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CALL FOR EXTENSION OF BLASPHEMY LAW IN FINAL APPEAL

The final appeal in the House of Lords in the blasphemy case against "Gay News" and its editor, Denis Lemon, has been lost. There can no longer be any doubt that blasphemous libel stands as an indictable offence in Britain today, and the judgement has established a definition of blasphemy which includes any material likely to outrage the feelings of Christians, regardless of the intention of the "blasphemer".

The judgement of the five lords was divided three to two. This difference of opinion indicates how complex, unclear and abstruse the legal arguments have become since the case began in the Old Bailey in 1977.

Denis Lemon, the Editor of *Gay News* reacted to the judgement by saying that his lawyers would be examining the possibility of taking the case to the European Court at Strasbourg. He also said that he had never been given the opportunity of explaining his intention in publishing James Kirkup's poem *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*. He complained that the poem had been read as prose with a disregard for the metaphorical way in which poetry could operate on different levels.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, commented after the judgement: "The National Secular Society deplores the failure of the appeal of *Gay News* at the House of Lords against conviction for the 'crime' of 'blasphemy'. The failure of the appeal demonstrates that the threat of blasphemy law being used against controversial and artistic writing remains. . .

"The National Secular Society, which has been campaigning against blasphemy law for more than two hundred years, will not be satisfied until there are no such rules to break; until the special protection given to the Christian creed is lifted in favour of open debate and free artistic expression. If gods cannot hold their own in the free-for-all arena of ideas, then they are dead indeed."

The issue which divided the Lords was the question of *mens rea* or the "intention" of the accused. Legal history gives grounds to argue either that the intention of offending and outraging is an important part of the offence of blasphemy, or that it is irrelevant (as Judge King-Hamilton had ruled in the trial at the Old Bailey). Viscount Dilhorne and Lord Russell of Killowen both argued that the case history, including the case against Ramsey and G. W. Foote in 1883 and the case against Gott in 1921 (quoted in *The Freethinker*, 1922) gave no grounds for believing that it was necessary to prove intention and could not therefore allow the appeal. Lord Edmund-Davies and Lord Diplock both interpreted the legal history differently and would have allowed the appeal on the grounds that Denis Lemon should have been given the opportunity to explain his intention in publishing the offending poem. Lord Scarman, while holding the view that it was not necessary to prove intention to outrage, recognised the force of the other argument. He said, "the issue is, therefore, one of legal policy in the society of today".

Lord Scarman was acutely conscious of the necessity to define blasphemy for today, quoting from Lord Sumner's speech in the case of *Bowman v The Secular Society Ltd* (1917) "there is nothing in the general rule as to blasphemy and irreligion, as known to the law, which prevents us from varying their application to the particular circumstances of our time in accordance with that experience".

It was stated by Lord Scarman that the law of blasphemous libel serves a useful purpose today; it is an offence designed to safeguard the "inner tranquillity of the kingdom". He quotes approvingly a definition which is likely to be used in any further prosecution for blasphemy: "Every publication is

(Continued over)

said to be blasphemous which contains any contemptuous, reviling, scurrilous or ludicrous matter relating to God, Jesus Christ, or the Bible, or the formularies of the Church of England as by law established. It is not blasphemous to speak or publish opinions hostile to the Christian religion, or to deny the existence of God, if the publication is couched in decent and temperate language. The test to be applied is as to the manner in which the doctrines are advocated and not as to the substance of the doctrines themselves." (Stephen's Digest of the Criminal Law, 9th edition, 1950.)

Legal Policy in Society

The fact that Lord Scarman evidently felt that "the issue is, therefore, one of legal policy in society today" combined with the narrowness of the three to two vote, shows that a political belief in the importance of blasphemy law today was crucial to the result.

Lord Scarman went further. He suggested an extension of the blasphemy law to cover other religions: "In an increasingly plural society such as that of modern Britain, it is necessary not only to respect the differing religious beliefs, feelings and practices of all, but also to protect them from scurrility, vilification, ridicule and contempt."

Barbara Smoker said, in her press release: "At the first hearing of the case, Judge King-Hamilton asserted (and has since re-asserted) that the scope of the common-law offence of blasphemy, which protects only the Church of England, should be extended to all other major religions. Some years ago the Director General of the Islamic Foundation in this country demanded the introduction of an international law to protect the honour of 'all prophets of God and all founders of religions'. As long as the established church enjoys the privilege of legal protection from 'blasphemy', we may expect increasing demands of this kind—and such demands, if complied with, would further erode the freedom of speech won during centuries of struggle."

All five lords expressed their own shock and outrage at the poem. No-one has allowed for the fact that the poem is about the homosexual *fantasies* of a centurion—not a direct description of Christ. But Lord Scarman did speculate that had Denis Lemon been permitted to give evidence "I have little doubt that he would have said, and truly said that he had no intention to shock Christian believers but that he published the poem not to offend Christians but to comfort practising homosexuals by encouraging them to feel there was room for them in the Christian religion. I am prepared to assume the honesty and sincerity of his motive." This was irrelevant to the decision not to allow the appeal.

Nicolas Walter, press officer for the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, has said: "We emphasise the following points: there has never been any

doubt that James Kirkup's poem *The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name* was a serious work of literature, and that its publication in *Gay News* was a responsible act of journalism; there has never been any evidence that the poem caused any damage to any Christian church or individual, or any danger to public order or morality, or that anyone involved had any intention to cause any such damage or danger; the only definite result of Mary Whitehouse's private prosecution of *Gay News* has been to increase the circulation of the poem far beyond its original readership."

In opposing any extension of the law to cover other religions, Nicolas Walter also said: "We are in favour at least of restricting the law to exclude private prosecutions, and at best abolishing it so that freedom of expression would be the same in religious as in other matters".

There is no doubt that scurrility is an important part of the "crime" of blasphemous libel. To question Christianity in "a sober and temperate style" is allowed. But people may be as rude as they like about the sincerely held views of a secularist. This is as we would wish it. For we favour the robust exchange of ideas in society. Do we want an anaesthetised world, where there is no fantasy, anger or bawdy humour, and we are all preserved as if in cottonwool from the possibility of ever offending each other?

The nineteenth century freethinkers challenged blasphemy law by continually publishing blasphemous material. Perhaps we should do the same today. When will the first anthology of twentieth century blasphemy appear?

The Church of England is planning to buy one of three big comprehensive schools in Acton for £1,000,000 plus. This is being opposed by some local leaders, partly since it creates sectarian division in a multi-racial area and also because it is seen as an attempt to create a middle-class "grammar" type school.

Mr Michael Elliot, local Labour leader, said, "It is a divisive move and will be harmful to racial harmony in this area. . . We do not want to set up special schools for the Sikhs or Muslims."

The Secretary of the National Secular Society has written to the MPs in the area, opposing the move, and commenting "The whole question of denominational schools needs to be reviewed now that many regions in the country have multi-racial populations".

The Church Commissioners are offering an 18 per cent pay rise to the clergy including the Archbishop of Canterbury. Somewhat outside the government 5 per cent guidelines, and rather embarrassing for a man who has rebuked the low paid for striking!

Events have recently been moving so swiftly in Iran that any specific comment on the current situation runs the risk of being quickly overtaken by further changes. However, it is clear that the move from secular, benevolent(?) dictator to religious prophet and Islamic republic is of far-reaching significance. Here, the author looks at the long-term perspective of Western attitudes to secularisation in Asia.

In evaluating the events in Iran, I find it useful to compare the numbers involved in the upheaval with those which obtained during the freedom struggle in India.

It is generally agreed that the fate of British rule in India was sealed in April 1919 when the Amritsar massacre took place. The number killed by General Dyer's men, in Amritsar, was estimated to have been a little over 300. The last conflict was in Bombay in February 1946 when there was mutiny by ratings in the Royal Indian Navy which was supported by a general strike in the city lasting four days. The death toll then was between three and four hundred. In Iran the death toll has been estimated at about 15,000. In one week-end of carnage in Meshed, the deaths were estimated variously between 500 and 4,000. The Pahelvi dynasty recently established (in 1925) could not have survived these events.

At the height of the Nationalist upsurge in India in the forties, with Nehru or Gandhi addressing meetings, the turnout used to be estimated at 100,000 to 200,000. The march in Teheran on 19th January was reported to have brought out one million people. By any standards, this was a staggering mobilisation and it was clear that the aspirations of the people of Iran were overwhelmingly expressed by the slogan of an Islamic Republic through the personality of Ayatollah Khomeini. No wonder then that when the Islamic Lenin arrived at his Finland Station his reception was tumultuous.

The end of the Bakhtiar regime was swift. The army had failed to drive the anti-Shah forces off the streets, despite their heavy losses. It could not, in any case, run the economy without popular co-operation. A section of the army was bound to be sympathetic with the opposition. The desertion of the Air Force Cadets was enough, after a short struggle, to neutralise the army. Deserters from the army and hastily armed civilians took over government offices with very little resistance. An era had ended.

The events in Iran are so severe a shock to Western Democracies and so unexpected a set-back to secularist ideas that a heart-searching analysis must be made and debated for a long time.

During the last 200 years or so Euro-American ideologies represented by four revolutions have held sway in the world and newly-emerging states have followed one or other of these, however falteringly. Of these four revolutions, only the mild English one had left an established church, though in practice Britain acts as a modern secular state rather than a religious one. The French revolution was very anti-clerical, the American one very strongly secular in its jealous separation of church and state. The Russian revolution had even been anti-religious and the communist ideology has a substantial following or influence in the Western democracies.

When Western liberals and democrats express dismay or even horror at the spectacle of the people of Iran determined to turn back to a theocratic state, it is necessary that they examine to what extent they themselves have remained faithful to the heritage of their own secularist revolutions and whether they have made any efforts to encourage these ideas in the Muslim world.

Let us first take the case of Turkey. With the end of the first world war, the Young Turks led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha came to power in Turkey with a clear-cut programme of secularist modernisation. The abolition of the Khilafat, which Kemal Pasha was to accomplish, was an epoch-making event in the Muslim world; it was as if the Vatican and the Pope had been abolished by a Mazzini. The West's response to Kemal Pasha was to instigate the Greeks to land at Smyrna. Turkey was later to acquire Western support, not as a citadel of secularism in the Muslim world, but as an ally against the Soviet Union whom Turkey feared because of her common border.

Secular Principles Abandoned

In the Indian sub-continent, while the British did not create the antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims, it is clear that Muslim separatism was encouraged by the British rulers and the Indian freedom movement ridiculed for its claims to wish to establish secularist principles in the government of a free India. This unprincipled slant in favour of Pakistan continued until it became quite untenable when the Pakistani Army created a holocaust in the Eastern wing of its own territory in 1971.

Equally disastrous have been the results of the abandonment of secular principles by the West in the creation of a Zionist state in the Middle East.

In the first place it was Christendom that created a feeling of insecurity among the Jews. The West then proceeded to support the preposterous claims of Zionism in the form of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. By the end of the second world war, all Euro-Americans, including the Russian communists, were agreed that the price of the Nazi holocaust

must be paid for by the Palestinians. This grave injustice had the support of many Western liberals, typified by Richard Crossman and still remains a festering sore, arousing and fanning the fires of Islamism. American Presidents are powerless in this matter because they must woo the Jewish vote, disregarding the secular spirit of the constitution. The Nobel Prize Committee does not need any such votes; but such is the insensitivity of European liberalism that the Committee offered a share of the Peace Prize to Menachin Begin. Why should the West be surprised if the Muslim masses turn against the West and turn back and inwards to seek consolation in revivalist dreams of a glorious past?

It must be noted, in passing, that outstanding individuals like Bertrand Russell spoke strongly against the injustice done to the Arabs, and organised secularists might take pride in the fact that at the time of the 1967 war, David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society took a similar stand.

As for Iran, it must not be assumed that her Islamic State will take the form which is emerging in Pakistan. The Muslim movement in the Indian sub-continent was taught to identify itself with the Muslim conquerors of India. It had overtones of ruling class arrogance and contempt for the 75 per

cent non-Muslim population. The Iranian movement repudiates the Imperial past and is based on the vast majority of the people and may therefore attempt to combine Islam with economic egalitarian ideas. Also, it contains within the broad front liberals, social democrats and Marxists of various hues, rather like the post-Salazar and post-Franco situation in the Iberian peninsula. The Ayatollahs may correspond more to the revolutionary Bishops in South America than to the vociferous Ulema of Pakistan. The popular victory has been so massive that harsh treatment of minorities may be felt out of the question. However, the fact remains that the basic features of an Islamic state do not correspond to the complete equality of all citizens.

The Iranian people are now wedded to some form of an Islamic state and it is only through their experience that changes can come. In the fullness of time the realisation must come that a modern people cannot run their affairs on the basis of a medieval penal code or a seventh century "revelation". Shia theology is said to be more open to interpretation and therefore more flexible, but this flexibility is only relative to the rigid orthodoxy of Sunni theologians. Time alone will tell whether the shackles imposed by the divine Shah are going to be broken as easily as those imposed by a Pahlavi.

What is Secularism?

HARRY H. PEARCE

The following lecture was given to the Secular Society of Victoria by its President, Harry H. Pearce. A lifelong secularist and socialist, Harry H. Pearce is now in his eighties and is well-known in the Australian Labour Movement. In this talk he laid great emphasis on secularism's foundation in the scientific attitude.

What is Secularism? I may answer that by saying, "It is a philosophy of living without religion". But "What is that philosophy?"

It is difficult in a religious society fully to live such a philosophy, but that does not prevent us from knowing what such a philosophy really is and doing our best to keep it before us, and in our personal lives to endeavour at all times to think secularism as a guide to our understanding, not only of our own attitudes, but of the world around us.

Our language is overladen with a terminology that has in it numerous hang-overs in ordinary usage from a religious origin so that to avoid them in ordinary conversation is most difficult, but the secularist, with some ingenuity, if he is alert, can get over the problem. The main thing is to understand

the problem and condition oneself to think secularism all the time.

The secularist has to adopt radically new thought processes, just as science has had to actually adapt and invent a language of its own to express its new understanding of man and his universe, quite distinct from that of the religious one.

Now I claim that essentially the secularist's attitude must be that of the scientist in his understanding of himself and the universe of which he is a fundamental part. The scientific attitude is, firstly, a particular "mood" or mental outlook, marked by a passion for facts, by clearness of vision, and a clear sense of the inter-relatedness of things, the unity of the universe.

Secondly, the aim of science is to describe experience in verifiable terms as exactly as possible, as simply and completely as possible, as the experience actually is, not as the scientist would like it to be.

Thirdly, the scientific method of understanding is to use the tools of measurement, classification, and reduction to simple terms as completely as possible, using hypothetical explanations, which must be tested by experiments to prove if they are correct.

The scientist only describes "how" things occur, not "why". Religion, of course, will not accept the

application of these tests to itself, because it claims that its world is quite distinct from that of the material world that can be measured, being what it calls a spiritual world which cannot be subjected to such rigorous testing. But science recognises no such claim, and, in fact, brings that very claim itself within its field of investigation. Thus, science can find no such spiritual world as is claimed by religion.

The world of religion is one that was created by primitive man in the process of his early evolution from the animal condition, when he projected his own personality and his motives, fears, likes and dislikes into the world around him. Thus intelligent motive and purpose animated everything that moved in what we call nature, which was mostly hostile to himself. Out of this beginning evolved all brands of religion with all their rites, creeds, and explanations as to "how" and "why" everything came to be. Thus, from numerous spirits and/or gods and goddesses governing every aspect of his external world came what are called the great religious systems. Christianity has it all so fully set out in its Bible and developed in its theological creeds, all so elaborately precise and—sacred.

In ancient Greece, something like half a millennium BC, a new idea was born, which saw the world not as religion was trying to explain it, but in terms of man himself. Nature was not the fickle plaything of spirits and gods. There was order in nature, that could be discovered and described. A regularity in certain occurrences was noticed and extended to other aspects of nature, and could be described and understood apart from the supposed indwelling spirit or god. And so science was born. The new idea caught on and spread. Famous Greek philosophers, and scientists, such as Hippocrates, Thales, Archimedes, Euclid, and Aristotle led to their new philosophy being enshrined by the Roman poet Lucretius in his great poem, "On the Nature of Things" in the first century BC.

Dr Lewis Farnell, in his book *The Religion of the Greeks*, says of the Greek philosophers:

"The astonishing outburst of Ionic philosophy was indirectly indebted to the absence of any religious dogmatism or prejudice that could impede it. The Greek world had the advantage of possessing no sacred books that could impose, as a duty of faith, any definite belief about matters that were the proper domain of physical science or speculation".

So when St Paul referred to his attempts to teach the Greeks about Christ he said that to them it was "foolishness". And when he was teaching that Christ was "The Way, the Truth and the Life", he was telling them no more than a dozen other cults of the time were preaching. They were not seeking religious truths but scientific truths. And where Hippocrates, 400 years previously, had described the "sacred" disease, epilepsy, in scientific terms,

Christ was treating it as possession by the devil, which could only be cured by rebuking the devil and expelling him from his victim.

In outline, say from the triumph of Christianity under Constantine (d. 387) to Copernicus (d. 1543) science was extinguished in Europe. From then on it grew, and is growing, today. Julian made a brave attempt to revive it, but on his death Christianity regained its power, and Europe lapsed into the Dark Ages with Christianity supreme, imposing its primitive theological "knowledge" of the truth. But science was not to be denied, and with the birth of the New Learning, called the Renaissance, Christianity was unable to suppress that new learning. Secularism got away from the prison it had been in. In other words humanity got away from the Church's control. Life and the world took on a new meaning a humanitarian meaning of human existence and understanding, not only of man himself, but of the whole universe.

A new scientific language distinct from the old religious language came into being. A new conception of reality was born. A secular reality free from Christian (religious) hangovers. It was not concerned with the religious "why" of anything, but with the scientific "how". Although some religious scientists, even today, are reluctant to foresake the "why", believing in something spiritual that lies behind the phenomena that direct the operations of nature.

After Copernicus, the second decree of science against Christianity came from Darwin's evolutionary ideas, and the last was Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, making religion take refuge in the human mind. I think that the three greatest scientists who have contributed to the scientific secularisation of human thought have been Copernicus (the physical world), Darwin (the biological world), and Freud (the psychological life of man). Between them and those who developed their ideas, the Christian world has been tipped into the remnants of primitive mythology.

In 1645 a group of scientists and like-minded persons came together to study what was then called "Natural Philosophy". In 1660 this group became the "Royal Society", taking as its "Motto" the words *nullius in verbe* (nothing in words), which, according to Sir Henry Lyon FRS, in his book *The Royal Society—1660-1940*, indicated ". . . the Society's determination to withstand the domination of authority and to test all statements by appeal to facts which had been carefully verified . . . In a similar manner the Fellows of the Society claim to have freed themselves from the restrictions laid down by authorities in the past, and are willing in future to accept only what they have satisfied themselves by examination and experiment to be reliable and true".

Sir Ray Lankester said, "They showed (by their Motto) that they understood when they urged their

fellows not to make long discourses of wonders and marvellous narrations, but 'bring in' an experiment or a specimen . . . and of refusing to waste time in the discussion of vampires or what some learned writer of antiquity had stated, or the properties of dragons, or how many angels can dance on a needle's point . . . Let us see whether (these things are so or not)."

Science is completely without God or any theological sanction whatever. Such is the basis of secularism. Secularists behold to nothing, nor to any person or group of persons, except themselves. They take no direction from anyone, or thing, except the requirements of the basic principles of scientific thought.

And yet there are those who call themselves scientists, and are accepted as such, who still seek the "why" of things as they are, and still see motivation and purpose in what Bertrand Russell calls "events in natural occurrences", which can only imply that there is some intelligent operating power behind those events working towards a predetermined goal or end. Thus they want to know "why" such events occur in addition to "how" they occur!—a completely unscientific question. And thus, for example, the scientist Jeans wrote a book, *The Mysterious Universe*, yet as a so-called scientist he should have known that mystery belongs purely to the theological world, where its previous mysteries have so frequently been exposed, as in his own fields of physics or astro-physics. In the world of science there are no mysteries, only problems waiting to be solved.

Another thing that needs to be clear in the thinking of secularists is to distinguish between science as such, and the artificially segregated portions of nature to which the technique of science is applied. Thus, strictly, there is no science of biology as distinct from the science of astronomy. Science is *only* science wherever it is applied, in biology, astronomy, or anywhere else. There are no different kinds of science. Science is one.

Great Christian propaganda was once made of what was then called the "defeat of causation" in science, when a physicist, Heisenberg, formulated his "uncertainty principle" in the study of the atom. Electrons in the atom could jump from one orbit to another, seemingly without any "cause". They seemed to have "free-will" in doing so. No "cause" could be "determined" because to do so both the position and the velocity of an atom had to be simultaneously determined. One or the other could be determined independently but not the two together. However, scientists no longer accept this, having postulated that any appearance of no causation in nature was due to human inability to determine causation. We never hear today about the free-will of electrons in atoms.

With no intelligent "purpose" in the physical uni-

verse and its operations, there must also go a lack of discernible moral purpose for a discernible end.

Christian morality is based on a static divine revelation given once and for all time to the "Saints", either in the Mosaic Law or the Sermon on the Mount by Christ. But science has exploded such ideas by its conception of evolution, which applies to morals as much as to the universe. Humanity itself decides its own moral codes, discards, amends, adapts, or introduces new codes, as its evolutionary conditions require. There is no absolute or ultimate code of conduct for humanity. The complete secularist cannot avoid recognising this as part of accepting the complete scientific view.

Thomas Henry Huxley said, "Logical consequences are the scarecrows of fools". If the secularist is completely honest in his belief and with himself, the "logical consequences" of that belief must be accepted.

The Christian doesn't really "believe" his own belief, because he continually denies it in so many things, when it becomes too inconvenient to abide by it. And he always has a convenient excuse ready. Like the clergy have when they support war! Or the Christian capitalist when he dismisses hundreds of employees!

I have tried to show that the only secure foundation for a philosophy of secularism is science. It is the only alternative to religion. And so we have today the undignified position of Christianity having not only to reconstruct its beliefs, but to try and make them acceptable to the new (scientific) revolutionary understanding of humanity and the world we live in. The "once and for all" delivered sacred revelation from its own "divine" and sacred source has gone. For criticising this source many have been persecuted, condemned and put to death, with all the sacred anathemas and ritual it could call forth and implement.

George Jacob Holyoake first coined the word "Secularism" to describe a "Way of Living" without religion setting it out in a pamphlet, *The Principles of Secularism, Illustrated*, and G. W. Foote later wrote, *Secularism, The True Philosophy of Life. An Exposition and a Defence*. This is, however, my own case for secularism.

In a lifetime of studying both religion and science and of advocating secularism, I have come to the conclusion that the best way to deal with Christian opponents is thoroughly to understand one's own basic position, as opposed to the basic position of the Christian. No other person than Chapman Cohen taught me the necessity of adopting this position.

And so I emphasise in conclusion, understand and accept the scientific attitude to your very processes of thought. That is the only basis on which any worthwhile secularism can stand up to meeting any religious attack. That is scientific secularism.

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

During the recent spate of strikes and industrial troubles it was inevitable that the Archbishop of Canterbury would put his oar in, and the opportunity came when he preached a sermon at a Folkestone church last month. The newspapers and broadcasting services responded with alacrity; not since Dr Coggan's fatuous drivel was hailed as a "Call to the Nation" three years ago, have his views been so assiduously trumpeted throughout the land.

The archbishop used the occasion to sanctify the barrage of ignorant and biased commentary presently being directed against the trade unions. He warned that "the forces of selfishness are rampant . . . It is each man for himself". The witness of Christ and the witness of the Church is vitally important: "We must be men and women of probity when perhaps others are crooked."

No doubt these sentiments went down well with those "unselfish" elements in the congregation who expect the streets to be swept, dustbins emptied, ambulances driven, school buildings maintained and parks kept in order by workers who have to put in many hours of overtime to get a living wage. Dr Coggan and his ilk are the successors of those "men and women of probity" who, when the boot was on the other foot, graciously allowed working-class men and women to work for a pittance as gardeners and skivvies.

The archbishop attempted to disguise his hostility to organised labour with misleading references to "the Christianity that inspired the movement". Even Keir Hardie's name was dragged into Dr Coggan's canting discourse. "I wonder what Keir Hardie would have said if he were in Britain today," wailed the archbishop, as though he visualised the Labour pioneer as some kind of Mrs Grundy in a cloth cap. Dr Coggan assured his flock that Keir Hardie would have "something caustic" to say about "some salaries . . . that are out of all proportion to the work done or to the good achieved for the community by those who receive them. And I'm sure he'd have something even more caustic to say about the sheer pitilessness which injures the old and very young who can't retaliate even if they wanted to". Brave and noble words indeed from My Lord of Canterbury who has to scrape by on his £10,590 a year (plus perks which include a tied palace).

If Keir Hardie were in the land of the living he would be 123 years old and incapable of expressing a coherent viewpoint on any subject. But when Hardie was in his prime and leading the working people in

their struggles against exploitation, dire poverty and foul living conditions, neither the Anglican "Tory Party at Prayer" nor any of the other churches "wondered" what he had to say about Britain.

Had they done so, Keir Hardie would have had "something caustic" to say about Christian slum-owners and Church authorities who seized people's belongings if they refused to make tithe payments. He would have had "something even more caustic" to say about a wealthy nation that condemned its elderly poor to the hellish surroundings of the work-house and whose working-class children were riddled with ailments resulting from malnutrition.

Although he preached in Labour churches and made the Left noises about Christianity and Socialism, Keir Hardie would have been forthright in his condemnation of church leaders like Dr Coggan. This pontificating prelate is the head of an institution that has amassed immense wealth over the centuries and has plundered the public purse to build its churches, pay its clergy and subsidise its schools.

Instead of "wondering" what a Labour leader who died in 1915 would think of Britain in 1979, we know what the present Labour Member of Parliament for Paddington thinks of Dr Coggan and his firm. Arthur Latham revealed that in his constituency the Church Commissioners are increasing rents by several pounds a week and threatening critics with libel action. Dr Coggan, who criticises people for trying to increase their income to meet higher rents and living costs, is chairman of the Church Commissioners.

When Dr Coggan spoke of how Christianity had inspired the Labour movement he had either been going it too hard at the communion wine or indulging in the usual dishonest apologia for Christianity that is the wont of Christian Socialists—not that he would welcome that appellation. From the early years of the Industrial Revolution and throughout the 19th century every attempt by the working people to secure a better life was baulked by Church and State. The bishops fulminated against reform and preached to the poor the virtues of humility, respect for one's betters and passive acceptance of the miserable station in life which it had pleased Almighty God to allot them. Reformers, radicals and freethinkers were hounded by the clergy and magistracy, the roles often being interchangeable.

Lacky was on the mark when he described the Church of England as "the most servile and efficient agent of tyranny". The Methodists, castigated by Cobbett as "the bitterest foes of freedom", came a close second.

Of course many individual Christians came into the Labour movement and campaigned with great vigour and courage for social progress. They were not any the less welcome because of their religious beliefs, but many of them were treated as pariahs

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POPE IN NEW WORLD

Half of the world's 750 million Catholics live in South America. So the visit of Pope John Paul II to Puebla in Mexico, to address the Latin American Bishop's Conference, was carefully watched to see in which direction the new Pope is likely to move the Catholic Church.

The Pope described his mission as a "pilgrimage of faith". The "pilgrimage" was set in motion by a papal kiss planted on the soil of the Dominican Republic. He said the country was the place in the New World where "the first cross was placed, the first Mass celebrated, the first Hail Mary said".

It is not a glorious memory; Santanyana wrote of Columbus's arrival in the New World:

"He gave the world another world, and ruin
Brought upon blameless, river-loving nations,
Cursed Spain with barren gold, and made the
Andes

Fiefs of St Peter's. . . "

(Ode)

Somewhat to the embarrassment of the anti-clerical Mexican government, the Pope was rapturously received on arrival in Puebla. In contrast a crowd of 200,000 from a very poor area of Puebla hissed and booed him, when he spoke of the "simple joys of the poor in their humble shacks".

One of the Vatican-watcher's main interests was to see which faction the Pope favoured: the Marxist-inspired priests who have adopted a creed of political action on behalf of human rights and the poor (known as "liberation theology"), or the conservative Catholic hierarchy.

The hierarchy had successfully ensured that the conference was not full of progressive men. It only later emerged how deviously this had been achieved. A dictated letter from the ultra-conservative Bishop Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, the Colombian secretary-general of the conference, came into the hands of the press. It revealed a venomous letter criticising a progressive Cardinal and a General of the Jesuits. Another arch-conservative was called on to "prepare your bombers and some of your secret venom. . . I feel you should go into training like a boxer before a world championship. May your blows be evangelical and well-aimed."

The scandal following the publication of these fighting words led to an offer of resignation from Bishop Trujillo, who was then persuaded to stay on. But the rift in the church and its medieval methods were well publicised.

The actual words of the Pope gave some comfort to both factions. He warned against the idea of "Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, the subversive man from Nazareth". But he also spoke of the right of participation and criticised unjust and unlawful coercion. He is clearly going to be a politic pope, excellent at steering between different interests.

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Naturally, he does not lack the ability to talk disturbing nonsense: "Your principal duty is to be teachers of truth—not a human and rational truth, but the truth which comes from God, the truth which brings with it the principles of the authentic liberation of man".

Pope John Paul II seems set to sail a course that is conservative in theology, informal in style, and, as could be expected from the Vatican—totally lacking in human and rational truth.

THE TIE AND THE CROSS

A Muslim religious leader in Leicester is reported to have objected to his son having to put on a school tie on the ground that the sign of the cross is made when tying it. This religious objection has never been heard before. Indeed it is so far-fetched that a spokesman for the Muslim Educational Trust in London is reported to have said, "Some people go beyond reason and create strict disciplines that have little foundation". If the Leicester leader were followed by his other Muslim brethren, logically their children would not write the + sign in arithmetic or the letter t or the number 4. He himself would not be able to wear the loose pyjamas so popular in the Indian sub-continent, because they are secured with a sash in tying which he would be making the sign of the cross.

The man has however done one great service. By taking up this way-out position, he has forced the Muslim Educational Trust spokesman into admitting that "Some people go beyond reason". In fairness, therefore, the Muslim Educational Trust spokesman ought to be willing to consider whether other demands made by Muslim spokesmen go beyond reason in the eyes of the rest of the people in Britain.

G.N.D.

CHARITABLE STATUS CHALLENGE

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service faces a challenge to its charitable status. Mr William Paton, the man who unsuccessfully attempted to prevent his wife obtaining an abortion, backed by Mr Spring, known as an anti-abortion and anti-BPAS campaigner, approached the Charity Commissioners. He initially complained that BPAS could not be a charity since it "goes round killing unborn babies".

The Charity Commissioners refused to consider his complaint on the grounds that he was not an

AND NOTES

affected person. Paton and Spring now claim they are challenging the Commissioners in the High Court on this point. If they succeed the Charity Commissioners will have to reconsider Mr Paton's original complaint. If there is then a decision that BPAS is a properly registered charity, then Paton and Spring say they will appeal to the High Court against this decision on the grounds that the BPAS indulges in political activity.

The case highlights once again the unsatisfactory legal nature of charitable status. Groups with reformist aims are denied charitable status and the consequent considerable tax relief. How can you draw a sharp dividing line between education and campaigning? And can there be any doubt that some religious groups—usually granted charitable status—often take part in political activity?

Freethinker Fund

We are grateful to contributors whose donations have exceeded even last month's excellent total. Thanks to the following: A. E. Avery, 60p; P. Barbour, £7.60; C. J. Bason, £1.10; F. Bennion, £10.60; G. Berg, £1.65; R. D. Birrell, 60p; A. G. Brooker, 60p; J. W. Buck, 60p; J. H. Budd, £2.60; B. J. Buckingham, 60p; E. Cecil, £1.60; H. L. Clements, 60p; J. H. Charles, £4.00; B. J. Clifton, £2.60; Mr & Mrs Corrisken, 50p; S. R. Dalton, 60p; W. Donovan, 60p; A. A. H. Douglas, £1.60; N. Dwyer, £3.40; R. J. C. Fennell, £2.60; G. Fledderman, 60p; T. Graham, £2.00; E. Greaves, £2.60; Mrs M. Groome, £2.60; W. C. Hall, 60p; Mrs N. S. Harvey, £2.00; E. J. Hughes, £2.00; V. Harvey, 60p; M. D. Jeeps, £2.60; S. E. Johnson, £25.00; F. W. Jones, £2.60; J. M. Joseph, £1.60; E. Lewis, 25p; E. Litten, 60p; Ms E. Mathieson, £2.00; R. Marke, £2.60; C. Matthews, £2.60; H. Madoc-Jones, £2.00; S. Moge, £1.00; J. W. Mooney, £2.60; M. Moore, 60p; P. S. Neilson, £1.60; D. Nickson, £1.60; M. O'Brien, 60p; M. Perkins, 60p; J. Rippitt, £5.00; D. M. Robins, 25p; E. Royle, £1.00; Mrs M Russell, £2.60; Ms K. M. Tolfree, £1.60; N. Toon, £1.60; L. & M. Van Duren, 60p; A. Vogel, £2.60; E. Wakefield, £3.63; E. West, 50p; E. Westman, £1.00; E. G. Vaughan, 60p; Dr I Williams, £2.60; D. Wood, £2.60; A. E. Woodford, 60p; L. Wright, £2.00. Total for the period 19 January to 21 February: £134.28.

Wanted for sheltered flats for the elderly: Piano and jumble/bring and buy items. Please contact Humanist Housing Association, Mrs Bryson: 01-485 9538.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

Saturday, 24 March 1979

The City Volunteer
(by the Tower, map sent with ticket)

6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

RENEE SHORT will be Guest of Honour. Renée Short has been very active in Parliament in achieving and maintaining the right of women to obtain an abortion. She has also championed all aspects of women's rights, including the importance of day care nurseries. In Parliament she has been the convener of the Parliamentary Humanist Group.

DIANE MUNDAY will propose a toast to Renée Short. Diane Munday, who is well-known to many of our members, has also been immensely energetic as a campaigner for the right of women to choose an abortion. She has appeared on television and radio to debate this subject. Her vigorous opposition to the book *Babies for Burning* played a crucial part in discrediting it in this country.

LORD RAGLAN will propose a toast to the Society. He is one of the Society's distinguished members panel and has spoken on matters of secularist concern in the House of Lords.

BARRY DUKE will reply for the Society. He is a journalist from South Africa, who is a member of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society.

BARBARA SMOKER, President of the NSS, will introduce the evening.

Price: £6.00 per person.

(Menu: Minestrone Milanese; Roast Beef, Horseradish, Roast Potatoes, Sprouts; Sorbet; Coffee. Alternative for vegetarians: Quiche Spinach)

Cheques with reservations to:
The National Secular Society

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

(founded 1866)

Membership details from

NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

BOOKS

NELSON MANDELA—THE STRUGGLE IS MY LIFE.
Published by the International Defence and Aid Fund
for Southern Africa, £1.85.

The overall effect of the Christian-based doctrine of apartheid on the black, coloured and Asian populations of South Africa is well-known to most people concerned with events in that country. The Nationalist administration makes very little effort to hide the fact that cruel repression and a total disregard for human rights are the linchpins of a system aimed at maintaining white supremacy at all costs.

But what is not known, or conveniently forgotten by those who like to think that the Afrikaners are the only villains of the piece, is that the systematic exclusion of blacks from what can only laughably be described as South Africa's "democratic system" began long before the Afrikaner took power.

Indeed, when the Nationalists toppled the Smuts administration in 1948, many of the laws the National Party needed to construct their vicious apartheid machine were already on the Statute Book—presumably with the fullest approval of the majority of English-speaking South Africans, who, until the end of World War Two, controlled the country.

Three years after South Africa's four white provinces were welded together to form the Union of South Africa under the British Crown, the 1913 Land Act was passed to deprive blacks of land and land security. A decade later the Urban Areas Act forced Africans into legalised slums called native locations, and gave the authorities sweeping powers to control every facet of the black person's life. In 1926, the Mines and Works Act barred Africans from skilled trades. And in 1936, the few blacks who had the vote in the Cape Province were disenfranchised.

Just how well-entrenched discrimination was against blacks in pre-Nationalist days is revealed in the opening pages of *The Struggle is my Life*, a tribute published by the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa to Nelson Mandela, a black lawyer who was sentenced, in 1964, to life imprisonment on Robben Island for the role he played in a campaign of sabotage against government installations. The book was published to coincide with Mandela's 60th birthday last year.

It was against a background of well-established discrimination that Mandela took up a leading position with the now-outlawed, but still highly active African National Congress. That was in 1944, in the days when the ANC was firmly committed to non-violent protest. Four years later the Afrikaner Nationalists came into power, and immediately began adding a battery of new laws to the existing ones in an all-out campaign to subjugate the blacks

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still further.

The stage was set for confrontation. Mandela, who had suffered years of harassment by the security police, and who had undergone a period of banning, warned in 1961: "The government is spoiling for a massacre . . . in my mind we in the ANC are closing a chapter on this question of non-violent policy." Six months later, sabotage marked the emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe—Spear of the Nation. Later, at his trial, Mandela explained why Umkhonto was formed, and the role he played in its formation. The time had come, he said, when the black man had only two choices, to submit or to fight. And submission was out of the question.

The Struggle is my Life, made up of Mandela's speeches and writings, highlights what is perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of political life in South Africa: that natural leaders, true statesmen of the calibre of the imprisoned Mandela and the murdered Steve Biko—men committed to the ideal of human dignity—have no place whatsoever within the existing political system.

There is one comforting thought: any system intent on excluding men of such dedication and honour must inevitably destroy itself. In South Africa's case the destruction of the Nationalist regime cannot occur too quickly.

BARRY DUKE

BEGONE GODMENI by Dr A. Koor. Jaica Publishing, Bombay.

In an age when pseudo-science, ufology and spiritualism appear on the surface to be taking the place of organised religion in the West, Dr Koor narrates a series of encounters with similar spiritual frauds in the not-so-mysterious east.

The early chapters of this interesting piece of investigative research by Dr Koor deal with irrational beliefs that he has come across including Christianity, where he makes several valid criticisms of the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin's strange concoction of evolution mixed with God. The philosophical concept of God is dealt with in conjunction with the idea of life after death using the standard materialist and scientific approach.

I didn't realise until now that astrology has a strong hold in the Indian sub-continent, or so it would seem as Dr Koor tells us of the strong links between Hinduism, Buddhism and star-gazing. Indeed, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) created a chair for astrology at one of its state universities. As he rightly points out, the 12 signs of the Zodiac drawn up several thousand years back have moved in

REVIEWS

relation to the earth scores of light years in the intervening period so the "birth sign" of anyone would be several months out. Unfortunately, that doesn't affect the many millions who everyday glance at their newspaper to see what their horoscope says.

The main part of this book deals with incidents that Dr Kovoor has personally encountered concerned with supernatural events. (How can we as part of nature comprehend that which by definition is above and beyond us?) Among the spiritual phonies that Dr Kovoor exposes are our old friends the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of Beatles fame and the more sinister Guru Maharaj Ji, who not long ago had a substantial following in Britain though I now note that his "Palace of Peace" in East Dulwich has been closed down for more than a year. It appears that India has a veritable plague of gurus, swamis, yogis and other assorted godmen.

The later chapters of this book develop into a chain of events where gullible people have called in holy men to rid themselves of evil spirits and flaming apparitions amongst other phenomena which although perhaps a little repetitive was nevertheless enlightening concerning the motives of holy men. As expected their services are only performed when their palms are crossed with silver. This reminds me of a parallel situation we have recently had in the west with "psychic surgeons" who were exposed on the BBC television programme "Tonight".

It is sad that in the rational, secular world we live in today people are still taken in by an appeal to the irrational. Observe how many people on any main road still avoid walking under ladders irrespective of whether or not anyone was standing at the top with a paint pot. In the introduction by Hariharan Poonjar to this book it is stated "... the social conditions of alienation which leads to superstitious beliefs as an escape route from the miseries of life have to be abolished." This is a statement with which I find myself in complete agreement. How this simple statement is going to be realised would need a whole book in itself to be explained. Suffice it to say that religion and superstition are an attempt to transcend the everyday, mundane existence that large numbers of people throughout the world have to live through. How much easier to leave it all in the lap of the gods than to exercise the use of one's own reason.

While there are still those who are prepared to believe in the likes of gurus, astrologers or even Uri Gellers, it is going to take an enormous amount of convincing people that these are nothing but a collection of tricksters out for a quick commercial

killing.

More than ever it is up to those who would put forward the rationalist, freethinking approach to speak out against chicanery, as has Dr Kovoor in his brief book.

KEN WRIGHT

CRITICAL THEORY OF THE FAMILY by Mark Poster.
Pluto Press. £8.50 hardback, £3.95 paperback.

This is a timely book about the family. Politicians and churchmen are constantly making pronouncements about the topic and the Queen's message last year was about the family. The approach is different—a highly ambitious book which aims "to demonstrate the weaknesses of the existing theories of the family in the fields of history, sociology and psychology and to offer at least the beginnings of a more adequate theory". The scope is even wider with chapters on family group psychotherapy and linguistics applied to psychoanalysis—the latter being so concise in dealing with complex issues as to be very difficult to understand.

The book, by an American historian, is in two parts: in the first are the chapters reviewing various and widely divergent approaches to understanding the family. Some of the criticisms deal with crucial issues, such as definition, cultural bias, lack of historical perspective. The author deals with Freud's cultural narrowness rather harshly and also with Marxist theorists' failure to recognise the unique, emotional qualities of family relationships.

The polemical tone of these chapters rather irritated me and occasionally made it difficult to believe that the author was always being fair to the work under consideration. I do think, for example, that Mr Poster has overlooked the broad anthropological basis of the work of the psychologist Erik Erikson, when criticising his work for not dealing specifically with growth and interaction in family groups.

The two final chapters present a framework for future research and inquiry into the family and offer a review of four differing family structures from Europe at different periods of history and in different social classes. The illustrations of how different child-rearing methods produce distinctive personality types within a class or culture are fascinating (but not original). They make clearer the author's objections to the Freudian claims of the universality of the Oedipus complex.

One of the major tasks set by the author is to work towards a framework comprehensive enough to be used for all future studies of family and kinship. However, he himself indicates the extreme diversity in history and between cultures not of notions about family groupings but also of community and of the relationships between the two. It does seem likely that there may never be an entirely satisfactory framework which can be applied universally to the study of the family. This seems especi-

ally likely in view of the author's (in my view, correct) emphasis on the "emotional structure" of the family.

This work is worth reading, especially for the last two chapters. It attempts to cover a very wide area and most readers may find themselves a little out of their depth in the brief coverage of some areas (as I did). This book is not a particularly fluently written book, but since great gifts of communication are needed to clarify all aspects of the development of the family Poster does tolerably well.

The author has written his "Critical Theory" partly to "enrich the capacities of radical social theory" to contribute to our understanding of the modern world. His conclusions are, however, much more cautious and academic than the early part of the book leads one to expect.

It is a short piece of work (205 pages with a preface) and although a considerable amount of thinking has clearly gone into its production, it still scarcely warrants the use of the word "theory" to describe the end product. It seems likely that Poster may return to the subject in a few years with a more substantial synthesis of evidence from the various disciplines on the subject of the family.

GERRY HORNER

THEATRE

FULL FRONTAL by Michael Hastings. Theatre Upstairs.
BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE by Dennis Potter. Open Space.

Two plays, each by established authors and with a curious history, have opened in London within the past month—events which may be more significant than the plays themselves. Michael Hastings's one-act monologue was turned down by no fewer than 104 managements before seeing the light of day. Dennis Potter's play was commissioned by the BBC, shot and then never screened—presumably the intervention of some fiendish gremlins deep within the recesses of Broadcasting House.

I mention the fact that they are established authors to allay suspicions that this wholesale rejection of their work has anything to do with its questionable quality. The plays, while perhaps not the best each man has produced, are indubitably worthy of presentation. They rank as near-misses because of the "controversial" subject matter, and one wonders how long it will take for the powers that be to wake up and realise that theatre-goers no longer need to be lulled into complacency in order to be "entertained".

Mr Hastings's current hit *Gloo Joo*, earned for itself the dubious accolade of a British *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by one critic. *Full Frontal* could be regarded as its stable mate. Both are attempts by a white writer to present convincing portrayals of black life

in this country. *Full Frontal* goes a stage further by daring to suggest racial tensions between black communities—a bleak comment on the deterioration of our race relations policy. The conceit, however, is brilliant and staggering.

A Nigerian enters the National Front headquarters seeking membership. He is laughed at, insulted and eventually turfed out. He is in dead earnest, however, and in the course of his interview he delivers a stinging tirade against the "rum and coke" West Indians who have overrun the country and contributed so much to his present degradation. "Black is beautiful", he says, is just "another rip-off Jew scheme". "Hang 'em high" is his all-purpose solution to the rampant rise in the national crime rate. Unless the three million blacks are extradited, the whole population will be the colour of "Nes-black-café". Bigotry this vitriolic can be found at Hyde Park Corner on any Sunday or on the nearest lavatory wall. Our sensibilities are shocked not by the words, but by the fact that the man who expounds such notions has taken the need for acceptance to the point of embracing our national hatreds.

The play is founded on this perversity, and is as such powerful in concept. In execution, it may be less successful, partly due, perhaps, to the limited size of the theatre, and partly, to the awkwardness of the technique. Winston Ntshona's performance, a *tour de force*, fixes the audience and sustains our attention throughout. Yet his method of extending his gaze beyond the off-stage official to select members of the audience is disconcerting. He also needs to pace his play more, though perhaps the fault lies in an over-exuberance of writing. It is pitched too high too soon in the action, with the result that it tends toward the end to hysteria.

Dennis Potter also penetrates close to the bone with a study of superstition in present day suburbia. A couple whose daughter was struck down by a car and left helplessly crippled, watch on in agony as she writhes about on the bed in the front room, uttering no more than occasional babble. The father, despairing of ever seeing her whole again, flirts with the idea of joining the National Front. The mother maintains her faith in prayer and the power of the almighty to deliver her from her torment. They seem to have reached the end of their tether when one day a young man claiming to love Pattie enters their home and offers to lift the burden of care from their shoulders. His mission, far from divine, is satanic, however, and when the couple's backs are turned, he proceeds to have his way with their daughter and contemplates nicking the jewellery. Devilish business indeed.

So one might think, and so the BBC might well find subversive, if the theme were against belief in spiritual forces. Mr Potter, unfortunately, does not let the matter rest there, and his purpose is to reassure after all. For the devil's advocate is really

a saint in disguise, and his "divine intervention" has the effect of restoring the poor girl to speech. The true cause of her accident, she discloses, was the shock of discovering her father and best friend locked in sexual intercourse: the sins of the father being visited on the innocent child.

The acting, by George Cole as the father, Marjorie Masson as the mother and Richard O'Callaghan, was, on the whole, steady. Mr. O'Callaghan exuded so much "treacle" that only the besotted or worse would be taken in, but Ms Masson succeeded in making her belief in him credible. This play's suppression was yet another example of the BBC shooting from the hip and hitting themselves in the process.

JAMES MACDONALD

CINEMA

BLUE COLLAR (various London cinemas)

Blue Collar is set in a car assembly plant in Detroit. Harvey Keitel plays Gerry, a worker of Polish stock, who forms a friendship with two blacks in the plant, Zeke (Richard Pryor) and Smokey (Yaphet Kotto). It's a friendship of three outsiders, based on a feeling of disenchantment and exploitation. The management cares only about production figures; and the Union, which once worked to get blacks onto the assembly line, now fights only for its own survival. The three men moonlight, but still run into debt, they try to cheat on the taxman and on their wives, fantasise desultorily about women and wealth — and then decide to burgle their Union's safe.

It's a zany, but moderately successful, attempt. Part of their booty is a ledger containing a record of illicit loans made with Union funds. The three decide to blackmail the Union, but discover it *has* got teeth after all. Smokey finds himself trapped in a paintshop, asphyxiated by blue fumes, Zeke is bought off by an offer of a well-paid Union post, and Gerry is hounded into assisting the despised FBI. Their friendship is at an end: ". . . they pit the lifers against the new boys, the young against the old, the black against the white. Everything they do is to keep us in our place."

Taxi Driver writer Paul Schrader, making his directorial debut with this remarkable new film (written in conjunction with his brother) has said he wrote in an intricate plot to cover a multitude of sins in characterisation. No need. He is excellently served by his three main actors, as by the supporting cast. Yaphet Kotto is pragmatic and buoyant; Richard Pryor plays that screen rarity, a black with middle-class aspirations, a character whose early williness turns into calculation when the plot misfires. Harvey Keitel, an outstanding actor with the look of a caged lion, fuses perfectly the concern of a harassed family man with the jaded nonchalance of a "buddy" snorting coke behind his wife's back.

I find many recent American films meretricious and cheap, mass-produced to a commercially safe formula. Close Encounters with the Third Rate. Thanks to a strict Calvinist upbringing, Paul Schrader did not see a single film until he was eighteen, which may account for the respect he shows to the medium and to his audience. This is an original and adult work. I fully sympathise with his protagonists' anger and honesty, There's a glorious moment of release when a worker drives a fork-lift truck at an ever-defective drinks machine, completely demolishing it. Jack Nitzsche's superb rock score pounds unrelentingly and the camera inevitably shows us the brutalised landscape, and tawdry bars and interiors. The film exposes the inhumanity of urban life without ever being part of it. If the men's leisure is soulless and their horizons limited, work itself is even worse—exhausting, noisy and dirty, with violence always incipient—a man's work, that emasculates him.

This film, rich in desperate humour, must be seen. A film which works on many levels, but has all the tightness of a clenched fist.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

NUCLEAR POWER

I am afraid that Albert Beale makes two quite unwarranted assumptions about humanism. Firstly that humanists are pacifists and secondly that they are against nuclear power stations. I like to think that humanists are anti-militarist (and that may or may not be true) but they are certainly not pacifist as a species. There will, of course, be individual humanists who are pacifists. It is no use writing to "The Freethinker" or any other humanist journal as though it was "Peace News"—it is not the case!

About the nuclear power issue . . . Some years ago I found myself responsible for an RPA Week-End School on humanism and economics and finding that two of our number worked in nuclear power I put on a special discussion of that subject. The two professionals put up an excellent case for nuclear power and it was plain that there was no such thing as agreed humanist rejection of it. I put myself in the "'don't know" bracket. At the same time I discussed the matter with Sir Hermann Bondi (who is, of course, a committed humanist of long standing and not a VIP brought in from the cold!) and at that time he himself had his doubts. He has presumably since resolved them and is now the Chief Scientist at the Ministry of Energy. It so happens that I have been recently corresponding with him on this subject and he has now agreed to speak to a South Place Sunday Meeting at 11.0 am on April 29th. His subject will be simply "Energy". May I invite all interested to be there? This could be an important moment in the clarification of humanist thinking on one of the most contentious of all subjects.

There is one new critical development on the subject of nuclear power on which I have asked Sir Hermann Bondi to comment. It could change the whole picture. Friends have long assured me that if the fusion problem could be solved we should be in the clear. Apparently it has been solved but the news is slow in getting through to people on this side of the Atlantic. Dr R. C. Arnold of Argonne National Labor-

atory and his colleague Dr Martin have invented an ion beam technique that solved the otherwise impossible problems raised in combining the light nuclei of deuterium and tritium. A report of their work has appeared in "Nature" and in "The Times" 7th November 1978. The Americans aim at getting an ion beam driven fusion reactor in the early 1980s. So we need to get up-to-date. It looks as though fission, fast-breeders and the rest are out and a major rethink is on. But I am not a scientist and look forward to April 29th!

PETER CADOGAN

BASIC ENGLISH

I was very surprised to find Barbara Smoker, in her review of "C. K. Ogden: A Collective Memoir", trying to resurrect the corpse of Basic English, which proposed to reduce English to 850 words.

She blames Churchill for its death, but I think it is fairly obvious why it died. It is extremely difficult for a writer whose native language is English to keep down to C. K. Ogden's 850 words. Ogden himself evaded the problem by offering Technical Vocabularies in addition, which of course ran into thousands of words. There were only eighteen verbs and these were such words as "get", "give", "take". Unfortunately for Ogden and foreigners these are extremely idiomatic in their use so that, without previous instruction, it is impossible to anticipate what "get up", "get round", "get by", etc, will mean. The socialists of the 1930s soon discovered that the word "class" was not included among the 850 and so it was impossible to translate the Communist Manifesto so that it made any sense.

Dr Mario Pei, Professor of Romance Philology at Columbia University, wrote: "The big obstacle that appears in the case of natural languages is the opposition of speakers of other tongues. It is all very well to say that lots of non-English speakers study, learn and speak English and that almost as many non-French speakers study French. There is a vast difference between studying a foreign language so as to be able to use it, and accepting it as an international medium of communication in preference to your own. Since a national language is the vehicle and mouth-piece of a national culture the citizens of each nation hesitate to place themselves at a cultural disadvantage vis-a-vis another group. This is perhaps the main reason why so many citizens of small nations prefer neutral Esperanto."

I may add that Esperanto does not suffer from the chaotic spelling, the 30 dialects and absurd idioms of English. Esperanto had 50 years' start of Basic and so has accumulated a large original literature and translations of Voltaire and Dante. I should be amused to hear how "humanist", "agnostic", "freethinker" are translated into Basic.

Many famous English poems have been translated into Esperanto, but translating them into Basic is a kind of vandalism. My Basic is rather rusty but I presume Keat's sonnet would become:

Much have I gone round in the King's lands of gold
And many good countries and King's lands seen;
Round many islands of the west have I been
Which makers of verse keep in trust for the Greek
sun-god.

SAMUEL BEER

BUDDHISM AND BLASPHEMY

After such a favourable notice of my booklet "Buddhism and Blasphemy" from William McIlroy in your January issue it seems ungrateful to cavil, but I would like to correct a misunderstanding. Mr McIlroy is quite right when he refers to me as taking a swipe at ex-Christian Buddhists who object to any

criticism of Christianity, but partly wrong when he goes on to say "It is not only among The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order that such muddleheadedness prevails". I am sure he will be glad to know that muddleheadedness of this sort does not prevail among the FWBO, and that it was not to members of the FWBO that I was referring. When I decided, in 1967, that an entirely new Buddhist movement was needed in this country, and started the FWBO, one of my main reasons for taking this step was that I wanted to get away from the kind of muddleheadedness to which Mr McIlroy refers and which, unfortunately, still exists here and there outside the FWBO. A Cornish Buddhist, I am told, was so upset by "Buddhism and Blasphemy" that he burned it!

VEN. MAHA STHAVIRA SANGHARAKSHITA
President, The Friends of the
Western Buddhist Order

ISRAEL AND PEACE

In reply to Ken Wright (February) I must apologise for not having qualified my rhetorical question, "Can one blame them?", in my article on the Jews. What I meant was that here we have a nation born out of desperation resorting to desperate measures to ensure her survival. Israel learned from her enemies the efficacy of naked force and decided to go one better. She made up her mind to "do unto others" but to do it first.

Of course, any nation which uses the frightful weapon of napalm as Israel did against Egypt is to be condemned. For a nation that claims to be spiritual and the repository of spiritual values, Israel is in danger of losing the world's respect simply because of her almost total reliance on military power.

Incidentally, I was amazed when Israel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and even more amazed when their leader went to Stockholm and collected it. Will they live up to this honour? One is harassed with doubts.

GEORGE JAEGER

GAY RITES

There is much confusion, muddled thinking and prejudice in society concerning homosexual relationships. Many people think they are wrong and I think this view is understandable because the sexual mores of society have been formed by Christian teaching which forbids sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage.

I think gay relationships could gain acceptability and respectability if same sex couples who live together were to go through with some kind of ceremony where they promise to be faithful and care for one another. Such a ceremony might help to dispel some of the superstition and fear which surrounds homosexuality. Would some talented writer in the humanist movement like to compose such a ceremony?

JOHN WATSON

(Jottings)

by Church and Chapel because of their political activities. However, the existence of this enlightened Christian minority does not justify the claim that Christianity inspired the Labour movement. On the contrary, it developed in the teeth of fierce opposition by the churches.

Historical fact does not deter Christian propagandists, and it will be no surprise if some future Archbishop of Canterbury proclaims Jesus Christ to be the greatest picket of all time.

PUBLICATIONS

(A full list is available on request with s.a.e.)

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. £1.25 (15p).
 The Humanist Outlook, Ed: A. J. Ayer. 95p (26p).
 Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham. £1 (29p).
 The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy. 10p (7p).
 Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen. 15p (7p).
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WORLDWIDE

SOUTH AFRICA

The Warmbaths Moral Action Committee warned a nearby nudist colony that action would be taken against the naturists unless rain fell. There were rumours of the use of bulldozers against the colony.

The Afrikaner Calvinists who comprised the Moral Action Committee, believed that God had ordered a drought to punish the local people for allowing nudism. But rain prevented God's wrath. A committee member commented: "If you read the Bible you will know why such activities cause hardship like drought".

CANADA

The Prime Minister of Canada for 21 years, Mr MacKenzie King, often received advice from his dead mother at seances while he was Prime Minister. Mr King, who retired in 1948, also relied on contacts from prominent dead people, including President F. D. Roosevelt of the USA, through "automatic handwriting" by spiritualists in trances.

These crucial influences in the life of a leader are revealed in Mr King's diary, recently released from the archives under a Government 3-year rule. He also gained insight from visions in his shaving lather. Apart from frequent visions of dogs, of which he was obsessively fond, he saw matters of world import in the lather. In January 1948 he saw an image of an eagle, a polar bear, and a dog in the lather that "might have been prophetic of what was happening in the struggle between Russia and the United States".

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. George Vale: Humanism for the New Generation. Sunday, 1 April, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Film and discussion: Accident Prevention. Tuesday, 20 March, 8.00 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrel Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Speaker from Anti-Apartheid Movement: The Situation in South Africa. Tuesday, 13 March, 8 pm. Swarthmore Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

Leicester Secular Society. Mr A. Bradney: The Work of the NCCL, Sunday, 11 March. Mr Roger Gallie: Scarcity, 18 March. Mr Peter Jones: Cuba, Africa and the Third World, 25 March. Ms Barbara Smoker: Relics are they things of the Past, 1 April. All meetings Sunday at 6.30 pm, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester.

Lewisham Humanist Group. David Porter: Men's Liberation. Thursday, 29 March, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford.

London Young Humanists. Discussion: Prices and Incomes. Sunday, 18 March. Rose Sneddon of Age Concern, Sunday, 1 April. Both 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Mrs Stringer: The Work of a Probation Officer. Wednesday, 21 March, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Enquiries to 051-608 3835 or 051-342 2562.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. AGM. Wednesday, 14 March, 8.30 pm. 46 Windermere Road, N10.

Sutton Humanist Group. Peter Ward: The Work of the Humanist Housing Association. Wednesday, 14 March, 8 pm. Friends' House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 11 March, Jean Liedloff: The Continuum Concept. 18 March, C. Gordon Tether: China, Russia and the West. 25 March, Richard Clements, OBE: Humanism in the Italian Setting. 1 April, Robert Waller: What Do We Mean By Love? Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. 13 March, John St John: Journey Through Inner Space. 20 March, Tew Bunnag: Meditation. 27 March, Barbara McGavin: Primal Integration.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Dr John Durrant: Evolution and the Idea of Progress. Friday, 30 March, 7.30 pm. The Royal Institution (Swansea Museum).

Humanist Holidays. Easter 1979. April 12 or 13 to 17 or later. Small private hotel fairly near the front at Boscombe, Bournemouth. £7 per day, breakfast and dinner. 11-25 August 1979. Similar accommodation at Lowestoft, Suffolk. About £64 per week. Camping and caravan possibilities. Details Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

THE FREETHINKER

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