much wealth we can inherit or accumulate.

#### Sickeningly thwarted

The Mary Whitehouses of this world do little to help promote a better life for our people; they do little to actually increase human happiness. Their Freudian concept of "moral renewal" that relates solely to certain kinds of sexual behaviour is sickeningly thwarted.

## REPORT ON CoG SECT

WILLIAM McILROY

Following a period of intensive investigation the New York Attorney General has issued his report on the fundamentalist Christian sect known as the Children of God. The sixty-five-page document is a damning indictment of the sect, whose members have been accused of kidnapping, extortion, rape and brainwashing. It criticizes in strongest terms their founder and leader, David Berg (Moses David), an aging American hippy who poses as "God's prophet for today".

#### Emotionally insecure

Moses David and his henchmen have aimed to recruit the young and the emotionally insecure—preferably from well-to-do families. (New members have to hand over their possessions to the sect.) They are exhorted to reject their families and friends. Outside influences are shunned and they spend much of their time memorizing passages from the Bible and from the writings of Moses David. Law enforcement agencies were on their trail in the United States, after accusations of malpractices and the virtual enslavement of young people who were enticed into joining their communes. "God's prophet" moved his headquarters to London, where some of the wealthy gulls of the Jesus Movement predictably financed the new sect—though they regretted it later. Moses David's earlier career as a Bible-punching evangelist is well chronicled, but in recent years he has fostered an air of mystery and secretiveness about himself, and few of his present devotees have ever seen him. He has become a hate-mongering, sex-obsessed fanatic, living in seclusion and writing interminable epistles known as Mo Letters, besides contemplating his genitals.

#### Hoodwinked

The Children of God hoodwink members of the public into contributing to their funds, and they are registered as a religious charity in this country. But the New York report has prompted one Conservative Member of Parliament, Mr. John Hunt, who had called unsuccessfully for an enquiry three years ago when the first Children of God commune was set up in his constituency, to take action again. He is now preparing a report for the Home Office and has received many letters from parents, whose children have left home and abandoned academic careers after becoming involved with this organization.

The mother of a fifteen-year-old Swindon boy wrote that her son had been "very unhappy and at times almost deranged" since coming under the sect's influence. A Dorking widow told how her daughter, who was being

treated by a psychiatrist for adolescent depression, had broken with her family and would give them only a box number address: "Her total rejection of the love of her family, and particularly the rejection of her eight-year-old sister, is cruelty she would not normally be capable of." The artistically talented daughter of a wealthy Home Counties family, destined for a University career, ran away from school to join the Children of God. She was made a Ward of Court and was removed by the police from the Pimlico C. of G. commune in London. She is legally forbidden to contact them until she is eighteen, but it is now known that she is planning to hand over to the sect a substantial legacy which she will receive next year.

Eight months ago the National Secular Society demanded a Home Office enquiry into the activities of the Children of God. The Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Association of British Ex-Servicemen and Women have expressed concern at the anti-Semitic tone of Children of God propaganda. The Board of Deputies warned that the sect's philosophy, as enunciated by Moses David, has serious and dangerous threats for British Jews. The Scotland Yard Special Branch is uninterested in the Children of God because it is "not political". While the Special Branch is always very interested in British political organizations, particularly of the Left, an American religious sect which has been the subject of the most critical report of its kind for many years, is allowed to operate freely.

The time has come for a very close look at the Children of God, and at other dubious imports such as the Divine Light Mission, the Osborn Foundation and the World Federation for Peace and Unification.

### HERETIC CARDS

Dear Smoker, You can take your Anti-Xmas cards and stick them up your arse and set fire to them: that will give you some idea of what it's going to be like for you in Hell. (*Unsolicited testimonial*)

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# GOD?

BARBARA SMOKER

*The following exposé of God was part of a talk given on 18 September at the Central Library, Croydon, under the auspices of the Croydon Humanist Group. It is being off-printed as a National Secular Society leaflet for free distribution.*

People who believe in a divine creator, trying to live their lives in obedience to his supposed wishes and in expectation of a supposed eternal reward, are victims of the greatest confidence trick of all time.

A children's hospital will provide you with ample evidence against the existence of a being that is both all-powerful and all-loving. And even if some specious explanation is contrived for the sufferings of humanity—such as its giving us opportunities for merit, or its being caused by the "sin" of Adam or that of ourselves or our parents—what about the suffering of animals, during the many millions of years before mankind came on the scene?

## Cruel monster

Since all life and its evolution are based on the principle of the weakest going to the wall, the creator, if the universe really were deliberately created, would be a monster of unimaginable cruelty—enjoying the sight of one animal devouring another, condoning the wastage of a myriad doomed species, and taking sadistic pleasure in the miseries of mankind. If our promised heaven means spending eternity in the company of such a monster, let alone in lickspittle adoration of him or it, what self-respecting human being would want "salvation"?

If the alleged creator really were all-powerful, then he certainly could not be a god of love. If he really were a god of love, then he must be so incompetent that it would surely have been better had he left creation uncreated.

What is the I.Q. of "divine intelligence"? Since it apparently scores no better than random chance, and has learned nothing at all from billions of years of trial and error, "divine intelligence" would be put to shame by the powers of adaptability exhibited by the least of its supposed creatures.

To say that God is good is meaningless unless his alleged goodness is to be judged by some independent criterion—that is, by human values. Therefore, when god-believers argue that human values must come from God they are chasing their own tails.

## God and existence

Most god-believers also postulate God as an explanation for existence itself. But if existence needs to be explained, the god-theory fails to explain it, for it leaves us with the necessity of explaining why and how God exists. The assertion that God has existed from all eternity, uncaused, is no advance on the hypothesis that matter (or energy) has existed in varying forms—from all eternity, uncaused.

Now just consider the vastness of the universe in relation to ourselves. Would an overlord of the universe be likely to take a special interest in the doings of individual members of a particular animal species, recently evolved on a small satellite of an inconspicuous star, among the billions of stars of a certain galaxy, itself one of billions of galaxies?

Is ours the only planet anywhere inhabited by a species comparable in intelligence with man? If so, and if the creator's main concern is therefore assumed to be with man, why should he create such a vast universe to house

so few of us? Besides, with such a huge choice of territory available, why did he not choose a less hostile environment for us?

If the more likely supposition is made that there are other colonies of intelligent sentient beings scattered about the universe, then god-believers must assume either that God has an equal concern for all—presumably, for instance in Christian terms, sacrificing his son more than once—or else, with supreme arrogance, that earth is his chosen planet and man his chosen species.

## Arrogant assumption

Even more arrogant, and selfish in the extreme, is the assumption, within the context of our own planet at this particular moment in time, that I and mine (especially in the more affluent areas of the planet) are God's chosen few. Although this is rarely admitted, it is clearly implied in every prayer of thanksgiving. To say grace, knowing that people on this globe are starving, indicates a highly selfish acquiescence in the arrogantly supposed favouritism of the almighty. A really decent god-believer, far from giving thanks for the food and good health and fortune enjoyed by himself and his family and close friends, would surely curse God for his neglect of the hungry, the sick and the tormented, throughout the world.

To imagine that God wants prayers and hymns of praise is to make him out a sort of oriental potentate; while praying for favours is an attempt to get him to change his allegedly all-wise mind.

To say that "God moves in mysterious ways" is to put up a smokescreen of mystery behind which fantasy may survive in spite of all the facts.

## OPEN LETTER

### TO THE BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK

Dear Mr. Stockwood,

I read with much interest your article on Rumania in my *Daily Telegraph* of 14 November. The Orthodox Church and the Communist State work together, you state, and one result of this co-operation is, you imply, that there is no mindless football hooliganism in Rumania, compared to that of the Manchester United fans. That is very nice, I am sure. But there is no such hooliganism in Russia either, where the Church is barely tolerated, as you yourself state. And after all, in England where there is football hooliganism, there are close bonds between the Church and State. So clearly, lack of football hooliganism must stem from the Communist system rather than Church State togetherness!

You write very approvingly of the position of the Church in Rumania which "members of the Church of England might well envy". To quote you again, "As for the Bishops, they live in a style which has been quite unknown in this country for decades. Most have their own fields, vineyards and wines, and they receive a salary equivalent to that of a senior member of the Government. Labour is no problem in their houses or on their estates, and on occasions roads are cleared for their cars to pass".

Clearly the Marxist State is paying a handsome price for this compromise on realistic grounds. But the \$64,000 question is how does your envious approval of this feudal state of affairs square with your socialist convictions?

GEORGE DAVEY



# REVIEWS

## BOOKS

**A TIME TO HEAL** by Gordon Turner. Talmy, Franklin, £2.75.

**THE MEDICAL HANDBOOK TO END ALL MEDICAL HANDBOOKS** by Dr. L. Pheasant. Wolfe Publishing, £2.50.

**THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN** by F. A. Hornibrook. Tandem Publishing Ltd, 35p.

A crop of "medical" books calculated to end all medical books having just come to hand, it is possibly as well that these, under review, are *not* entrusted to the tender mercies of the more "thinking" and orthodox in the field of medical reviewing. For not one of the three can be comfortably inserted into any of the categories calculated to cure the prostate or the sore thumb, the fracture or the hernia, bronchitis or even the common cold. What all of them can do is cure the "blues"; but not with Christian Science, Billy Graham, telly religiosity or any other of those mumbo jumbo philosophies so dear to the heart of the Good Man who preaches in his own words the presents for the "faithful" to be found in the Good Book; all the "good" books of all the various joss-houses. "You want the best creeds—we have 'em!"

Gordon Turner is an extraordinary man, irrespective of whether or not he is an extraordinary healer. His claims are made by others; for his part he does not pose as an instrument of a deity, only as one who finds himself helping others by touch and manner, power and sympathy and a sound medical knowledge; part of which he has grown to accept as well as in part reject. The story in *A Time to Heal* is modestly told, with a burning sincerity and with no suggestion of the commercialist about it. Too often the healer, a word that has unfortunate connotations for freethinkers, is a blend of medicine man and evangelist. The "pills" and tracts in the market square are the accessories that go with the routine performance of the miracle-worker who cures everybody and everything within sight. Here we have the tract on the printed page in the form of a book. He has been described as a "faith-healer," but refutes the suggestion that he is anything of the kind. Mr. Turner adapts Gertrude Stein when he writes "A healer is a healer is a healer". His thoughtful and, at times, absorbing book goes far to prove that its author is not so much one of the "faithful" as one of the quiet, good and unself-seeking men whose "healing" is not a matter of faith, but of awareness.

The author of *The Hairy Man's Book of First Aid* is a well known and witty country doctor who, because the rules against advertising preclude his answering to his true name has adopted the pseudonym of Dr. L. Pheasant for his literary output, which has recently been added to with the publication of *The Medical Handbook to end all Medical Handbooks*. The publishers describe it as "a splendiferous present for doctor or patient" but it is less than that for most of the doctors of my acquaintance and much more for a number of those "patients"—including myself—who have suffered the protocol that goes hand in hand with so many of the skilled and learned professions; a Harley Street religion in itself of a non-celestial type that is nonetheless both unconsciously comic and typifying in turn. Dr. Pheasant is clearly "sending up" his colleagues—a good natured chap, not the victim of any red-taped strangulated

hernia (he'd call it "rupture", of course) but he lashes his toffee-nosed fellows and uptight medicoes in such chapter headings as "Doctors", "Nurses" (he likes them), "Medical Students" (he was one, once upon a time), G.P.s (he's one now) and Gynaecologists (sample: "especially the one who said to the dentist *I don't know how you can spend your life looking down other people's throats*"). Pheasant's a funny fellow, Pheasant's for fun—Pheasant's for freethinkers; especially those sceptics, like Anatole France, who contend that ridicule is the greatest weapon against ill humour, oppression and general anti-social behaviour in our everyday lives.

And finally *The Culture of the Abdomen*. So much has been written of the classic text book written by Fred Hornibrook (of beloved memory to members of the N.S.S. and readers of this paper) that it is now only a matter of rejoicing that it has been made available yet again to a new generation of readers, both freethinkers and christians (and all the other "faithful" as well), in a new cover in paperback form. The "dress" is garish, but it's the contents that matter, and although the original plates have been replaced by some mundane line drawings ("text figures" the publishers call them) they are not poor enough to seriously damage the strength of the message that, when first splendidly published by Heinemann—exactly 50 years ago—won the applause of such worthies as H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, A. P. Herbert and Johnston Abraham amongst "patients", and the great Sir William Arbuthnot Lane in the ranks of those enlightened doctors who recognized in F. A. Hornibrook a pioneer in the study and practice of physical education; one who might well be termed the first great figure in physiotherapy. It is indeed fitting that in a year which sees the publication of two above-the-ordinary books concerning Health—a serious autobiography on the one hand and a comical "send-up" on the other—we should have back with us a definitive work in handy form that is as undated today as when it was first published.

PETER COTES

## CINEMA

**LAST TANGO IN PARIS** Directed by Bertolucci. Scene One, Swiss Centre, and general release.

*Last Tango in Paris* is likely to be the object of what has been described as one of the most important test cases in obscenity law. In the near future a trial will take place at the Central Magistrates' Court as the result of a private prosecution by Edward Shackleton, a retired Salvation Army officer. This will be the first case of the prosecution of a film "exhibited in a licensed cinema" under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act, and could be as important a case for films as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was for literature. It is therefore appropriate to review the film, taking it on its own terms as a serious work of art.

Like all good films *Last Tango in Paris* is so essentially a visual expression that comment can only reduce its complexity. It is a slow film but its cumulative effect was for me immensely powerful. A relationship between a middle-aged man and a pretty young girl forms the centre of the film; this relationship may not be typical of those we see around us, yet in important ways it is representative. Marlon Brando, as the older man, apparently casually passes Maria Schneider, as the young woman, in the street: then we see him huddled in the room which she has taken, empty and ready to be furnished. Within minutes he fucks her standing



against a wall. From this point they try to establish a relationship with absolutely no reference to the world outside that room; their past and their links with other people are both forbidden topics of conversation. It is an attempt to live a love affair with pristine existential purity: naked, unencumbered beings confronted with the inescapable reality of each other. The camera constantly returns to this room, roaming it as though it were a universe of itself.

Of course, the outside world is inescapable and intrudes intolerably upon them. The man's wife has died, committing suicide, and his mind keeps returning with the camera to images of a blood-stained bath and to the flop house with its petty jealousies, where he lived with her. The young woman's fiancé provides another strand in the film. He is a young director making a film about their affair, which, naturally, includes shots of her childhood; so she, too, has images of her past continually thrust before her.

It is a stroke of genius that her fiancé be a film maker for two reasons: firstly, since it shows the kind of image of love relationships which the media have foisted upon our society, secondly because it brings attention to the fact that the film is a work of art about the kind of work of art which it is (like much modern art). The diamond-ring, roses and "happy day" image of a love relationship, of the right person with the right commodities, the whole debasement of "Romantic" love which admiss and sentimental films have impressed on our society, is thus placed in stark contrast with the relationship between Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider (as we must call the characters who have no names). The fiancé's film within the film at times becomes a parody of this "type", as, for example, with the proposal in front of a weir, accompanied by the beautiful visual send-up of the sinking life-belt.

This brings me to the notorious buggery scene, which, I should mention for the sake of the Whitehouse brigade, is not portrayed as such a joyful experience that the whole of England's couples will be sent away happily experimenting. It seems to me legitimate because it so starkly represents the rape of our minds with which the media penetrate us—the seeing of ourselves in relation to others in terms of commodities, that reification which is the true shit of our society. It is also valid since the penetration of the anus is analogous to the need to stir the hoarded turds of our past, which constipate our possibilities of clean relationships uncluttered by past-, self-, and media-created images.

The fact that the film is about film, that is about itself, is not merely narcissistic self-obsession but important, since the clichés of cinema and TV have become a part of the way in which we see ourselves, or at least see others seeing us. Bertolucci is frequently confronting the cinema-goer with a disjunction between what he sees and what he expects to see. In a way he is doing for the film what Brecht has done for the theatre; that is, just as Brecht is constantly reminding his audience that they are in the theatre, so Bertolucci again and again reminds us that we are watching a film. The best example is the false conclusion, where soaring violins sent the audience shuffling to their feet in my local cinema, for we have been reminded not to be conditioned by our expectations. Also the photography is sometimes so deliberately self-conscious that I was reminded that my whole perception was being controlled by the camera. And the image of the tango, grotesquely danced at the end, as an image of fading bourgeois convention, reminding one of the same image in the Polish dramatist Slowomir Mrozek's play *Tango*, highlights how the film director can use metaphor as a poet of the visual.

It will be clear that I consider Bertolucci's film an extraordinary achievement. No article can do it justice, it has to be seen; but I should like briefly to mention one other

element of the film. We see many shots of railways, arriving at stations, subways, roadways and opening and closing doors. This re-inforces the feeling that the central relationship is one which would only be attempted in this way in a "Gesellschaft" society, where mobility means that many of our face to face relationships are with total strangers. The protagonists in this film come face to face, lip to lip, ear lobe to ear lobe, but because of the society they live in they cannot see each other.

JIM HERRICK

## LETTERS

### Filthy lucre

It is well known that religion does not prevent war. Not only do nations of different religions go to war with each other, nations of the same religion do likewise. For nearly thirty years Britain has managed to avoid being involved in total war, confining herself nowadays to providing arms for others. British arms are now being sold in many parts of the world, from South America to the Middle East and this has become one of our most lucrative export industries. The irony of this, for me at least, is that Britain is nominally a Christian country. Although the majority of her citizens are no longer active worshippers, the ties between Church and State remain. The constitution requires the monarch to be a member of the Church of England. Twenty-four bishops have seats in the House of Lords in order to bring Christian influence to bear upon the nation's moral and spiritual affairs. Religious training is given in British schools compulsorily by law. Concurrently with all this emphasis on religion in her State institutions Britain is one of the world's foremost traders in lethal weapons. Here, surely, Mammon has cause to complain of lack of official recognition. That Christians are reticent about the difference between Christian principle and Christian practice is not surprising. The surprising thing is the silence of freethinkers.

F. WESTWOOD

### The humanist today

Consonant with the *Freethinker's* concern in alleviating and improving the whole human condition, I think it is imperative to clarify and set forth the image of the humanist today. Accordingly, this is my response to the question: "What does it mean to be a humanist today?"

We need a new simplicity and spontaneity of living, a new openness to one another and patience with one another which are indispensable for moving towards a more human existence in justice and community. The anguish of millions of men and women uncertain whether they can survive and remain human is of profound concern to the thinking humanist.

Mass poverty, famine and misery are nothing new. They have been the lot of millions for centuries. What is new is the intensity and the extensiveness of the problem and the long-term trends which point towards a frightening future. The whole economic system which has dominated the world in the past 200 years appears to be in the process of breaking down. The growing pollution of the environment, the population explosion, the world monetary crisis, inflation and the world crisis in food and other commodities, the widening gap between rich and poor within and between nations have converged to create a situation which threatens the very future of civilized society.

In the face of these threats to world peace and survival, there appear to be three principal reactions to the whole situation. A first reaction is to seek salvation and security in remaining ignorant of or evading the issue by such means as pursuing one's own personal or group interests, by refusing to be involved, by retreating into a private world of self-indulgence, or drug taking, or of mystical and religious escape. The second reaction is to endeavour to exorcise the dangers we face by forcing them into the rigidities of a reassuring ideological or religious schema which explains everything and explains it away. The third reaction is what I call the evolutionary humanist response to the dangers with a clear head and open eyes, deploying all the resources of vision, imagination, reason and skills to understand and interpret them in their full reality and to be free to discover and attempt new ways of overcoming these dangers.

Effective humanist reform is both necessary and inevitable because the present increases in human numbers and per capita consumption, by disrupting eco-systems and depleting resources, are undermining the very foundations of survival.

Long ago, Dr. Martin Luther initiated international social



reform by nailing his invitation to consciousness-raising education on a church door in Germany. Teaching his view of the legitimate relationship of one to another within the God frame of reference in his *Werke*, Dr. Luther said that all things would quietly and simply be set right with these commandments: "What ye would that others should do unto you, do ye also unto them," and "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Today, we call for reasoned reform in the context of evolutionary humanism.

LEON ARNOLD MULLER

### Humanism and the political jungle

As a fairly new reader may I crave a little space to voice my dissent from those of your contributors who, while indulging in mutual vituperation and repetition at great length, seem to join forces only in an attempt to drag humanism into their political jungle.

History records, of course, that humanity has always allowed itself to be controlled by fear generated by superstition. The real leaders, seen or unseen, have always been the purveyors of superstition—the priests, evangelists and witch doctors. Generally they have sought to enhance their power by the acquisition and use of wealth. From time to time there have been sporadic attempts by some sections of the human race to throw off this exploitation only to find themselves still governed by fear in another form—tyranny.

To Humanists one is as bad as the other. The essence of our principle is freedom of thought, speech and action within the social concept. This means equal opportunity for all but, as we are each born with different talents and characteristics, we should have the right to enjoy all the benefits that individual industry and ability may earn. There is nothing wrong with wealth properly earned and used.

Your correspondents talk glibly of Right and Left. These are meaningless terms unless qualified. Who can define them? Right and Left in the Labour Party are not the same Right and Left of the N.U.M. nor even the T.U.C. Right and Left in the 1922 Conservative committee are not the same Right and Left as that of the whole party. And what does Right and Left mean in the Common Market? We Humanists should refuse to be pushed over to one of these pendulum classes.

Unfortunately, the fact that we do not wish humanity to be controlled by fear—whether based on superstition on the one hand or totalitarianism on the other—leaves a vacuum unless we can suggest an alternative. It may be unpopular to say so but it seems to me that the nearest to the ideal is something like the Corporate state envisaged by Mosley before it got mixed up with black-shirt nonsense. The ideal form of government should be by people freely elected to specialist Government work solely on their ability, industry, integrity and practical experience in the field they are to control. The civil service in all countries falls short of complete competence because (1) they have had no practical experience in the work which they control, (2) their decisions, right or wrong, are subject to veto by politicians with even less experience who are themselves controlled by extraneous factors, and (3) they are not, in practice, responsible to the public.

Of course, this is only a personal view but whether or not this is a practical solution, the fact is that the cause of humanism will be seriously damaged if any suggestion that if not white we must be red, is allowed to go unchallenged.

W. T. M. HUGHES

### Whose chicanery?

Mr. Walter Connolly's breathtakingly impudent diatribe (letters, September) against what he terms the "chicanery of the Right" must not pass. To point out only the more glaring faults:

*The emotive language.* Those who disagree with Mr. Connolly are "unconscious victims of the press and its bag of tricks"; we are "brainwashed", "indoctrinated" and "confused" by the "right-wing" (and therefore "corrupt") press into permitting ourselves to be manipulated for the "malevolent purposes" of the ruling class; we stand convicted of chicanery on the one hand and simple-mindedness on the other. In short: what Mr. Connolly does is to criticize not the arguments of non-marxist *Freethinker* readers but the readers themselves. *Ad hominem* attacks like this are not only one of the oldest, and most disreputable, weapons in the armoury of the intellectually lazy. They are disgraceful coming from a correspondent to a journal which stands above all for free and honest thought.

*The simple errors of fact.* It is not just the press which criticizes the double standard under which the all too real—not alleged—abuses and outrages by left-wing régimes and groups are white-washed, glossed over or just quietly forgotten by those very same left-wingers who stridently denounce the Americans in Vietnam or the British in Ulster. It is all those independent people, of whatever political complexion, who just dislike and detest plain simple hypocrisy.

*The question of morality and intellectual honesty.* In Mr. Con-

nolly's eyes, the fact that an "alleged" outrage by a left-wing régime is attacked by the press is sufficient reason for the left-wing to shut up about it. So what matters is not whether some left-wing action is morally right or wrong, humane or callous, compatible or not with our humanist ideals and aims: but whether the action is attacked by the "corrupt" press. What pernicious nonsense this is: as if we had learnt nothing about the indivisibility of honesty from the *New Statesman's* censorship of Orwell in the 1930s because Stalin's slaughter of millions *could not* happen! I wonder if Mr. Connolly and Mr. Sloan support, or oppose, the well-known crimes of modern (as well as stalinist) Russia, and of Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt and the rest? Are they prepared to make the same simple declaration as I do that, as a humanist, I don't give a damn about the "left" or "right" labels flaunted by those governments, sects or groups who do sickening things to ordinary people; I just oppose them, period. Are we honest, or are we not?

*The muddles in logic.* Just look at this: "no objective person could equate the one with the other (the Left with the Right) or make moral judgement without recognition of purpose". If this means that one shouldn't judge the actions of leftists without reference to whatever (unstated) purpose these actions are meant to serve, then this is just about the hoariest fallacy there is: nothing at all follows from the end sought by political action about the means used to achieve it. It all depends on which end and which means. This has still to be said to Mr. Connolly and those who think like him, despite the whole of human experience; it is enough to make one despair. Are we still to have no ethic or moral code other than that which asserts that whatever serves the revolution, or whatever, is right and everything else is wrong? This is Trotsky's view of the marxist ethic—see *Their morals and ours*—and it is totalitarian. It stands opposed to all that a humanist believes about the importance of individual freedom and dignity.

I could go on; but what is the point? Mr. Connolly's closed mind is closed beyond hope of rational argument. One can only trust that not all left-wingers are so utterly convinced of the rightness of their ideology that they cannot feel in their bowels the possibility that they might be mistaken.

P. HINCHLIFF

### Marx vindicated by capitalist decay

Having read the serial by the Messrs. Pat Sloan and Judex I must come down on the side of Mr. Pat Sloan in his defence of the fundamentals of Marxism. It seems to me that Judex always harps upon the mistakes Marx made which could convey the impression that Marx was never right. Surely after what we are experiencing internationally and domestically today we can say that Marx was fundamentally correct in his opinion.

In every western European country including "Wonderful Germany" we have unemployment and constant strikes, mounting inflation and threats of a dictatorship, not to mention the savage crushing of Chilean democracy and recently the events in Cyprus with the United Nations apparently powerless to do anything to stop the fighting. All this is the result of the capitalist system which Marx exposed over a hundred years ago.

J. H. MORTEN

### Weird Marxists

After the froth and bubbles of baseless rhetoric had fizzed away with the opening lines of his letter of September, Judex eventually produced a weak substance of communicable coherence by mentioning (in part) my reference to "falsehoods" being committed in the name of freethought. He says of me that I must remind him of the Communist and Marxist record in this respect. To which, I reply: all that I ask of Judex is that he extends to me the right, which I accord to him, namely, that he holds me responsible for my statements and actions, and *not* for those of others. He then follows with his inevitable babble of quotes: those verbal gesticulations posturing as a substitute for reasoned argument.

Readers, no doubt, will be astounded at the mind-expanding erudition, the devastating relations that burst forth: a Communist "confessed publicly" (*contain yourselves readers, please*) that "... Communists have sometimes indefensibly lied, broken promises, [surely, they'll never recover from this—they're finished] even tortured and killed people. . . ." Well! . . . This *cannot* be tolerated. These vile beasts. Daring to imitate the social behavioural patterns of we civilized humans.

I shan't waste time and words over the scattering of this Steptoe collection regarding "objective reality" and the "Marxist thesis". I think readers can see that, as usual, he was trying to "paddle in the deep end" as was, it seems, his purveyor, Gregor.

Of course "Hegel was a Christian". Of course, there are parallels in Christianity with dialectics. The point that should be obvious to a "freethinker" here, is that these parallels represent nothing else than a reflection of Greek civilization "seen" and recognized in this later period by the *developed* consciousness of modern man.



One could just as naively say, as Judex, that the philosophy of materialism has its origins in the Bible, and then refer to Ecclesiastes as evidence. But why is it, that Hegel is so vehemently denounced for his "Christianity"? If we put aside for a moment the distortions that are so popular, we can find Hegel referring to The Enlightenment as "a glorious mental dawn" and such things as: "Here it must be frankly stated, that with the Catholic Religion no rational constitution is possible" (*The Philosophy of History*).

In whose interests is it then, to distort his writings? And does it not seem strange that Solzhenitsyn is showered with praise and wealth—his Christianity never (or rarely) mentioned? Which is more dangerous, the Christianity of the last century, or the present?

It is at this point that I would address John L. Broom, for the sheer paucity of his comments causes obscurity regarding his meaning, and allows an interpretation to be extracted which I feel sure he does not wish to propose. In advancing: "The proposition . . . 'free speech should not be equated with the right to lie and cheat' is extremely disturbing and dangerous" (my italics), surely, he is not suggesting that "free speech" should be regarded as a synonymous expression of "lie" and "cheat"? That this is not (or perhaps less) "disturbing" and "dangerous"? Should freethinkers now embrace the doctrine of *restrictio mentalis* (mental reservation)—the legitimized right to "lie and cheat"?

But, to return to Judex, I stated, quite clearly and without butchering or mauling the statements of anyone, that he quoted as testimony the religious fanatic, "who shamelessly paraded before the whole world in the deceitful guise of poverty". He pitifully tried to counter this by quoting another of his wierd "Marxists", Roy Medvedev, who eventually says: ". . . Solzhenitsyn did not deceive or betray anybody. . . ." Of course, readers must believe this, for as any fool knows, Medvedev never tells lies. It would appear that when such Christian "gentlemen" impregnate females outside of their marriage, in the same year as they prepare to celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary, then the wife who has stood beside them in their loneliest years, has not been "deceived or betrayed".

In sheer desperation Judex delivers his final thrust, his *coup de grâce*—some may say, self immolation. "I have never put my trust in the God-that-Failed or given any support—blindly or otherwise—to any form of totalitarianism. . . ." Now, when I read in the *Sunday Times* (3 March, 1974) Solzhenitsyn saying: "I myself see Christianity today as the only living spiritual force capable of undertaking the spiritual healing of Russia. . . ." I foolishly "believed" that Judex was, in fact, supporting the oldest and longest reigning form of totalitarianism the world has known. And when that same writer noted, "Ferocious hostility to religion is Marxism's most persistent feature," I again "believed" it was so. That's the finish of damned belief for me.

TREVOR MORGAN

### Malfew Seklew

In the September *Freethinker* we published a letter from Mr. S. E. Parker requesting information on Malfew Seklew. Unfortunately, your silly editor misread Mr. Parker's letter, and "Malfew Seklew" (also known as Wilkes Barre) came out as "Malfew Seklew Calso" (known as Wilkes Barre). Our apologies to Mr. Parker, and to Mr. Seklew/Barre, his heirs and successors. If anyone has information on him, they might care to write to Mr. Parker, c/o *The Freethinker*, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

R. J. CONDON

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(foreword by Barbara Smoker)

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