

IMPRESSIVE SUPPORT FOR STATEMENT AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAW

Actress Glenda Jackson, writer J. B. Priestley, film director Jack Gold, novelist Margaret Drabble, theologian Professor G. W. H. Lampe and concert pianist Peter Katin are among the signatories to "A Statement Against Blasphemy Law". The statement was published by the Committee Against Blasphemy Law on 8 January. The signatories deplore the trial for blasphemous libel of the editor and publishers of "Gay News", oppose any extension of blasphemy law and urge that a Bill is introduced into the House of Commons to prevent future prosecution for blasphemy or blasphemous libel.

Over 20 members of both Houses of Parliament have signed. They include Lord Gardiner, a former Lord Chancellor, and Lord Willis, who is known to favour the introduction of a short Bill to end blasphemy law. Members of the House of Commons who have signed include Brian Sedgemore, MP (Labour, Luton West), who declared immediately after the conviction of *Gay News* that he would be prepared to sponsor a Bill to end blasphemy law. Mr Sedgemore had warned, at a public meeting organised by the National Secular Society earlier in the year, that the prosecution against *Gay News* was part of the "illiberal, authoritarian mood of our age", and that "We may see more of it before the decade is out."

A group of prominent Christian writers and lay people, who have also signed the statement, include George W. Target, author of many books on religious affairs, Dr Una Kroll, a deaconess well-known for her stand over the importance of women in the churches, Christopher Driver and A. E. Dyson. Clerics who have signed are the Rt Rev Alfred Jowett, Dean of Manchester and Dr John A. T. Robinson. There can be no doubt that moderate Christian opinion favours a change in the law. Quite distinct interests have come together in making the statement, as is seen by the signatures

of Canon John Hester, Vicar of Brighton and Professor James H. Sang, President of the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. "This statement and these signatures show how many people of moderate opinion support the complete abolition of blasphemy law", commented Nicolas Walter, Editor of *New Humanist* and author of the pamphlet *Blasphemy in Britain*. He said that the statement was important not only because it pressed for the abolition of blasphemy law but also because it opposed any extension of the blasphemy law, for which there has been some demand.

The Hon Secretary of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, W. McIlroy, who wrote the statement and solicited support for it, has said that he is pleased, but not surprised, that such a variety of individuals have signed it. "The publication of the statement", he said "will, I hope, help to stimulate the campaign to abolish blasphemy law. Its supporters cover a surprisingly wide spectrum of opinion. It is significant that people like A. E. Dyson and Michael Duane, Francis Bennion and Peter Hain, and Brigid Brophy and the Dean of Manchester, should join forces on this important issue."

Full Statement and Signatories

The full statement and list of signatories reads as follows:

"We deplore the recent trial and conviction of the editor and publishers of *Gay News* on a charge of blasphemous libel. This was the first successful prosecution for the 'crime' of blasphemy in over 50 years, and it demonstrated that the common law can be a device by which censorious elements can, by using the courts, impose their standards on all.

"The common law offence of blasphemy is clearly a threat to freedom of expression in religious, literary and artistic matters. So long as it is possible

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for litigious persons to initiate legal proceedings for blasphemy or blasphemous libel, the threat of prosecution, often resulting in crippling financial outlay and even the danger of imprisonment, will hang over artists, writers, journalists, publishers and commentators. This is intolerable in a free society.

"For three centuries the blasphemy laws were a blot on the Statute Book, and their removal with the passing of the 1967 Criminal Act and the 1969 Statute Law (Repeals) Act was welcomed by free-thinkers and libertarians. At that time some reformers did not believe that the common law offence merited attention, but the *Gay News* case has highlighted the urgent necessity to deal with this anachronism.

"We are concerned that attempts may be made to extend blasphemy law to protect other forms of religion in addition to Christianity. Such a proposal may appear to be just and reasonable, but whereas the protection of Christianity alone has, to date, been the *raison d'être* of blasphemy law, its extension would encourage zealots of other religious faiths to exploit this obsolete law.

"The result would be to increase the divisions between the religious and radical groups within the community. A more satisfactory solution would be to recognise the pluralist nature of our society and to abolish the offence of blasphemy altogether.

"We urge that a Bill is introduced into Parliament to prevent future prosecutions for blasphemy or blasphemous libel. The passing of such a Bill would be welcomed both by traditional opponents of blasphemy laws and by those perceptive Christians who recognise that such laws are discriminatory and absurd."

John Allegro, Lindsay Anderson, Professor Sir Alfred Ayer, Joan Bakewell, Lord Beaumont, David Benedictus, Francis Bennion, Humphry Berkeley, Benedict Birnberg, H. J. Blackham, Oswald Blakeston, Edward Blishen, Louis Blom-Cooper, QC, Anthony Blond, Edward Bond, Melvyn Bragg, Colin Brewer, Alan Brien, Lord Brockway, Professor Hugh Brogan, Brigid Brophy, Alan Brownjohn, Humphrey Burton, John Calder, David Caute, Lord Chorley, QC, Richard Clements, Peter Cotes, Professor Bernard Crick, Tom Cullen, Don Cupitt, Reginald Davis-Poynter, Margaret Drabble, Kay Dick, Christopher Driver, Michael Duane, Maureen Duffy, A. E. Dyson, Geoffrey Edge, MP, Professor Richard Ellmann, Gavin Ewart, Martin Flannery, MP, Lord Foot, Michael Frayn, Julian Friedmann, Lord Gardiner, Jack Gold, Geoffrey Gorer, Phyllis Graham, Peter Hain, Willis Hall, Dr James Hemming, Jim Herrick, Canon John Hester, Vicar of Brighton, Dr Richard Hoggart, Michael Holroyd, Lord Houghton, Robin Houston, Glenda Jackson, Derek Jacobi, Hugh Jenkins, MP, Mervyn Jones, The Rt Rev Alfred Jowett, Dean of Manchester, Miriam Karlin, Peter Katin, Ludovic Kennedy, Professor Frank Kermode, Margaret Knight, Dr Una M. Kroll, Keith Kyle, The Rev Professor G. W. H. Lampe, Rodney Legg, Denis Lemon, Michael

Levey, Jack Lindsay, The Earl of Listowel, Christopher Logue, Professor Norbert Lynton, Christopher Macy, Bryan Magee, MP, Frank Marcus, Joan Maynard, MP, William McIlroy, Ian McKellen, George Melly, David Mercer, Joan Miller, Adrian Mitchell, Naomi Mitchison, Sheridan Morley, Lord Norwich, Charles Osborne, Peter Owen, John Parker, MP, Dr Colin Phipps, MP, Giles Playfair, Christopher Price, MP, J. B. Priestley OM, Lord Raglan, F. A. Ridley, Dr John A. T. Robinson, Annie Ross, Paul Rotha, Dr Edward Royle, Michael Rubinstein, Dora Russell, The Earl Russell, Jeremy Sandford, Professor James H. Sang, Michael Schofield, Brian Sedgemore, MP, Renée Short, MP, Jon Silkin, Barbara Smoker, Colin Spencer, George W. Target, Maurice Temple Smith, Philip Toynbee, Lorna Tracy, John Trevelyan, David Tribe, Jill Tweedie, Kenneth Tynan, Nicolas Walter, Colin Ward, Irving Wardle, Ben Whitaker, Audrey Williamson, Lord Willis, Angus Wilson, Colin Wilson, Enid Wistrich, Baroness Wootton and David Yallop.

The following have also signed but arrived too late for classification above: Alan Coren, John Lehmann, Olivia Manning, Harold Pinter, Professor Sir Fred Hoyle.

Copies of the statement and a Newsletter from the Committee Against Blasphemy Law are obtainable from W. McIlroy, 32 Over Street, Brighton Sussex.

COMMITTEE AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAW

FIRST PUBLIC MEETING

Sunday, 22 January, 5.00 pm

Marlborough Hotel, Pavilion Street (off Old Steine), BRIGHTON

FRANCIS BENNION, Writer, Barrister and member of the executive Committee of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society

MICHAEL MASON, News Editor of *Gay News*

NICOLAS WALTER, Editor of *New Humanist*. Author of *Blasphemy in Britain*

"Hibernia", a liberal Dublin weekly newspaper, has alleged that a secretive Roman Catholic society is exerting much pressure in the medical profession. "Opus Dei", a Catholic society whose activities are shrouded in secrecy, has members drawn predominantly from the professions. "Hibernia" says that the Society canvassed doctors to join and offered them "Freemason type job prospects". There are further allegations that the medical faculties at both University College, Dublin and University College, Galway, are controlled by "Opus Dei" members.

The Third Epistle to Timothy?

DAVID SWALLOW

The appeal after the trial of "Gay News", in the first successful blasphemy trial for over 50 years, is likely to take place early in 1978. The subject of the prosecution was a poem by James Kirkup entitled "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name", which depicts the homosexual fantasies about Christ of a Roman centurion after the crucifixion. A number of literary works, including "The Brook of Kerith" by Meredith and "The Man Who Died" by D. H. Lawrence, have speculated about the sexuality of Christ. Perhaps such speculation might extend to other biblical figures . . .

An extensive and fairly well preserved fragment of papyrus has recently come to light among a bundle of hitherto unclassified texts at Cairo. The date and place of its discovery, presumably in the course of one of the recent Egyptian archaeological or technological schemes, cannot now—regrettably—be ascertained. But the document is of exceptional interest. It is, of course, undated, and tests have yet to be carried out which will date it with precision. But most scholars are confident that it will prove to belong to the second half of the first century AD. It is a letter addressed to a certain Timothy, but we can only guess from whom. The superscription, unusually for the period, gives the name of the addressee, but not of the addressor. The handwriting is unusually large, and some scholars have (perhaps rashly) seen here a connection with St Paul's letter to the Galatians 6:11; it must be stressed, however, that at present the identification is more or less speculative. A tentative translation has been released by an American scholar who, for the time being, wishes to remain anonymous in view of the still uncertain nature of some of the readings and of the interpretation of the more obscure passages. It reads as follows:

My dear Timothy: Shall we forget, this once, that stuff about "Grace, mercy and peace", so conducive to faith, so restrictive of candour? I would like you to believe that on this occasion I shall mean exactly what I say. Not that I have attempted any actual deceit in my other writings, or am at all alarmed at the surprising reputation they have so rapidly achieved. But recently I have begun to realise more and more that the truth, pure and simple, cannot be stated. We must make do with a little at a time, and leave it to others to fill in the gaps. The "filling in" seems often to be not merely in contrast but in flat contradiction to the original framework. But experience convinces me that the contradiction is apparent only, and that honesty should induce us to desire it. For instance, I un-

derstand from Luke (it shocked me when I first heard it, but he assures me that the fact is undeniable) that Jesus was in the habit of consorting on friendly terms with people of the very lowest moral standards. It came as a considerable jolt. That is not how I had ever pictured him, and I scarcely need to point out the violent and insuperable contrast which emerges from that fact between Jesus as he actually was and Jesus as I have invariably portrayed him. But perhaps, after all, he was right. Does that sound presumptuous? "Perhaps"? Of Jesus Christ? Of the man I have consistently described, no doubt it would be; but we must remember, as I have realised rather late in life, that there was another Jesus who actually did exist, and who was therefore—presumably—like me—a human being.

Thorn in the Flesh

Why do I bother you with this? To justify myself? By no means. Perhaps I have already done too much of that. That glance through my correspondence proved more than occasionally embarrassing. What, I wonder, did the Corinthians make of that ghastly conclusion to my second letter to them (chapters 10 to 13 in the popular editions, I believe)? It certainly horrifies me. Corinth is off my visiting list for ever—that's my decision, not theirs. I simply can't face them. That awful bit about the "thorn given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me"! How absurdly and idiotically girlish! And how well calculated to arouse what it was my intention to allay—a gnawing curiosity. How many times have I been questioned (and I deserve it, I suppose) about the nature of this ailment. Never yet have I found the courage to be more explicit. Let that be a secret between us. Not that it is entirely safe in any case. Future generations less blinded by zeal and adoration, may come to make some shrewd and unflattering deductions.

I writhed in embarrassment as I ploughed through those endless, obsessive tirades against the practice of circumcision. It's clear to me now that I must have had some kind of fixation on the subject. Above all I was forced to recall that one unforgettable occasion when I actually performed the operation myself. (You haven't, I hope, too much regretted the loss of that little Gentile decoration? When I saw how much nicer that charming member would look with its hat still on its head, I began to relent—but by then it was too late. I had to do it, or else explain myself.) Would you believe that that particular indiscretion has been immortalised for ever in the pages of what Luke calls his "Acts" (chapter 16, verse three, in most of the

copies that I've seen)? It must have been you that told him. My dear boy, are you really that naive?

And again: why did I choose you, you may have wondered, from all the hordes of pure-souled adolescents who were forever laying at my feet the dedication of their lives? Not only at Lystra, but almost everywhere I preached. You yourself witnessed these waves of teenage hysteria often enough—did they provide embarrassed recollections of your own original approach? I should love to think they did! Out of all these hundreds, you were the only one I ever chose. Of course, you *were* good looking, but that was not the only, nor indeed the chief, reason. And it wasn't either that at the time I already realised what it might develop into. Quite the contrary. Even while I was making arrangements with your charming mother and grandmother, I was telling myself that I was acting like a madman. I had only just got Mark out of my system when I met you; and so far from needing someone to fill the void that he had left, I was fresh from having offered heaven the most unalterable vow that from now on I would avoid close contact with all pious young men for ever.

You'd never believe, by the way, to look at him now, what an extraordinarily beautiful young man he was at the time. But so inhibited! Apparently he'd had an interesting experience on the night of Jesus' arrest with one of the young soldiers, who was not quite so considerate a partner as he might have been. He assures me it was against his will, but I was not convinced. I much rather got the impression he was delicately describing to me the only circumstances in which he might consent. And with the righteous Barnabas breathing down the necks of both of us, that was more than even my ardent passion could rise to. On my first journey, we managed to get rid of him in the early stages, and I immediately felt the benefit; hence my adamant refusal to fall in with Barnabas' plans and take him on again when we next went on a preaching tour. If the absence of Mark meant the absence of Barnabas, then as far as I was concerned it had to be. In the event, I was glad. Neither of us can complain of Silas, can we?

The Sweetness of Martyrdom

And after all this, I see I still haven't told you why I took you on. You reminded me of someone. No, not of Mark, someone much earlier in my life. I remember as if it were only yesterday those sad, suffering eyes looking into my face, bruised lips unctuously praying for my forgiveness, maimed hands raised in blessing for me, his persecutor. And then some minutes later I was surveying that sweet, angelic form lying broken on the ground. It's obvious to me now, but will you believe that for years I made no connection in my own mind between the vivid memory of that sight and my own conversion

to his faith a few weeks later. It was when I met you, and you reminded me of him, and I wanted you beside me, that I realised. For years I felt guilty about it: that the motive for my whole career could, I suppose, be dismissed as rather suspect. Recently, though, I've recovered from the feeling. Do you know how? It was again through looking through my files. (The experience has not been entirely negative, you see.) Those passages about being beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, and so on. I came to see that just possibly Stephen's own martyrdom may have had similarly questionable motives. He was certainly that kind of man. (Luke brings it out so beautifully.) Again, the zealots have not noticed, so possibly all is safe. In a tight little hot-house organisation such as ours, there are fortunately no critics to worry about. Among all God's mercies to me, this is perhaps the greatest.

Now unto him that is able—oh, dear! It's hard to break the habits of a lifetime.

VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA

Voluntary Euthanasia could be practised quite legally in Holland. This was the claim made by Baroness Adrienne van Till, when she gave a talk at the Annual General Meeting of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society on 22 October. Baroness van Till, who is an expert on the subject and a member of the Board of the Dutch Foundation for Voluntary Euthanasia, gave a full account of the situation in Holland today.

She explained that there are now no less than three organisations concerned with voluntary euthanasia in Holland—an apparently unique situation. The first Society, established in 1973, is similar to the British Voluntary Euthanasia Society (started in 1936), and it wishes to change the law. It was set up around the time of the Postma case in Holland in 1973—a case where a woman accused of killing her mother (under circumstances which anyone would agree justified euthanasia) was given a sentence of one week suspended for a year.

The Dutch Foundation for Voluntary Euthanasia was established in the same year, and is shortly to produce a detailed report on the current legal situation in Holland. The conclusion that Voluntary Euthanasia could perhaps already be practised quite legally there comes about because of a clause in the Dutch statutes which specifically excludes medical people from certain provisions of the law, if they can prove they were acting in accordance with their professional duties. Now, if a doctor is unable to deal with a patient's suffering adequately (assuming he is using all possible means towards that end), he might be said to be negligent. If he were then to

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President of the National Secular Society Defends the Need to Chew Up Bishops!

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has said in defence of her reputation for devouring bishops, that this is a small price to pay for preventing the delay of social reforms.

At the AGM of the National Secular Society at Conway Hall on Sunday, 4 December, (the Feast of St Barbara!) Barbara Smoker was re-elected President—being only the ninth President in its 112 years. Thanking the members for this implicit vote of confidence, she said that having a woman as its President was just one indication that the NSS is socially far in advance of all the main institutionalised religions in this country. Not one of them yet permits women to occupy key positions in its hierarchical structure.

“Had I remained in the Catholic Church”, remarked Miss Smoker with an ironic smile, “I could never have become a priest, let alone a bishop or cardinal—though I hasten to add that that was not my reason for leaving the Church.

“Somehow, in the intervening years, I seem to have acquired the reputation of devouring bishops—probably fried for breakfast. This is gross slander. I merely bite their heads off; and then only when they really deserve it. Which is, I am sorry to say, all too often.

“Continuing to refuse equality of opportunity to their own women members and perpetuating anti-feminism in society at large (four centuries after Luther coined the phrase ‘A woman’s place is in the home’) is just one of many social issues on which the Churches (not to mention the mosques and temples) are dragging their holy feet and keeping everyone else’s feet in shackles as long as possible.

Delaying Social Issues

“The legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, the preservation of legal (and therefore safe) abortion, and the abolition of censorship, whether through the revival of blasphemy law or any other means, are examples of current issues on which the opposing pressure groups divide almost exactly along religious lines. Thus, religion still pursues its age-old mission, as a satellite of the ruling power, of slowing down the rate of social progress in terms of human welfare.

“During the past two centuries, the pioneering ‘infidels’—who campaigned for the abolition of the slave-trade, for the promulgation of family planning, for the legal equality of women, for the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, for democratic rights, for the right of non-believers to affirm instead of taking a religious oath, for the introduction

of cremation, for the legalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults, for the legalisation of abortion, for the reform of divorce laws, and so forth—have generally been opposed by the whole Bench of Bishops, both in the House of Lords and with their wider authority through the pulpit. But once these reforms have been achieved, in spite of them, and have become part of modern civilisation, most of the churchmen have come to welcome them, and even claim the credit for them. Some of these claims have been made so often that almost everyone believes them.

“What is far more crucial, however, is the effect of the long delays on people’s lives. Even if history is on the side of secularism (and that is by no means certain), delays in furthering human welfare cannot but mean more human misery for those individuals and groups living during the period of delay. And since, as freethinkers, we are convinced that this life is all that there can possibly be for each person, it is that much more important that it should be made as good a life as possible. If chewing up a few bishops helps in this, just a little, it is but a small price to pay—however distasteful it may be to us.”

Among the motions passed at this AGM was one opposing denominational schools, which read: “Noting with alarm the increasing demand of Muslims in this country for their own sectarian schooling in parity with the Jewish, Church of England and Roman Catholic Schools, this AGM calls for the abolition of state and county subsidies for all denominational schools.” A motion was also carried opposing Muslim demands for civil law to be amended to make allowance for Islamic family laws.

HALE MARY!

Has any theologian ever tried to disentangle the threads of relationship in the “Holy Family”?

Leaving poor old Joseph out of it (as merely the Christ child’s foster-father), we find some strangely incestuous relations between God and the so-called BVM. If the first person of the Trinity is her father, the second her son, and the third the sire of her son—to put it politely, her husband—then, according to the doctrine that “these three persons are one God”, this one God must be, simultaneously, her father, son and husband.

It follows that Mary is her own step-mother. Also, her own mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, aunt, niece, half-sister, sister-in-law, step-daughter, step-grandmother, step-granddaughter . . .

BS

Anand Marg: The Violent Path to Bliss

"Blessed are the peacemakers", said the leader of one sect a couple of thousand years ago. But sects are by no means always peaceful—as the subsequent history of the religion deriving from that mythical figure has shown.

The Anand Marg, a religious sect originating from India, were linked last month with an attack on an official of the Indian Embassy. Mr Anwar Singh Ahluwalia was stabbed when returning to his home in Golders Green. He was taken to hospital, but his condition was described as "not critical".

The Anand Marg have been suspected of other attacks, including one on the Indian military attache in Canberra, and were probably responsible for throwing a brick through the window of the Indian Tourist Office in London. (Reported in *The Freethinker*, November 1977). The attacks are supposed to be in protest against the imprisonment of the leader of the Anand Marg, Mr P. Saarkar, for allegedly murdering a number of his disciples who rebelled against his rule.

Sects Origins

Mr P. Saarkar, a former Indian railway official, founded the sect in 1955. It rapidly gained a surprisingly large following from all levels of society, including professional groups. The Anand Marg established schools to inculcate its ideas and Mr Saarkar's avdhoots, or disciples, were expected to foster "a sense of reverence and devotion as well as of discipline." In its prime a few years ago the sect had five million activists and more than a thousand paid avdhoots. There were over two thousand branches in India, and there were claimed to be one hundred thousand supporters across the world.

The ideals of the sect are obscure. Anand Marg means the Path to Bliss. Mr Saarkar's autobiography calls for the abolition of democracy, which he called government "by fools for fools". Instead, he favoured a dictatorship of Margis, the rule of men "who have gained self-control by means of spiritual practices and are aspirants of cosmic consciousness."

European members of the sect have denied any connection with incidents of violence. An American, Acharya Bharadwaja, who heads the organisation in Britain, has said that the sect is peaceful and there is no evidence to support any allegations of violence. Anand Marg have suggested that former members might be misguidedly taking the campaign to free Mr Saarkar to extreme lengths.

The sect was banned by Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1975, just after a declaration of emergency in India. Four delegates from the Anand Marg in New Zealand, the United States, Britain and Japan more recently sought from the new Prime Minister, Mr Desai, who has removed the proscription on the sect,

an assurance that their leader would not be mistreated. As has been seen in other sects, for example the Unification Church of the Rev Sun Moon, the Anand Marg has strong political overtones and is fanatically anti-Communist. The activities of the political wing are kept secret, but it is clear that a violent campaign against Communists was launched in West Bengal.

According to witnesses, including the perhaps unreliable word of Mr P. Saarkar's former wife, he has been involved with the murder of scores of avdhoots and is "an incorrigible practitioner of homosexuality with his disciples, after having convinced them of their girlhood in previous lives."

Earlier in the year two Anand Marg monks, who fled to Britain for asylum from India, were ordered to be deported by the Home Secretary, Mr Merlyn Rees. There was parliamentary protest, but the Home Secretary insisted that there was a violent wing to the sect and that the presence of the two men would not be conducive to the public good.

The Anand Marg was again mentioned at Westminster on 7 November, when Mrs Elaine Kelllett-Bowman, Conservative MP for Lancaster, asked for an emergency parliamentary debate on the sect. Her question referred to a sum of £60,000 that the Anand Marg have been using from the Manpower Services Commission. According to the chairman of the Merseyside job creation committee, Prof Fred Ridley, the money was being used by the sect to enable them to restore a Victorian theatre in Liverpool. It was stressed that the money was not given to the sect, but being used by them. This is a hair-splitting distinction since the Anand Marg are to be able to run the theatre as a community centre once the building is completed. Prof Ridley said that despite some initial doubts that the group were on the "lunatic fringe", he was convinced the project could be run responsibly. The Anand Marg is now seeking charity status, and has repeated its belief in non-violence.

Mushrooming Sects

Reference to ritual murder and homosexuality was strong stuff for the House of Commons and no debate was allowed.

The mushrooming sect and cult phenomenon is seen by some people as peripheral and unimportant. Yet, in this age of emotion, significant numbers get caught up in such groups, and what for some may be a harmless and silly leisure activity may for others be very nasty indeed.

Len Ebury, the veteran secularist speaker, died peacefully on 19 December 1977. A full obituary will be printed next month.

The former Editor of "The Freethinker" and Secretary of the National Secular Society has agreed to write a regular column. We are pleased to begin the new year with the first article from this experienced campaigner, who remains very active as Hon Secretary of The Committee Against Blasphemy Law.

One of the goodies that came my way during Christmas was a booklet, *Remember all the Way*, by Harold J. C. Legerton, who recently retired after 42 years of full-time service for that esteemed body, the Lord's Day Observance Society (motto: "For Our Lord and His Day"). In an introduction, the author expresses the hope that this account of his life's work will encourage readers to remember "the Assured Promise of everlasting Sabbath-rest of all believers"—a truly daunting prospect of unending boredom.

There are many groups of fanatical Christians who seek, usually with the aid of the Charity Commissioners and obsolete laws, to impose their standards and beliefs on society. They are usually conservative and authoritarian, often unscrupulous, and nearly always concerned about other people's behaviour, particularly where sexual activity is concerned. But it is how people spend Sunday that gets the Lord's Day Observance Society so hot and bothered; since 1831 it has endeavoured to make the first day of the week one of unrelieved dreariness. Sabbatarians may not be as powerful and influential as they were in the nineteenth century, but they are just as arrogant and as intolerant. (A current LDOS publication is entitled *Imposition of Christian Standards Upon Others.*)

The Lord's Day Observance Society has been retreating since the death of Queen Victoria. Her successor did not follow Mama's example in such matters; Edward VII had little patience with the gloom and tediousness of the English Sunday. His loyal subjects acquired cycles or purchased cheap excursion tickets to Brighton and Southend, where the air was healthier and more stimulating than the dusty atmosphere of chapel and Sunday School.

Sabbatarian Denunciations

Sabbatarians denounced the "enormous evil" of Sunday newspapers, travelling, band performances in parks and the opening of Kew Gardens. They had resisted the opening of art galleries on Sunday ("likely to inflame the passions"), the "riotous pleasure" of rowing on the Thames, the "organised gigantic wickedness" of games at the Crystal Palace, not to mention the "unseemly conviviality" of Sun-

day funerals. But these and other battles were lost before Mr Legerton was born.

However, there were still plenty of bugaboos to worry the sabbatarians when Harold Legerton's predecessor, Herbert Henry ("Misery") Martin, took over the LDOS leadership in 1925. From then on there was relentless opposition to such enormities as Sunday cinemas, concerts, theatres, sporting events and harvesting. Sunday trams were stopped in Edinburgh, libraries closed in Cheltenham and Bermondsey, concerts banned at Worthing and Bath, tennis disallowed at Clifton, boating at Rhyl, golf at Cromer and skating at Ilford. *The Lord's Day Magazine* gleefully announced "that two Councils . . . have decided in the interests of the moral and spiritual welfare of the children to refuse to allow the games apparatus to be open for use on Sundays."

Gloom-and-doom Lobby

The gloom-and-doom lobby did not have it all their own way. Anti-sabbatarian groups were formed at various times in different parts of the country. They usually campaigned around some specific incident and, with a few exceptions, soon became defunct. Mr Legerton lists some of the groups and declares triumphantly "every one has gone out of existence, yet the LDOS continues still". Well, not quite every one of them: "There is one that remains, and that is the National Secular Society which remains a persistent instrument of godless philosophy."

I trust that the significance of Mr Legerton's last remark is not overlooked by those "progressive" Christians and non-Christians who assert that organised secularism is either (a) a negative, sterile force, or (b) that it is irrelevant. Reforming organisations come and, as Mr Legerton says, they go, usually after a specific reform has been achieved. In many cases they were initiated by secularists in the first place—the family planning movement is a notable example—and the struggle for social reform, free expression and civil liberties would be much less effective without a firmly established secularist movement.

Mr Legerton unwittingly pays the National Secular Society a compliment when he describes it as "persistent". Long may it continue to be so.

It has become a hard slog for those who labour "For Our Lord and His Day". The Christian churches—including those of evangelical persuasion which traditionally supported the sabbatarians—now find the Lord's Day Observance Society something of an embarrassment. The Royal Family's relaxed

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More news of America's best-loved atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hare, this time from the October issue of *Playboy*. The magazine has reported, rather late in the day, on the Easter convention of the American Atheist Association, held in Rosemont, Illinois. The Association was founded by Mrs O'Hare following her Supreme Court victory in 1963 as a result of which any kind of religious worship was removed from publicly owned schools throughout the USA.

Delegates related their experiences at the hands of the religious establishment. One described how his children were ostracised at school. Another, a small business man, claimed to have been run out of town with his head shaved. A particularly enterprising infidel complained that the telephone company had disconnected his Dial-an-Atheist service.

One of the weekend's highlights was to have been a televised confrontation between Madalyn and Ruth Carter Stapleton, President Carter's faith-healing sister. However, Mrs Stapleton refused to enter either the same studio or even the same building as a notorious atheist. She demanded that Madalyn record her views on videotape, with a Catholic priest present for instant refutation. After viewing and hearing the tape, Mrs Stapleton would record her reply. No, she wouldn't talk to Madalyn on the phone. The TV host, anxious to save his show, offered to relay a message from Madalyn. The reply was a characteristic: "Tell Ruth Carter Stapleton to go fuck herself."

Naturally Mrs Stapleton was a nominee for the title of Religious Hypocrite of the Year, won in 1976 by the Rev Billy James Hargis for what *Playboy* describes as "bedroom switch-hitting" with his young followers. The elected champion in 1977 was Eldridge Cleaver, maker of Living Proof commercials for the Southern Baptist Church. Runner-up was the Rev Claudias Ira Vermilye of the Episcopal Church, director of a rehabilitation farm for boys, for allegedly using his charges as models for homosexual pornography.

The unsuccessful candidates were as follows:

Anita Bryant, the campaigner against equal rights for homosexuals.

The Rev Oral Roberts, for using his daughter's death as an excuse for an emotional appeal for contributions.

The Rev Sun Myung Moon, for describing Richard Nixon as a gift from God to the United States.

The debrainwashers of the Moonies, for rebrainwashing them with Christianity.

President Carter, for not keeping his promise to maintain the separation of church and state.

A nun who murdered her baby, and the judge who freed her.

During the convention Bill Murray, Madalyn's son, had to be taken to hospital following a fall. It was Bill who began the fight against any forced religion in 1959, when he objected to the practice in the school he attended. Nor was he the only casualty. On Easter Sunday, just when church services were beginning, part of the ceiling fell and knocked out a delegate. That should teach atheists not to meet in Holy Week.

R. J. CONDON

FISHERS OF MEN

A row has developed in Birmingham after publicity was given to the Children of God, an American-based religious sect, as a result of the peculiar methods it uses to gain and keep members. In one report it is alleged that girls were told to use sexual enticement to lure youngsters into the sect. It has also been reported that a 16-year-old boy, who was rescued from the sect by his elder sisters, had great difficulty in leaving the sect of his own free will.

Rona Bates, a student nurse who has left the sect, is alleged to have been given instruction in a "Conversion to God Course". Girls were expected to dress with low necklines, no bras and short skirts as "Hookers for Jesus". In a "bible" for instruction one picture showed a blonde girl wearing a black mini-skirt, black bra and boots under the title "Fishers of Men". Rona is reported as saying "We were told that if someone was not a Christian we should make love to them and they would get very close to Jesus." A leader of a Children of God commune in the Birmingham area has apparently said that the group believed sex played a part in getting converts.

There is no harm in sexual attraction for mutual pleasure. But what a way to gain converts for Jesus! It debases the physical pleasures of lovemaking.

One 16-year-old convert, Leonard O'Hale, joined the sect after being approached in the centre of Birmingham. He claimed to have been offered sex by one of the girls in the commune, but turned it down. When he decided to leave the sect he found that "they kept trying to talk me out of it." His two elder sisters raided the sect's commune, bundled Leonard into a car and drove him away from the sect. Leonard said afterwards that he was glad it was all over.

The extraordinary activities of the Children of God in gaining and keeping members has been reported in the past. In 1974 the Home Office was

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asked to investigate the group, because of their dubious methods of fund-raising. While recognising people's rights to follow weird beliefs, we would reiterate the comment made by William McIlroy, at that time Secretary of the National Secular Society: "The methods of indoctrination that are practised by the Children of God hierarchy are, to say the least, rather dubious."

CHURCH SCHOOL'S PRIORITIES

On the front page of the September 1977 issue of *The Freethinker* details were given of the cases of two children discriminated against by a Church of England secondary school in South East London. Northbrook School, Lee SE12, had refused admission to two girls because their parents were not regular churchgoers. In both cases there were health grounds, supported by medical statements, for hoping these girls would be admitted to Northbrook, which was the nearest school to their homes. Letters of protest were sent from the National Secular Society and the local Lewisham Humanist Group to the Secretary of State for Education, Mrs Shirley Williams. Letters from the Lewisham Humanist Group's Hon Secretary, Denis Cobell, were also published in the *South East London Mercury*. A reply was received from the Department of Education and Science informing that the case of one child was being investigated.

As a result of the letters and further reports by the local paper's own staff, a reporter from a popular national Sunday newspaper visited the parents and Chairman of the Board of Governors at Northbrook School. Almost immediately the Chairman, a Rev Owen Everson, offered a place to Julie Clark, one of the children. Actually, the place was not taken up, as Julie had already started at another, inconveniently situated school. Her parents also felt that the ill-will generated by the issue would have made life for their child unhappy at the school.

The other child, Sandra King, had already been waiting for over a year to gain entry to Northbrook, and had not been attending any school. Her case is still under consideration by the DES. This is despite a recommendation by the DES on 30 September, given through its Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Margaret Jackson "that after full consideration of all the relevant factors, we have concluded that the admission of Sandra King to Northbrook School would not give rise to unreasonable expense to the authority and that the school

would not be unsuitable for her age, ability and aptitude. We have therefore directed the Inner London Education Authority to arrange for the admission of Sandra King to Northbrook School as soon as possible." Following the publication of this news, local MP Roland Moyle, whose help had been sought in the matter, commented regarding Sandra's future schooling at Northbrook: "I hope she will be very happy there." Unfortunately the school have found a loophole in the Education Act, enabling them to question their rights in the matter, and Sandra's case is still *sub judice*.

Northbrook School has an agreement with the Inner London Education Authority stating it may give "priority" to children whose parents are members of the Church of England. But the headmistress, Mrs V. M. Kirby, clearly told the parents of Julie Clark and Sandra King that their children were refused entry because they were not churchgoers. Furthermore, in Policy Documents published by the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education—the area covering Northbrook—there is a hint of conflict. In this booklet, in the section dealing with admission to secondary schools, the following appears: "The Church school does not confine its admissions to children of its own denomination but offers a service to the whole community." Of course, if these Church schools paid for by the State were abolished, as the NSS proposes, this confusion and these disappointments would not arise.

DENIS COBELL.

Freethinker Fund

The fund has received a number of generous donations giving an excellent start to the year. Thanks are expressed to: Anon, £3.00; H. A. Alexander, 75p; W. J. Bickle, £1.10; Brigid Brophy, £2.60; F. Bradford, £1.10; D. Campbell, £4.00; I. Campbell, £8.30; J. H. Charles, £10.00; J. E. Futter, £1.00; D. Harper, £5.00; E. J. Hughes, £2.60; Miss S. E. Johnson, £25.00; N. Levonson, 60p; S. J. Mace, £1.00; F. Pidgeon, £2.00; M. Powell, 25p; C. A. Pugh, £3.00; J. B. Reader, £1.25; W. M. Shuttleworth, £2.60; J. G. Wilson, £12.60; E. Willoughby, 50p; B. Whiting, £1.25; D. Wright, 60p; Total for the period 18 November to 15 December: £90.10.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

PAVIOURS ARMS, SATURDAY 18 MARCH

Speakers:

Denis Lemon, Maureen Duffy, Bill McIlroy

Further details in February "Freethinker"

What justifies autobiography? Celebrity of any kind presumably implies a public which includes some, perhaps many, who want to be told at first hand more about the person they read, or read or hear of, or see. Everyone does have his own story, but not everyone can make it of general interest, even if it does have that possibility. Philosophers used to be notably reticent. Hume told his story, "My Own Life" in fewer than ten pages, Croce in perhaps 60. In our garrulous times, autobiographies run to three or four volumes, sometimes more, far outdoing the modest Victorian standard two-decker biographies which Lytton Strachey thought due for demolition. Professor Ayer slips into the genre with an ambiguous title, intentionally one supposes in so careful a philosopher, perhaps wrongly: Part One or merely the first part, or the part he chooses to make public? Of course, it certainly is the last two, and there is no reason why he should commit himself to the first. As for its being, inevitably, the part he chooses to make public, let it be said at the outset that this is an autobiography that does not cheat; it is fully and engagingly informative about the author, and earns full marks for frankness and modesty, the two rarest virtues in the practice of autobiographers. Hume begins his by saying that it is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity, which is the reason he gives for being short—and also that the only part of his story of public interest is the history of his opinions and of his literary activity. Ayer, when he does parade his vanity, which is seldom, contrives an offset that disarms and charms.

The first impression most people have of the author in action was expressed on a postcard by the Headmaster of Eton when he congratulated him on the results of his finals at Oxford: "Clever Mr Ayer". Clever and incisive and rapid, and restless. C. S. Lewis described him as "a cross between a rodent and a firefly". Staying in the country house of a friend in France whilst writing *The Problem of Knowledge*, he says he "alarmed the gardener who thought I must be mad, as he watched me walking up and down, juggling a watch-chain and talking to myself." The watch-chain might be a bunch of keys or a handful of coins, but that is the characteristic visual image. A polemical warrior, frightening to the other side. Readers of *The Freethinker* will relish the story he tells of an encounter with Father d'Arcy when he was a freshman at Oxford. There developed a running argument between them about the possibility of proving the existence of God—this was in a class of Father d'Arcy's on Thomas Aquinas. Years later, he heard that Father

d'Arcy described him to Evelyn Waugh as the most dangerous man in Oxford. He adds that "if he really held this view he never allowed it to affect our personal relations."

The flash-point is low, but underneath the volatility and brittle exterior there is uncovered here a solidity which will surprise many, in terms of rock bottom decency, even propriety, even docility and adaptability, and veins of romanticism and idealism and affectionate warmth. His perceptiveness, of himself as well as of others, his fair-mindedness, his willingness to learn and to try are qualities which give strength and grace to the human being, but also stand the philosopher in good stead. His convivial social life has been as important to him as his professional or his domestic life, so it appears: all three highly valued. His many friends throng the pages, and are appreciated with discerning judgments. He consciously responded early to a "civilized" ethos, and enjoys being "civilized" in a hedonistic, discriminating sense. One hears of the films he has enjoyed or admired, the ball games he watches, the books he has read, his special liking for parody, and, fugitively, of his interest in painting and in music. He has soiled his hands with the chores of local politics and party work, and might even have been tempted after the war to go into Parliament.

One marvels at a memory which can recall in detail so much of the day-to-day life of so many years. But why recall and recount in so much detail how they ordered things at Eton and at Oxford and in the army? The answer must be that this is the texture of the tale, the fabric on which the patterns of personality are woven, the concrete contexts in which the author lived and moved and had his being. At any rate, it is in this way that he succeeds in telling us so much about himself in direct and cumulative information borne by the narrative structure. It works out as a distinguished performance of the undertaking which autobiography is. The successive spheres are of course not the real world in which most people live; they are the worlds in which clever Mr Ayer lived, his world, as he found it and saw it. But that is what autobiography is about. If it is undertaken, its justification, or part of it, should be that it is well done. In these 300 pages, it has been well done.

The story breaks off when shortly after the end of the war Ayer took the post of Grote Professor of the Philosophy of Mind and Logic at University College, London. The department was sadly run-down, and it was in the 13 years of his tenure that

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it became a flourishing school of discipline in philosophy, attracting good students and staffed by distinguished teachers whose names are now among those that make the reputation of contemporary British philosophy. Ayer had made his own reputation at the age of 24 with the publication of *Language, Truth, and Logic*, his own distillation of his studies, discussions, and reflections at that point, which he describes now as "a blend of the positivism of the Vienna Circle, which I also ascribed to Wittgenstein, the reductive empiricism which I had taken from Hume and Russell, the analytical approach of Moore and his disciples, with a dash of C. I. Lewis's and Ramsey's pragmatism." He composed the book slowly, with passion, determined to make the argument unmistakably clear. Since it began by disposing of metaphysics summarily and ruthlessly, the book was something of an affront to the Oxford Idealists and their heirs who had dominated the philosophic scene for a generation, and in general to those who took refuge in teaching the history of philosophy. The brash young man was recognised as a force, but uneasily, and with rather ineffectual attempts to impede his progress. He had friends, and time was on his side. The tradition of British empiricism had been interrupted by neo-Kantism and neo-Hegelianism, but was due for restoration.

Logical Positivism of this early vintage passed, largely under the influence of John Austin, into the kind of linguistic philosophy that is preoccupied with verbal usage, which Ayer regarded as philosophically a dead-end, and which has itself been superseded. Ayer himself has gone back over the ground, refining his perceptions and his arguments in the defence of empiricism, dealing with the epistemological problems it raises in the persistent attempt to think clearly which is philosophy. He stands, as John Locke said he stood, as a journeyman ancillary to the natural scientists, who are alone doing the operational work in the field of knowledge. He says at the end that he does not aspire to be a second Hume, and would consider it glory enough to be thought to have played Horatio to Russell's Hamlet. Perhaps he thinks of Russell here more largely than as technical philosopher, as a public man and liberal champion on the scale of Voltaire, whom elsewhere in the book he says he did aspire to resemble. To have this model counts for righteousness among us, but there are many better reasons why A. J. Ayer should be highly regarded, and they are made abundantly evident in this book.

H. J. BLACKHAM

ENERGY OR EXTINCTION—the case of nuclear energy
by Fred Hoyle. Heinemann, £1.50.

In his first chapter, three full pages long, Hoyle labels anti-nuclear environmentalists as dupes of the Soviet Union, on the grounds that they serve the interests of that state as he chooses to see them. On account of this disreputable start the publisher has had to paste in a grudging apology to the Friends of the Earth.

After a somewhat fanciful cosmological history, Hoyle's brief essay goes on to explain that there is enough uranium in the sea to supply the world's energy needs for 30,000 years. Although it comprises only three parts in a thousand million he is confident that the estimated price of £200 per kilogram for extracting it is a sound basis for argument. (This is about ten times the present day price for deliveries in 1980.) He is so convinced that the CANDU type of reactor is superior to all others that one wonders why so many people build other types.

By rather dubious arguments he, probably correctly nevertheless, dismisses the health and accident risks as trivial compared with many commonplace dangers. What he says about the problem of storage and disposal of nuclear waste is welcome because many anti-nuclear propagandists have made much of it, with considerable effect, as it is easy to frighten or scandalise people by distorted pictures of the unfamiliar.

Finally he dissects a *Sunday Times* leader as if it can be assumed to contain all the valid arguments against committing ourselves to dependence on nuclear energy, and having countered it to his own satisfaction concludes that the argument is over and anything now said against nuclear energy originates in treachery of the environmentalists.

This brief case may be called mischievous because it ignores important aspects of the controversy. If the world were filled only by Fred Hoyle and his admirers, his devotees would undoubtedly feed him with information confirming his belief that the issues are as simple in the real world as they are in his science fiction stories. But the folly of committing our civilisation to becoming yet more dependent on very special technology escapes him. Our western culture is failing to generate the clear collective motivation appropriate to such a commitment. The continuity of our institutions has been placed so much in doubt that people's healthy instinct to withdraw from dependence on larger and larger organisations must be respected. Their scepticism about the reliability of theoretically possible technology is well founded, and we must not advance beyond a familiar energy and resource base until the alternative is well established.

Whatever Hoyle may have said elsewhere the nuclear debate represented in this book is naive and incomplete, for it is without reference to the

progress of population growth. The blind trust in nuclear power which he advocates could cause abandonment of the growing appreciation of the need for a greatly decreased birthrate, just as it is beginning to be effective. Even if it can be a reliable energy source for many centuries nuclear power will be neither as lavish nor as cheap (by a very long way) as the power we have become used to in a world in which oil prices, though artificially high thank goodness, are still at a give-away level considering the total magnitude of the capital asset we are expending. Economic and population growth at anything like the rate of the last 35 years will be disastrous even if Hoyle's technological "solution" is realised.

RICHARD SCORER

A NEW WORLD FOR WOMEN: STELLA BROWNE—SOCIALIST FEMINIST by Sheila Rowbotham. Pluto Press, £1.50/£3.60.

As interest in feminist history develops, more figures emerge into historical perspective that were previously hidden. Stella Browne is among the most interesting of the pre-war feminists. She was a founder of the Abortion Law Reform Association in 1936. When Keith Hindell and I were writing *Abortion Law Reformed* nearly a decade ago, we could find out little about her, other than that she had been a militant activist, had been involved in the birth control movement, had translated some controversial books on sex into English, and was highly eccentric.

Dorothy Thurtle, one of her colleagues in ALRA, whom I got to know in the last years of her life, always sighed when Stella Browne's name was mentioned. Her force of personality and literary gifts were undeniable, but teamwork was not her *forte*, and she often exasperated her colleagues by her peremptory demands for histrionic action. On one occasion, Dorothy Thurtle recalled to me, she had had to write to Stella Browne to instruct her to cease writing incessant letters of advice to Alice Jenkins, Secretary of ALRA at that time, because this stream of letters was rapidly driving Alice Jenkins to the verge of a nervous breakdown. Since Alice Jenkins, whom I met on two occasions in old age, was herself a woman of steely purpose and formidable toughness of character, I was much impressed by this story.

In this, Stella Browne much resembles Marie Stopes, whose colleagues, almost without exception, found her intolerable. This in no way detracts from her immense achievements. It simply demonstrates that some of the most vital people in reform and political movements are personally insufferable, but that ought not to be held against them. The next generation will benefit from their single-minded obsessiveness, even more than the present generation

suffered from it. Whenever I find any of my colleagues exasperating beyond belief, I console myself with this reflection.

Shelia Rowbotham's book is of great interest because in addition to filling in many gaps in Stella Browne's life, it relates her work to the political and sexual reform movements of her time. It also reprints two of her important essays, one on sexuality and the other on abortion. These show what an accomplished stylist she was, and what a formidable publicist she must have been for the radical, and in those days Utopian, causes she so prophetically espoused.

MADELEINE SIMMS

MECHANICS OF MIND by Colin Blakemore. Cambridge University Press, £10.50 hb, £3.95 pb.

"The brain exudes mind as the liver exudes bile" a nineteenth century psychologist remarked. "How is it made and how does it get out?" we might ask, on the same basis. Even now it is a mystery. Psychologists tend to ignore the brain, largely because most of them also ignore the mind. Neurophysiologists regard themselves as scientists and ignore the mind too.

Some exit points for the mind are known. If you worry excessively, cutting off the front of the brain may stop you—but it will stop you doing a good deal else as well. Speech too, seems to come out of one or two particular parts of the brain. If they are damaged, speech is seriously interfered with, and may be destroyed altogether. The interesting thing is that damage in these areas interferes only with speech, not with thinking itself. There is a man in America who cannot remember anything for more than a few minutes. Three years ago his uncle died; each time he is told, he experiences the same shock and grieves again.

We know too how mind gets into the brain. We know where the brain receives the messages from all our sense organs. But wait: I have committed a sin. For the messages that arrive from our sense are not mind. They are not anything in themselves. If I show you a picture of something utterly strange to you, you will not recognise it—I don't mean just fail to give the correct name to a foreign flower, but fail to know it for a flower, fairy or bee's knee. Recognition depends on thought and knowledge, which depend on stored experience. It is that store which is the mystery: how you can cut out one part of a person's brain with no apparent effect: cut out another of equal size and reduce him to a vegetable.

All that we do know about the human mind and brain is here in this book, as nearly bang up to date as it is possible for a book to be. Colin Blakemore, the youngest Reith lecturer ever, has done a brilliant job in not only packing in the information

but making it read like a boy's wonder book of adventure. The illustrations are copious and sumptuous. If you learn everything within these two covers, and it won't be difficult, you will know more than many professionals.

CHRISTOPHER MACY

HISTORY WORKSHOP: A journal of socialist historians. Issue 3. History Workshop Journal, PO Box 69, Oxford. £3.45.

The aim of this journal is to fill a gap between specialist economic studies and social and labour history. Like all history, it has a viewpoint, and some readers might find the "socialist" perspective too overt, compared with the implicit outlook of much historical writing. The editors explain that "As a socialist editorial collective opposed to capitalism, our concern to develop a more real understanding of capitalism as a historical phenomenon, is political rather than academic."

The respectable academic standards of this issue include a thought-provoking study of work and capitalism in the mid-Victorian economy by Raphael Samuel. For those interested in both drama and Irish history there is a fascinating account of the problems involved in dramatising the life and work of James Connolly by Margarette D'Arcy and John Arden. *In Search of Carpenter* provides a personal account by Sheila Rowbotham of Edward Carpenter, the socialist and writer on sexual liberation, and *The Bothy Ballads* places songs of the farm servant community in North East Scotland in an economic context.

* * *

Come Holy Spirit (Darton, Longman and Todd, £1.60) is the title of a new paperback by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey and Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens. It is clearly intended as an "ecumenical book" and other authors include two protestant bishops. The forward and one essay are by Michael Ramsey, and he writes: "If speaking with tongues and healing are gifts of the spirit so also are intellectual integrity and an imaginative social conscience." There is no suggestion that the idea of speaking with tongues may be incompatible with an intellectual outlook. The phrase Holy Ghost, which churchmen used to use frequently has now quite gone out of fashion in favour of Holy Spirit—presumably because of the horror film connotations of "Ghost".

JH

WORLDWIDE

WEST GERMANY

Hare Krishna monks have been on trial in Frankfurt, charged with a variety of offences including embezzlement, unauthorised collections and illegal possession of arms. The monks are members of the

International Society For Krishna Consciousness and are familiar in German cities (as in England) for their saffron robes, shaven heads, banging drums and chanting.

The prosecution argued that about £600,000 was collected in the name of their god Krishna between May and December 1974. This was collected from people who believed that the money would be used to feed starving children in India. But only £4,000 was transferred to the Krishna centre at Mayapur in India. A former book-keeper of the sect was expected to explain how the money had been spent on printing religious books, international travel and expensive gifts for their guru. This guru, C. Bhaktivedanta Praphupada, died recently in Delhi.

It is thought that, if found guilty, they will get off lightly since only minor damage was caused to the charitable, but deceived, passers-by.

CYPRUS

A new Greek Orthodox Archbishop has been enthroned in Nicosia. Archbishop Chrysostomos has pledged to continue the struggle against the Turkish occupation of the north of the island. In an hour-long, emotional speech he said "We shall never write off the land seized by the Turks, nor shall we forget our sacred shrines." Referring to the burial place of St Barnabas, founder of the Cypriot Church, he paraphrased the Old Testament: "Oh, holy shrine of St Barnabas, if I ever forget thee let my right hand lose its cunning. If I ever forget the shrines of our holy ancestors let the tongue stick in my mouth."

AUSTRALIA

The Premier of Queensland, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, exerted pressure to stop the State trachoma programme. Trachoma, a preventable, curable eye disease, is still prevalent among the Aboriginal population. Mr Bjelke-Petersen complained of the "political activism" of two Aboriginal liaison officers working with a government medical team. After public controversy, further enquiry showed this activism was encouraging Aborigines to enrol to vote in State and Federal elections, as is their right.

According to the National Party, of which Mr Bjelke-Petersen is a leading member, he is "a man that stands for what is right, for what is true and just." But the trachoma programme, which could reduce and eventually eliminate this disease, has halted. Mr Bjelke-Petersen is also well-known as a devout Christian and supporter of the Festival of Light (Australia).

A correspondent to the Melbourne paper *The Age* has written: "As a humanist of many years standing it has been a matter of pride to me not to be a Christian. But never so much as now when Bjelke-Petersen who, as a Christian can, as a sin of omission, inflict blindness on human kind." (Ivy Hart).

LETTERS

PAEDOPHILIA

Antony Grey, in his article "Paedophiles—Are We Dodging the Issues?" ("The Freethinker", November 1977), says that paedophiles "may well turn the stomachs of most of us", yet complains of the attitude of the public and the press, whom he accuses of hysterical hullabaloo.

He then asks whether the public's image of the paedophile as being a "dirty old man" who is "a child molester" is accurate, and states that the answer is without doubt no. He gives no reasons why he should make such a sweeping statement. We are then told that there are "sexual psychopaths who molest, assault and sometimes even murder small children, but they do not comprise the majority of paedophiles, who feel as much if not more revulsion at such atrocities as the rest of us." I am sure we must all be very relieved to know that.

But how is it possible for a paedophile not to molest a child? Is Mr Grey suggesting that it is the other way round?

He appears to base his very favourable slant towards paedophiles entirely on his conversations with them. But what about the other side of the question? Has he asked the children who were assaulted?

The answer is apparently no, but he has consulted the psychiatrists, who mostly contradict his argument and say that these contacts are bound to have some damaging effects. This is qualified by suggesting that much of the damage relates to society's current attitudes and Mr Grey bases the rest of his case on this qualification. So, now we have it; we, the misunderstanding society have to change our attitudes in order to accommodate the paedophile.

In your inset editorial you have stated that it is in the belief that unpopular and even distasteful aspects of life should be discussed reasonably and calmly that you publish this article. Are we therefore to look forward to future illuminating articles on perhaps incest or rape, provided of course they don't murder their victims, with your contributors' plea that they are misunderstood and that society should change its attitudes?

I think your choice of article was a great mistake.
STANLEY JAMES MACE

FLOOD'S SOURCES

R. J. Condon is being rather one-sided when he states that "the world's Deluge myths stem from roots in ancient Egypt" ("The Freethinker", October 1977). He quotes some of the possible Egyptian sources for the Biblical flood story, but none of the much more plausible Mesopotamian sources. The Sumerian and Babylonian stories of Xisuthros/Sisithrus in Berossus (preserved in Josephus and Eusebius) and of Utnapishti/Atrahasis in the Gilgamesh epic (preserved in cuneiform tablets in many sites) are so similar to the Jewish story of Noah that the latter must surely be traced to a Mesopotamian rather than Egyptian original.

It is true that there were both flood stories and destruction stories in Egypt, but it is significant that there was no destructive flood story there, as there was in most other places. The obvious reason is that in Egypt floods are good rather than bad and rain is a blessing rather than a curse. The Biblical story relates much better to conditions in Mesopotamia than in Egypt or anywhere else in the Middle East, and it seems to come from a common seasonal/astrological myth connected with the coincidence of rainstorms and floods with the death and rebirth of the sun at

midwinter. Herodotus's misinterpretation of Egyptian (and other) myths is notorious, and it is very far-fetched to link the Semitic world "tebah" with the Greek name of Thebes or the German word "tub".

As for Noah, there seem to be two of him in the Bible (just as there are two flood stories). The hero of the flood (Genesis vi, 8-ix, 17) doesn't look much like the pioneer of agriculture and viticulture (Genesis v, 29 and ix, 20), let alone the drunkard (Genesis ix, 21-24), especially when the name Noah is explicitly interpreted as "rest" (Genesis v, 29) and implicitly contrasted with the nomadic wanderers of earlier Hebrew history. There seem to be impossibly wide gaps between Noah, the Jewish survivor of death-dealing flood, and Nun (not Nu), the Egyptian god of life-giving ocean, and Ne, the Egyptian name for Thebes (meaning "city"). Noah's name was probably added to the biblical flood story relatively late, possibly as a result of some misunderstanding like those of Herodotus and Mr Condon.

The point is that, while the flood story in Genesis may take some elements from the old civilisation of Egypt, the overwhelming influence surely comes from the even older civilisation of Mesopotamia—as in so much of the Old Testament.

W. H. PEMBERTON

JURY CHALLENGE

In Barbara Smoker's interesting piece about how she avoided serving on a jury, in the December "Freethinker", there is an error. She refers to the right to seven peremptory challenges, but this has changed following the passage of the 1977 Criminal Law Act (which is justifiably more notorious for several other of its provisions).

The situation now is that there is only a right to three peremptory challenges—thus making it more difficult for the defence to object to unsympathetic-looking jurors. The available number of such challenges had been an important factor in the past—especially in conspiracy cases where each of a large number of defendants could object to seven potential jurors.

ALBERT BEALE, "Peace News"

DEISM TO ATHEISM

I found myself intrigued yet irritated by Mr Crommelin's letter in the October "Freethinker". Whilst admiring his courage in leaving the Church, I find myself unable to understand why he has still not made the transition from Deism to Atheism.

From about the age of 14, I have been an atheist. I never accepted all the traditional nonsense about divine inspiration of the scriptures, the incarnation, atonement, etc, and all that could have been said of me was that I was a tepid Deist. Then abruptly, I saw that Deism itself had to go—so it went!

Mr Crommelin is evidently trying to avoid "dogmatism"—thus, he allows that it may turn out quite different posthumously from how the atheist sees it, we may discover we are immortal, and that God is there to welcome us. Think, Peter—if this world is a representative sample of the deity's handiwork, how would you feel about sharing eternity with the creator of such a world? Since it is perfectly obvious that your conception of God is of a being that never intervenes in worldly affairs, some kind of impersonal, Aristotelian "First Mover", why do you find it necessary to cling on to this metaphysical will o' the wisp? The question is not "Is there a God?" but "Would I give my approval to his creation of the cosmos if there were such a being?" After all, the demonstration of God's existence would not be an automatic justifica-

tion of his creation—a point conveniently overlooked by theists.

Mr Cadogan mentions the poem about Jesus being a poem about necrophilia. It could be argued that necrophilia is a very effective way of keeping the population down, though the disadvantage is that one's sexual partner will inevitably be rather unresponsive.

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

SPIRITUAL AIRS

If your correspondent, O. Ford, will take the trouble to re-read my article "Art as the enemy of rationalism", ("The Freethinker", October 1977), he (or she) will find that I deliberately singled out one aspect of the arts for comment, namely, (apart from a brief reference to Buddhism), that which supported the Christian faith. The vaster areas of secular architecture, sculpture, music, literature and painting were not my concern. Obviously, creative artists, including musicians, even when they were religious, rarely concerned themselves exclusively with work related to their religion or to the accepted religion of the time. More often than not, they were many-sided geniuses.

I stick to my point that religious music has considerable propaganda value. This is especially true at times like Christmas and Easter unless (a) you are a non-listener to broadcasts, (b) are completely non-musical, or (c), happen to be deaf.

GEORGE JAEGER

Jottings

approach to Sunday observance has caused much sorrow among their sabbatarian fans. The Duke of Edinburgh was considerably peeved when Mr Leger-ton ticked him off for playing polo on Sunday.

Although there are still irksome restrictions on Sunday trading there has been a transformation in attitudes to Sunday observance during the period about which Mr Legerton writes. Cinemas are open on Sunday, hundreds of thousands attend cultural and sporting events, it is now possible to enjoy a Sunday drink in Scottish public houses and in many parts of Wales. Only Northern Ireland remains as an outpost of sabbatarianism, and the Lord's Day Observance Society is welcome to the place.

It is not surprising that LDOS publications have lost much of their verve and have become increasingly doom-laden. *Remember all the Way* is no exception; the 28 pages are a chronicle of woe and lamentation. It exudes the cheeriness of a religious tract penned by Amos Starkadder on a wet afternoon in the back parlour at Cold Comfort Farm.

Harold Legerton puts on a brave face. But at the end of the day it is clear that, despite incalculable expenditure of human energy and resources, the sabbatarians are not just in retreat; they are on the run.

* * *

Two items of news from our off-shore islands.

The Bishop of Sodor and Man, the Rt Rev Vernon Nicholls, recently delivered a dire warning to his Diocesan Synod about the awful plays that the benighted mainlanders are seeing on television and in the theatre. He singled out for special opprobrium, *Lavender Blue*, a National Theatre production, and in a gracious message to the people of England, particularly supporters of the "Festival of Light", announced "our determination never to allow such things to come into the theatres of the island."

Bishop Nicholls assured the faithful that he was also determined to prevent "the desperate state of morals in England" reaching the Isle of Man. The bishop recently supported the retention of birching as a form of punishment on the island.

Further across the Irish Sea to Northern Ireland, where the committee of Belfast Humanist Group has voted against supporting a measure of homosexual law reform that would bring the Province into line with the rest of the United Kingdom. One of the smaller churches, the Church of Ireland, supports reform, but the governing body of the only humanist group in Northern Ireland has come down on the same side as the Rev Ian Paisley, whose Democratic Unionist Party has been spear-heading the campaign against a change in the law.

The decision was reached by majority vote, and

(Continued over)

Voluntary Euthanasia

give euthanasia, at the patient's request, this would be quite understandable, and he should not be prosecuted. Such, at any rate, is the theory. Whether it works in practice, we shall see. Unfortunately, there is no such provision for doctors in English law, where any act of euthanasia is still legally murder.

Perhaps the most remarkable recent development was the establishment last year of the Dutch Information Centre for Voluntary Euthanasia. This intends to receive people's requests for a suicide pill, interview them and, if they are satisfied with the reasons for that person's intentions, give them a suicide pill. In doing this, they may find themselves open to prosecution for assisting a suicide—something punishable in Britain with up to 14 years imprisonment, and likewise punishable in Holland.

Baroness van Till did not think it likely that a blind eye would be shown to such practices, because it could create a dangerous precedent (or be dangerous in itself) for such complex judgments about patients to be made by lay people. Such matters should surely be left to the clinical judgment of the doctor or psychiatrist.

The Baroness dealt most effectively in questioning with some people's doubts about the details of voluntary euthanasia legislation. "It is clear that parliamentary action on the subject cannot be far off, here as well as in Holland", Nicholas Reed, the Press Officer of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, has commented.

Jottings

it will be interesting to see how the members react at the next annual general meeting. BHG journal, *The Realist*, has clobbered the anti-reformers for "this pitiless action, worthy indeed of this Bible Belt of Northern Ireland. Living with Paisleyites and their ilk is no excuse for being contaminated."

Unionists, of both Paisleyite and Humanist variety, often point to the measures of reform, particularly in relation to censorship, family life and social welfare, that the people of Northern Ireland enjoy because of the link with Britain. They conveniently forget that reforming measures have, as a rule, had to be imposed upon them by Westminster, usually in the teeth of fierce opposition from the fanatical Christian majority. And in the case of homosexual law reform, from the committee of Belfast Humanist Group too.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castlereagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim, telephone Whiteabbey 66752.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Pat Sloan: "The BHA and the Economy". Sunday, 8 January, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havinger and District Humanist Society. Linnea Timson: "'Jude the Obscure'—a humanist novel'." Thursday 17 January, 8.00 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (between Squirrels Heath Road and Gubbins Lane).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. AGM followed by topical discussion. Tuesday 10 January, 7.45 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square.

Lewisham Humanist Group. John Evitt: "Rationalism, Reason and Philosophy". Thursday 26 January, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, SE6.

London Young Humanists. John Florentin: "Computer File Privacy". Sunday 8 January, 7.30 pm. Nan Smith: "Nuclear Power and its Implications". Sunday 15 January, 7.30 pm. Both at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). Thursdays. 12.30 pm at Tower Hill; Sundays, 3-7 pm at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

Merseyside Humanist Group. Details from Secretary: Ann Coombes, tel 051-608 3835 or Public Relations Officer: Marion Clowes, tel 051-342 2562.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Informal meeting: "Can I improve my character?". Monday 9 January, 8.30 pm. 30 Archibald Road, N7. Mr D. Billingsley: "Poverty Action". Wednesday 18 January, 8.30 pm. 5 Leaside Avenue, N10.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. Sunday morning meetings, 11.00 am. 8 January, T. F. Evans: "Samuel Butler and his Time Bomb". 15 January, Ian MacKillop: "Intelligentsias". 22 January, Prof Richard Scorer: "The Dangers of Nuclear Success". 29 January, Dr Alexander Shtromas: "Soviet Dissent and the Western Response". 5 February, Nicolas Walter: Shelley Plain. Sunday Forums, 3.00 pm. 8 January, Nigel Wright: "Towards a New Schooling". 22 January, Simon Hebditch: "The Abolition of Compulsory Retirement?" Tuesday Discussions, 7.00 pm. 10 January, Erich Fried: "The Baader-Meinhof Experience". 17 January, David Porter and Peter Cadogan: "Rank and File Peacemaking and the Xmas Truce of 1914". 24 January, J. K. Gordon: "Helsinki, Belgrade and Human Rights".

Sutton Humanist Group. AGM followed by John White: "Education and Stances for Living". Wednesday 11 January, 8.00 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Dr L. Button, Department of Education: "Helping People". Friday 13 January. Dr David George: "Helping the Gypsies". Friday 27 January. Both 7.30 pm, Friends' Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea.

Humanist Holidays. Easter 24-28 March. Comfortable hotel near Great Malvern station. Hills, theatre. Breakfast and evening meal, approx £35-£39. August 5-12-19. Hotel by Derwentwater at Keswick, Lake District. £55-£59 per week, excluding lunch. Apply to secretary, Marjorie Mephem, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796. Also if interested to join small party at a Welsh cottage one spring week-end for walking and talking. Communal cooking, small charge. Another possibility is family camping on North Wales coast in school holidays.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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