

The Freethinker

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IGNORANCE, SQUALOR AND RELIGION OBSTRUCT POPULATION CONTROL

"Unless we deal with population growth there will be much greater crowding in our cities; there will be much greater pressure, much greater crime, riots and mugging", Lord Gisborough told the House of Lords during a recent debate on world population. He was one of several members who expressed grave concern about the problem of over-population. Lord Gisborough said that in Britain most families are controlled. But he added that "just like in the Third World where the large families occur in the less educated and poorer countries, so in the United Kingdom the increase comes from the poorer socio-economic groups.

"The less educated the parents in this country, in many cases the more children they have. Those who have sat as magistrates will well know that many of the young lads and children who come before the courts, many are from families of ten. . .

"We have all read about the problems in our crowded schools. Many of these children probably grow up with little education and they in turn have large families".

Lord Vernon, who is an executive member of Population Control, said "the exceptionally fast rate of population growth in the world since 1945, and which is continuing at an ever faster rate, diminishes the quality of life for all of us on this planet. . .

"One is told that human ingenuity will find a way of solving these problems; that it is merely a question of improving the standard of living in these countries and their birthrate will fall. I wonder".

Lord Vernon suggested that "no development aid of any kind should go to countries unless they have vigorous and effective family planning programmes. We should increase the present one per cent of overseas aid devoted to family planning to two per cent. Even the doubling of our aid in the family planning field would still not be a very generous proportion".

Lord Houghton of Sowerby said there were many obstacles in the way when it came to formulating sensible population policies. "I mention a few", he said. "Ignorance, squalor, lack of communications and technical services. But I do not think we should overlook another, which is religion.

"Religious beliefs, doctrine and teaching are never far away when discussing birth control. And birth control is what we have in mind when talking about population control. It is bound to be.

"In this context we cannot ignore the moral conflict which surrounds family planning and advocates of population control in every Roman Catholic community in the world. Wherever artificial contraception is condemned as sinful there are obvious difficulties in the way of family limitation and population control.

Ten Million Too Many

"The extent and consequences of this factor are rarely open to investigation. Take, for example, the Catholic or the Vatican contention that economic, social and political injustices are the cause of poverty and starvation in today's world. That is, unfortunately, valid enough, at least up to a point. But it is not enough to call for a reorientation of the world order.

"The horrifying fact is that some ten million human beings enter this world every year without the slightest possibility of a good life or of achieving the human dignity or the human rights which Pope John Paul II so rightly proclaims.

"His strong and repeated condemnation of contraceptives means that more mothers are more likely to have more children that they do not want, and that they will not be able to look after properly.

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

MPs REJECT BID TO RESTORE DEATH PENALTY

It was widely expected that an attempt to restore capital punishment would be defeated on a free vote in the House of Commons last month. But it came as a surprise that the rejection was so convincing. There has been a continuing campaign to bring back hanging with, among others, the Police Federation exerting considerable pressure in favour. But MPs of all parties resisted a move that would have degraded Britain.

During the report stage of the Criminal Justice Bill, Vivian Bendall, a Conservative back bencher, moved the clause: "A person convicted of murder shall be liable to capital punishment". His speech was described by *The Times* newspaper as "a mishmash of statistics and personal views unbacked by any strong evidence".

Mr Bendall was rather ambiguous when Christopher Price (Labour) reminded him that there had been miscarriages of justice in the past. Did Mr Bendall and his supporters want to see innocent people hanged? "I have not referred to hanging, but to the death penalty", Mr Bendall replied. But Price's intervention must have reminded MPs of Derek Bentley and Christopher Evans.

If the majority of 165 was higher than expected, there was one predictable pattern in the voting. Prominent among the pro-hangers were resolute defenders of "the sanctity of life" and Christian values. They included Sir John Biggs-Davidson, Andrew Bowden, Dr Rhodes Boyson, Sir Bernard Braine, Mrs Jill Knight, the Rev Martin Smyth, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the Rev Ian Paisley and Sir Patrick Wall.

Those who voted against the clause included the present Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins (former Labour Home Secretary) and Edward Heath (former Conservative Prime Minister). Four Labour members and one Liberal voted in favour of capital punishment. All the Social Democrats voted against.

THE FREETHINKER, 1980

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S AND NOTES

BULLETS AND BIBLES

The Rev Peter Southwell-Sander, vicar of St Mary the Virgin, the London church where Nelson worshipped, cancelled a programme of words and music he was scheduled to give during Merton Festival of Arts. The vicar of "Nelson's church", as St Mary's is known, said: "In view of the Falklands crisis I felt that it would be inappropriate to give something which could be seen as a symbol of Britain's naval prowess, although of the past".

The programme, in celebration of British admirals, "might have been regarded as celebration of fairly aggressive tendencies", said Mr Southwell-Sander. Of course it could also have been interpreted as a contradiction of Mrs Thatcher's constant assurances that aggression does not pay. In fact aggression paid very high dividends to Empire builders.

Great fortunes were made from plundering and exploiting other lands. The Church, always with an eye to the main chance, blessed the endeavours of the colonisers. The clergy often acted as unofficial recruiting officers, combining prayers for victory with appeals for cannon fodder. Governments were always appreciative of such pious patriotism. The missionary was seldom far behind the military.

A THING OF SHREDS AND PATCHES

Slowly but surely doubts concerning extravagant claims about the Turin shroud are filtering into the world Press. The reservations are generally expressed in respectful terms. But some sceptics, like Philip Adams of Melbourne's *The Age*, are prepared to clobber what he recently described as "that notorious piece of schmutter".

Mr Adams' demolition work is carried out in an article that was prompted by a series of papers issued by the US-based Committee for the Investigation of the Claims of the Paranormal. The earliest reference to "this most tantalising of textiles" is in a letter written by Bishop Pierre d'Arcis to Pope Clement VII. The bishop complained: "Some time since in this diocese of Troyes the dean of a certain collegiate church, to wit, that of Liry, falsely and deceitfully, being consumed with the passion of avarice, and not from any motive of devotion but only of gain, procured for his church a certain cloth cunningly painted. . ." An inquiry took place which "discovered the fraud and how the said cloth was cunningly painted . . . that it was the work of

human skill and not miraculously wrought or bestowed".

After due consideration Clement VII decided the cloth could be exhibited but ordered that it should be advertised only as a representation. Needless to say, the papal instruction was forgotten after a few years.

Six centuries later devotees of the Turin shroud were making wild claims on behalf of the relic. These have been published by journalists and writers and treated as holy writ.

Marvin Mueller, a research physicist who has been following the controversy for 20 years, claims that the age of the cloth could be established by radio-carbon dating. A piece of cloth the size of a fingernail is all that is required for the examination.

The Church will not agree. Its reluctance is not based on fear of damage to the shroud but on destruction of claims that it is the cloth in which Jesus was wrapped. For as Adams points out, the Turin shroud "belongs to a time when fraudulent relics abounded, when every second church had a piece of the One True Cross or a 100 per cent authentic crown of thorns".

The Vatican has never officially endorsed the Turin shroud. But the effect of Church silence has been to authenticate it by default. A 14th-century fraud still has its usefulness.

There was a higher attendance than usual at the annual conference of the Scottish Humanist Council which took place in the new conference suite of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Professor Bob Perks spoke about the work of the humanist movement in Northern Ireland. The situation there is particularly depressing because little can be done to move people from their entrenched positions.

WRITTEN WORDS

Three new publications which have appeared will be of interest to *Freethinker* readers. The first two are private ventures and the other is published by Action for Sexual Knowledge (ASK).

Two issues of *The Humanist Theme* have been produced but it is too soon to evaluate its significance. It could be a considerable asset at a time when there are few outlets for humanists ideas and opinions. But some of the items in both issues are groan-producing. Editor Leslie Scrase does not raise hopes when he writes: "It is not my intention to do battle with religion. Most of the evils of religion do not seem to me to be specifically religious. Where they are, it is often better to ignore them than to oppose them". *The Humanist Theme* is free, but donations are welcome and so are articles. Editor: Leslie Scrase, 38 Weston Avenue, East Molesey, Surrey.

Ego is duplicated and consists of eight pages. The first issue is devoted entirely to what its Editor believes is the first publication of Lawrence Stepelevitvh's English translation of Max Stirner's *Art and Religion*. Price 15p a copy plus postage, four issues £1 (USA three dollars). Editor: S. E. Parker, Basement Flat, 91 Talbot Road, London W2.

The best produced of the lot is *ASK Bulletin*. Although it is a serious journal aimed at professional workers, it is of considerable interest to the general reader. It consists of 12 pages of articles and reviews written by Antony Grey and W. F. R. Stewart. *ASK* and its *Bulletin* exist "for the dissemination of accurate sexual information and knowledge, for the promotion of rational and responsible attitudes towards sexuality and for encouragement of enquiry and discussion aimed at increasing the data available for these purposes". Price 50p, including postage, from 90 Uplands Road, London N8.

When Dr W. C. Wake gave the address at a service in Shrewsbury Unitarian Church to commemorate the centenary of Charles Darwin's death, he recalled an incident in the town many years ago. At the time when a statue of the great naturalist was erected, a violent storm brought down the steeple of St Mary's Church. The Vicar declared this was God's judgement on a heretic. But the "Shrewsbury Chronicle" commented: "The fall of the steeple would have been more impressive if it had happened on a windless night".

Freethinker Fund

There has been a marked decline in donations to the Fund. We appeal to groups and to individual readers to share the responsibility for keeping Britain's only monthly freethought journal on a sound financial footing.

Our thanks are expressed to the latest list of contributors.

Anonymous, £25; £5; £2; B. Able, £2; C. Brunel, £2; F. P. Cameron, £1; I. Campbell, £15; D. L. Cook, \$2; T. Cornish, £2; S. R. Dalton, £1; A. Delmayne, £1; R. Edmunds, £2; A. Foster, £1; D. Fyfe, £1; S. Gale, £5; D. J. George, £5; G. J. D. Groom, £2; O. Grubiak, £7; J. Hemming, £3; R. Hopkins, £1; E. Litten, £2; C. Lovett, £2; E. J. Little, £5; C. Marcus, £2; W. G. Matters, £5; H. M. Merrill, £1; C. Mills, £2; M. Morley, £7; G. Orchard, \$20; P. Ponting-Barber, £2; P. J. Riley, £1; J. E. Rupp, £12; N. Sinnott, £3; L. Stapleton, £2; G. Swan, £1; J. C. Tugwell, £2; M. Villiers-Stewart, £3; A. E. Woodford, £2; A. Woods, £2.

Total for the period 6 April 1982 until 6 May 1982: £142 and \$22.

Religious Discrimination

Anyone suspecting that there might exist in Britain one law for Christians and another for everyone else would certainly have had their suspicions confirmed by a recent pronouncement by the Prime Minister. Mrs Thatcher, when she responded to a call to overturn a decision made by the Commission for Racial Equality.

What happened was this: the medical newspaper, *Pulse*, found itself in the centre of a storm after it had refused to accept an advertisement submitted by a Coventry GP, Dr Robert Trent. The advertisement read: "Third partner required. Partners share Christian beliefs". *Pulse* sought advice from the Commission for Racial Equality, which concluded that the advertisement could be seen to deter, for example, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists, and indicated an intention to discriminate against them.

Senior legal officer at the CRE, Frances Deutsch, said the advice was given on the basis of Section 29 of the Race Relations Act of 1976, though there had not been a court ruling on the subject. Not surprisingly, the decision by *Pulse* not to accept the advertisement produced a wave of indignation from assorted Christians who got to hear of the ban. Among them was John Stokes, Conservative MP for Halesowen and Stourbridge, who, judging from the contents of some of his more bizarre speeches in the House of Commons, is not a keen supporter at all of the Commission. He requested Mrs Thatcher "to put a stop to this sort of nonsense", and pointed out that there was a traditionally close relationship between Christianity and medicine. Mrs Thatcher replied: "I very much share the sentiment you express about this particular advertisement", and added: "*Discrimination on the grounds of religious belief is not unlawful in Britain*".

That was enough for *Pulse*, which, on hearing the Prime Ministerial announcement, declared: "We have changed our minds and are going to carry any advertisements by doctors who specify they want Christian partners".

BARRY DUKE

Jim Herrick, former editor of *The Freethinker*, recently gave a talk to the Rationalist Society of Latymer School in Edmonton. A rationalist society in a school? Yes, indeed. This excellent society is voluntary and run during the lunch break. Meetings have covered topics such as "Morality Without Religion", "What is the Point of Prayer?", "The Jesus Legend", nuclear war, censorship and the Third World. Here is a healthy antidote to morning assembly and RE lessons. It would be splendid if all schools had a rationalist society.

Ritual Slaughter in Britain

FRANCES HIX

Eating habits in Britain have changed considerably over the last two decades, with greatly increased consumption of vegetarian and health foods. Nevertheless thousands of animals end their lives in the slaughter-house every year, many of them being subjected to ritual killing carried out by representatives of religious communities. Frances Hix is a Liberal councillor who has been campaigning against ritual slaughter. Her article is not comfortable reading

I am now in my late thirties and looking back can identify two people who had a deep and lasting effect on the formation of my moral code. Both people have probably almost forgotten that they ever met me, and this in itself should make us think hard about the views we express to others. The first was a folk singer called Redd Sullivan—one of my teenage boyfriends—a man with a strong sense of reality and a total lack of pretension whose views at the time I rejected completely. The second was a politician, now Sir Trevor Jones, leader of Liverpool City Council, who awakened in me what has been a long and occasionally tedious love affair with the Liberal Party. He once said to me: "Good intentions and ideals do nothing but give one a warm self-congratulatory feeling unless you had the ability to put them into action. To make change you must take power".

In my early twenties I felt my mission was to right every wrong in the world; since then I have set my sights a little lower. My position as a local councillor gives me a measure of power in as much as I have the opportunity to influence other councillors who collectively can vote for change. Of course the sphere of influence is limited, but anything one can do to reduce the total sum of misery, either animal or human, is worth doing.

I hope this preamble will give you some idea how I now find myself arguing with 2000 years of tradition and arousing the hostility of the not inconsiderable Jewish and Muslim population by trying to end the slaughter of animals for food without pre-stunning. The law states that "animals shall be slaughtered without infliction of unnecessary suffering". The methods of killing are laid down, but two exceptions are made. First by the Jewish method; for the food of Jews and carried out by a Jew. Secondly, by the Muslim method; for the food of Muslims and carried out by a Muslim.

The rules for slaughter of animals for Jewish consumption were codified about 500 AD. They insist that the animals must be fully conscious when slaughter takes place and they must struggle during or after the act of slaughter. As far as I can dis-

cover, these rules have not changed. The Shechita board does not even nod in the direction of science or acknowledge that refrigeration has virtually eliminated the problem of meat putrefying; or that modern methods of meat inspection ensure that animals are fit to eat.

I am pleased to say that many leading Muslims now accept that as their Prophet declared "God has prescribed kindness in everything", pre-stunning before slaughter is permitted. Nevertheless far too many Muslims still insist that the Halal rituals are performed while the animal is still fully conscious.

In Britain, the use of the rotary casting pen for ritual slaughter of adult cattle is obligatory under Rule 17 of the Slaughter of Animals Act. This horrendous Iron Maiden of the slaughter-house is a solid drum which rotates through 180 degrees so the animal is upside down. Its head is then held still, usually with the aid of a slaughterman's boot, and the animal's throat cut with a sharp knife. (The Jewish argument in defence of ritual slaughter is the sharpness of the knife.) The animal, often still kicking, is then pulled out of the drum and hoisted up to continue bleeding.

If this rather bland account of the grisly act revolts you, pause to reflect that over half of the carcase is sold to non-kosher butchers; your steak or hamburger could well be the flesh of an animal that was killed in this callous and degrading manner. All abattoirs are a nightmare; those of you who eat meat, and all of us who keep quiet, must bear part of the responsibility.

Compassion, not Prejudice

Since I become associated with the campaign against ritual slaughter, I have been surprised and saddened by the number of people who see my concern as being directed against the Jewish and Muslim communities. Some of the letters I have received have shown more concern about the presence of minority groups in our country than for the issue of cruelty to animals.

I think of people as people. I couldn't care less of what race or religion they are. The argument has nothing to do with religious dogma or racial discrimination. It has everything to do with putting right an anomaly in the law which acknowledges that slaughter without stunning is cruel and "causes unnecessary suffering"—except when the animals are being killed for consumption by Jews or Muslims.

If a slaughterman cut a bullock's throat and left it on the ground to bleed to death, he would, quite

(continued on page 87)

The Man in the Red Shirt

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

The centenary of Giuseppe Garibaldi's death recalls the remarkable career of Italy's fiery and anti-clerical revolutionary. A forthright atheist who poured scorn on Christianity and the Church, Garibaldi led the struggle to free his country from domination by the Pope and feudal monarchs. He was immensely popular with English freethinkers.

Garibaldi is at the gates, with the Devil in a Bersaglieri hat!—Papal official, "In nome del Papa Re" (Italian film).

A hundred years ago, on 2 June 1882, Giuseppe Garibaldi died at his modest home on the island of Caprera, off Sardinia. His wish to be cremated, in the manner of the poet Shelley, was denied by the Italian Government for fear of any further altercations with the Catholic Church; instead the "Lion of Caprera" was buried on the island whose meagre soil he had cultivated and made to flourish. A permanent guard was placed over the grave not—so the joke went—to prevent desecration, but to ensure that the old man did not get out and lead yet another march on Rome! (Administration and social conditions in the new Italy, which the "Hero of Two Worlds" had won at the point of a sword, left much to be desired.)

Garibaldi was a legendary figure of the nineteenth century—a warrior who seemed to ride out of the pages of Homer into a world of field guns and telegraphs. He certainly looked the romantic hero, with his beard and long fair hair, his red shirt and grey South American poncho. His voice, imagination and daring inspired millions, and the Garibaldi legend lost nothing by lavish, on-the-spot embellishment by journalist and writer Alexandre Dumas (the elder).

Giuseppe Maria (technically, Joseph Marie) Garibaldi was born in Nice on 4 July 1807. As a young man he joined Giuseppe Mazzini's movement, Giovine Italia (Young Italy), dedicated to the creation of a united Italian republic from the jigsaw of absolute monarchies on the peninsula. The organisation used him to infiltrate the Piedmontese navy; but when one of Mazzini's many uprisings misfired, Garibaldi found it expedient to flee to South America where he made a name for himself. He became what the *Daily Telegraph* "Way of the World" column would describe as a "freelance guerilla leader", organising armies or navies of "republics of doubtful stability and even more dubious virtue". The famous red shirt was in fact adopted as an emergency uniform for Italian volunteers defending Montevideo from an Argentinian

dictator.

In 1848 Garibaldi and many of his legionaries returned to Europe since they saw great prospects for Italian freedom in the Year of Revolutions. They were not starved of action! The following year saw Garibaldi and Mazzini defending the Roman Republic from a French expeditionary force sent by the future Emperor Napoléon III to restore Pope Pius IX. The brave, bloody but vain defence of Rome, and the tragic attempt to retreat from the Eternal City to relieve Venice (besieged by the Austrians), made and cemented the Garibaldian legend: "Italy had tasted her own blood, and knew that she still lived."

In 1849 Garibaldi promised his redshirts "neither pay nor provisions. I offer you hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country more than he fears the stranger, follow me!" The words were borrowed in 1940, without acknowledgment, by Winston Churchill when free Europe was fighting with its back to the wall.

Garibaldi and Britain

To British radicals and freethinkers Garibaldi became the man of the hour. When, in 1860, he invaded Sicily with a thousand redshirts, against odds of twenty-five to one, the secularists subscribed generously to the Garibaldi Rifle Fund. The compliment was repaid in 1877 when Garibaldi sent a letter and donation to Charles Bradlaugh's and Annie Besant's defence fund (the *Fruits of Philosophy* trial). By a combination of luck and daring Garibaldi conquered Sicily and then proceeded to roll through southern Italy, as a consequence of which the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily was incorporated into the constitutional monarchy of Italy. Garibaldi was offered the title of prince; instead he accepted a small sailing vessel and a few bags of seed corn.

In conservative Catholic and absolute monarchist circles, of course, Garibaldi was viewed as a monster of iniquity, ushering in red revolution and worse. The Papal press put it about that, on the retreat from Rome in 1849, he had murdered his pregnant, grievously ill wife, Anita, to further his own escape from Austrian justice. But the black propaganda usually misfired. It was claimed that Garibaldi had sold his soul to the Devil in return for being immune to bullets, which he would shake out of his poncho at the end of the day. So when Garibaldi rode into view in southern Italy the regular Neapolitan troops sometimes just dropped their muskets and ran!

By 1861 much of Italy had been unified, but an enclave around Rome remained in Papal hands.

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guarded by French regular forces. On two occasions Garibaldi sneaked away from Caprera, rallied his redshirts, and (against the wishes of the Italian Government) tried to take what he saw as the rightful capital of Italy. At Mentana the Garibaldini routed the Papal gendarmes, only to be themselves decimated by French regulars armed with new rifles. The rheumatic Garibaldi was observed on the field, doggedly reloading a cannon.

With the downfall of Napoléon III at Sedan in 1870, the Italian government finally obtained Rome. But they kept Garibaldi safely on Caprera and used one of his former lieutenants—now a general in the Royal Italian army—to take the city. Excommunications followed thick and fast! With Napoléon gone, Garibaldi showed his magnanimity by volunteering to fight for the new French Republic; and not a few teeth were set on edge when Garibaldi's Army of the Vosges was the only one to capture a Prussian colour.

Garibaldi hoped that unification and free institutions would bring social justice to Italy, particularly to Sicily and the south. He lived to be disappointed, hence his irritation with politicians and bureaucrats. For this reason both Fascists and Communists have claimed Garibaldi for their own. But he hated "doctrinaires" and was probably something of an anarchist at heart. He accepted wartime dictatorial powers, but "Woe unto them who instead of Cincinnatus choose a Caesar!"

He was indeed an enigma. He would harangue international peace conferences on the need for crushing the temporal power of the Papacy; a republican at heart, he accepted constitutional monarchy where he thought it would promote Italian unity. Courted by intellectuals and bluestockings, he was happiest in the company of more down-to-earth people. He was without guile, and readily deceived by the devious and unscrupulous.

Enemy of the Church

Garibaldi was a convinced freethinker. He wrote an anticlerical novel (*Clelia; or, the Rule of the Monk*) and was president of the Venetian Società Atea (Atheist Society); yet one of his best friends (executed by the Austrians) was Father Ugo Bassi, a radical priest from Bologna. And after his death villagers in southern Italy literally credited Garibaldi with working miracles! He had a superb understanding of morale, but while bayonet charges by redshirts could scatter demoralised defenders of mediaeval régimes, they were often no match for disciplined, regular troops with modern equipment (as Mentana showed). Garibaldi was stubborn in defeat, magnanimous in victory (often to enemies who hardly deserved glory), and was scrupulous about the rights and safety of non-combatants.

"By the death of Garibaldi", *The Freethinker*

commented (11 June 1882), "not Italy alone, but the liberty-loving people of every clime under the sun, have lost one of the bravest and most valiant champions that have ever lived. . . In freeing Italy from her vile despotisms, he struck a blow at the enemy everywhere, and wherever there was a people oppressed, in Garibaldi was to be found a chivalrous crusader of liberty. . . He was a personification of reawakened Europe, 'loving the Republic but hating the priesthood'".

The Man in the Red Shirt was no divine hero. He was very human; he had his faults, and made some appalling mistakes; but he was generous, sincere and incorruptible. And his motto, like his legend, will weather the centuries very well: *Libertà non tradisce i volenti* (Liberty will not forsake those who will have it).

Ritual Slaughter in Britain

rightly, be in breach of the law. But only a few yards away, the local Rabbi is doing the same thing and the law is powerless.

There have been several attempts to bring a Private Member's Bill before Parliament on this question. But they have failed, because the religious communities concerned have implied that action would be racial discrimination. Andrew Bowden, MP (Conservative, Kemp Town), is one of an all-party group gathering evidence and information which, it is to be hoped, will put an end to this ghastly practice. (Readers who wish to express their support for the All-Party Animal Welfare Group should write to Mr Bowden at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1).

Our neighbours, Norway, Sweden and Austria, have all passed laws forbidding slaughter without stunning. The EEC has issued a directive that food animals should be rendered unconscious before killing, although it can grant exceptions. Unfortunately Britain has exercised this right.

Any minority guards its rights. All political groups, except the extremes of the far Left and the far Right, hold personal freedom dear. But what of the freedom of animals to die with the minimum of pain and distress? Who would support a religious cult which decided that disembowelling sheep in public was necessary before they would eat lamb and mutton?

How can it be believed, against overwhelming evidence from the British Veterinary Council and others, that there is no cruelty involved in ritual slaughter. How can it be accepted that to put an animal in a cage, turn it through 180 degrees and slit its throat—remembering that a bullock has to lose three and a half gallons of blood before it dies—is a method of killing that a civilised society allows?

Canon John Hester, Vicar of Brighton, writes... An Open Letter to a Parishioner

Mr W. McIlroy,
Editor: *The Freethinker*,
32 Over Street,
Brighton, Sussex

Dear Bill,

I have now been a reader of *The Freethinker* for some years, thanks to your regularly dropping a copy through the Vicarage letterbox, together with the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group *Newsletter*.

Yours is not the only magazine I receive, though in quality it is second to none. Wearing my Rural Dean's hat I have a duty to wade through a dozen or more parish magazines each month; most have a national insert. You will not, I hope, be offended to learn how similar each package is to yours. In the Humanist group *Newsletter*, at least, there is a cosy assumption that everyone knows everyone else and shares their interests; a little moralising to stiffen the parish-pump gossip; loving references to departed brethren; repetitive crusades in favour of something good like truth or peace, or against something bad like mismanagement of church or world resources.

The common ground extends further. The people at your Sunday meetings look just like average churchgoers, strayed by a wise aberration into the Queen's Head instead of St Peter's. Even most of the group labels you use would be happily shared by many Christians. For instance, I count myself a humanist, believing as I do in man as the pinnacle of God's creation, made in his image, as a familiar phrase has it—even God himself can be called a humanist since he chose to become one of us in Jesus; I am also a secularist, as there is no good theological reason to distinguish between sacred and secular, except perhaps for the sake of the argument; and I am most certainly a freethinker, enjoying the liberty we all share as sons of God, freedom being his direct and most precious legacy to us. No amount of misuse of this by Christians, by other religionists or by atheists can shake my belief in freedom of thought. Its absolute priority is supported by history as I see it, by personal and communal spiritual experience and by plain good sense.

I would, however, have difficulty in being called an atheist! Questioning and search for the truth are paramount; they are met though by God's revelation of himself, inviting a response of faith. I remember a boy at school who believed and tried to prove to me that the classroom desk and chair I sat on did not exist. What could one say to him, I used

to ask myself? The desk and chair were so obviously there. He was sincere, yet how could he expect to be taken seriously? And how can you, dear Bill?

Unless, of course, you are talking about what men and women have sometimes turned God into, caricatures of himself, outrageous, blasphemous. As I read *The Freethinker* and *Newsletter*, as I talk with you and your fellow campaigners, it strikes me again and again that it is such idols, always distorted and often wicked, that you are fighting to get rid of. And so am I. Alas, neither of us can expect to be popular with certain sections of opinion, both inside or on the fringes of the Church, to say nothing of outside it. Yet the ones who worry me most are those who claim to believe in God but seem indifferent to what such a conviction must mean.

It is no wonder that you and I met for the first time in a BBC studio, each seeking the demise of the archaic blasphemy laws which so much confuse the cause of truth in our country. It is no more wonder that when you came to talk to our local clergy group about the non-religious funerals you were promoting you found, maybe to your surprise, that most of us agreed with you.

I think it's sad that you appear to have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Yet God exists and loves us all, however hard some Christians contrive to disprove the possibility, and whatever you yourself may think, say or write about him. Indeed I suspect that he rates your efforts more highly than mine, as you battle away against humbug and untruth.

I'm delighted that you live in our parish and honoured that you confess, even to the local newspaper, that you count me among your friends. I'd prefer to go further and stand alongside you in church. But maybe I'll need to be patient and wait till heaven for that.

JIM HERRICK

**VISION AND REALISM—
100 YEARS OF THE FREETHINKER**

foreword: BARBARA WOOTTON

Price and date of publication
by G. W. Foote & Co will be
announced next month

The Editor of *The Freethinker* writes . . .

A Parishioner's Reply

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter. I am pleased to know that despite constant pressure on your time you read *The Freethinker* and our local group *Newsletter*.

Perhaps inevitably the latter is written for people who know one another and share at least some interests. References to those who are ill, and tributes to those who have died, are not unusual in the newsletter of a group whose members are often close friends over many years.

The "repetitive crusades" to which you refer are not out of place in any humanist publication. Family planning, for instance, was pioneered in Britain and other countries by our movement, and the serious consequences of over-population is still a matter of much concern. I trust that Anglican leaders will express similar concern to the Pope (one of whose successors will become head of your Church) when he visits Britain.

The question of world peace is also a legitimate concern of a local humanist group. Brighton may be a speck on the map of the world and situated a safe distance from trouble spots. So was Port Stanley until a few weeks ago.

Is it really noteworthy that people who attend humanist meetings at the Queen's Head "look just like average churchgoers" who attend morning service at St. Peter's? After all, we live in the same community and rub shoulders in the streets, shops and public places every day of the week. Most humanists, like most churchgoers, are average people. When you came to our group meeting did you really expect to find that we had horns and cloven hooves?

There is, however, one fundamental difference between our audiences. The vast majority of Christians, particularly Anglicans, are adherents to their faith through an accident of birth. Their counterparts in the jungles of Africa and in Amazonian villages also worship gods inherited from ancestors. But humanists prefer to question and challenge what they have been told and base their decisions on reason and evidence.

You state quite correctly that "labels" like humanist, secularist and freethinker "would be happily shared by many Christians". Quite so; Christians have a long history of pinching other people's labels. Indeed some of the more worldly-wise apologists for Christianity will even call themselves atheists. Just as the churches fiercely opposed social reforms, and later claimed credit for them, some Christians now describe themselves in terms that

were previously anathematised by all true believers.

You may retort that early freethinkers often wore Christian labels. They did not do so out of deviousness, but to preserve their livings and their lives. Freethinking was always a perilous affair in periods of Christian dominance.

You say "God himself can be called a humanist since he chose to become one of us in Jesus. . .". But the god of your preference is only one of a veritable host of deities, all of whom, except the bully-boy of the Old Testament, are rejected by Christians. The unbeliever goes one step further and rejects the lot. As for the New Testament Jesus—here we have the prototype of the intolerant religious fanatic with his delusions about fulfilling a messianic role.

I understand your perplexity when confronted by a schoolboy's assertion that the chair you were sitting on did not exist. But was the budding existentialist's sincere belief that the chair which you could see and touch did not exist any more preposterous than your sincere belief that a supernatural being which you cannot see and touch does exist? A five-year-old child's sincere belief that Father Christmas lives in Reindeer Land is amusing; a 25-year-old adult's sincere belief in the same myth is alarming.

The fact that it is now safe for a churchman to describe himself as a freethinker has nothing to do with "enjoying the liberty we all share as sons of God", or that "freedom is his direct and most precious legacy to us". It has a great deal to do with the courage and sacrifice of men and women who challenged the concept of a supreme being, demolished biblical myths and defied the Church. You will know of Derek Carver, an early Brighton Protestant who "thought freely". Like so many others who imagined that liberty was God's "most precious legacy to us" he ended his life at the stake.

We are in broad agreement on a number of important social questions. However, I hold that many of the problems and miseries that afflict humanity are either caused or intensified by religious and political fanaticism, intolerance and gullibility that is rooted in faith in some "higher power".

Having made up my own mind, why should I exchange mental freedom for the bondage to God that is the Christian idea of freedom? It is very likely that we will meet in church now that so many of them are being put to good use as concert halls. Beethoven's nine symphonies are far more elevating than the Church's Thirty-Nine Articles.

Why threaten me with the Christian heaven? Let's make it the front bar of the Lord Nelson Inn any Friday evening.

THE FEMALE WITS: WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE RESTORATION by Fidelis Morgan. Virago, £8.50

Here's an astonishing fact: "In all of London's theatres during the 60 years from 1920 to 1980 . . . fewer plays by women writers have been performed than were played by the two London companies which held the dramatic monopoly from 1660 to 1720". As Fidelis Morgan makes clear elsewhere in her introduction, and indeed everywhere in this most entertaining volume, it wasn't a matter of the earlier period being mysteriously less prejudiced against women than the later. Far from it: "I hate these petticoat authors", says Critick in the exchange (dated 1702) from which the epigraph is drawn; and the intolerance is general and noisy.

Fidelis Morgan has chosen one play by each of five "she-authors" ("a thing . . . the language won't bear", says the epigraph of this term), and there's not one it wouldn't be interesting to see re-staged. In Susannah Centlivre's *The Wonder*, Garrick found his favourite part: another provided Congreve with the characteristic that makes Fondlewife one of his most richly comic characters: and they tend to be the source of terms and phrases that have been remembered ("We are here today and gone tomorrow", "Simon Pure"). And yet, says Fidelis Morgan, not one of the five has had the biographical coverage of the Duchess of Newcastle, who wrote at least 26 plays that have never once been performed. The attention devoted to this dramatic dud may spring, she guesses, from the fact that the Duchess "fulfils the popular fantasy that a woman writer is necessarily slightly demented".

First point, then: the volume makes it clear that the common view of Restoration theatre as a male preserve lacks all justice. If there's nothing here as good as *The Way of the World*, there's also nothing less deserving of revival than many plays that have had the dust knocked off them since Nigel Playfair's pioneering seasons at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in the 1920s. And I think readers might find (I certainly did) that in these five plays there are qualities and details that marvellously broaden one's whole notion of Restoration theatre.

In Mary Pix's delicious *The Innocent Mistress*, for example, we have a view of the domesticities of the day, a particularly wry account of relationships, that is . . . to use the very roughest shorthand (she's wry but not sour) . . . Ayckbournish: that sense of an ear close to the ground of the time. Into her play, *The Lucky Chance*, Aphra Behn fed a precise and practical knowledge of what it's like to be hard-up: together with a first-hand view of the ageing lecher. And in the erotic excitements of Mary Delarivier Manley's *The Royal Mischief* there are tones

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that simply aren't masculine, and are most welcome for being different. Even the absurdities of this grandly operatic melodrama have a nuance of their own: as when we hear of the distracted behaviour of the Princess Selima, flowing understandably from the fact that her lover has been "crammed in a roaring cannon,/Discharged in air, to expiate the crime/Of high-placed love". The poor lady, we hear, has been ranging "the fatal plain,/Gathering the smoking relics of her lord,/Which singe her as she grasps them". In the same play, Homais, who is "young and beautiful . . . watched over by a bishop while her husband went to war", is a passionate woman portrayed, I guess, by a passionate woman: and vividly glossed by Fidelis Morgan, who justly says that as Homais dies (in a scene of general carnage) "she imagines an after-life where she can enjoy such alarming vitality that it seems her death results more from sheer excess of energy than from any stab of moral retribution".

Vitality! Energy! It's these qualities the five plays have—as has a sixth and anonymous play, from which the book takes its title, and which throws light on the difficult atmosphere in which these obstinate and gifted women worked. They were also, as we learn from Fidelis Morgan's lively accounts of them, interesting persons in their own right. There's the marvellously spirited (and splendidly named) Mary Delarivier Manley, whose early adventures might have been invented by Smollet and Richardson in collaboration, who won the approval of Jonathan Swift: and who said of herself that she was "the only person of her sex that knows how to live. . .". There's Mary Pix, of whom not much is known except that she was fat and probably made very little money from her enjoyable comedies. Catherine Trotter wrote the curiously stirring melodrama, *The Fatal Friendship*; but her prose works were so dull, said Edmund Gosse, "that merely to think of them brings tears into one's eyes". Susannah Centlivre married a courtier "of very inferior rank indeed, one of Her Majesty's cooks"; Aphra Behn, never paid for her work as a spy in the Dutch wars, was the first woman to earn her living by her pen and, after Dryden, the most prolific writer of her day. Fascinating women, fascinating plays: and a stimulating commentary by the Editor. Fidelis Morgan has not only made order out of what she describes as the dreadful disorder of the received versions of these plays, but she's made the lists of characters (which are small plays in themselves) more rational and helpful: among other things, correcting the convention that all the men were gathered at the top, and all the women lumped at the

REVIEWS

bottom. She also brings a fresh eye to the character of drama during the Restoration period: for example, pointing out that the tininess of the average theatre produced "a convivial and attentive audience" much like a modern group of people "watching television at home, who chat when bored and then can suddenly be held, riveted and hushed".

Astonishing, given the animus against them, that these women persisted with their work in this notably unsheltered field: astonishing that, in our supposedly more sensible age, they remain neglected.

EDWARD BLISHEN

TRUTH: OPINIONS OF A TRUTH-SEEKER by E. G. MacFarlane. Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd, Elms Court, Wraccombe, Devon, £1.26

The cover of *Truth* proclaims it as "An Ideological Innovation; A Sociological Curiosity; A Mind-Bending Experience". Only the second claim is really justified. Though the author alleges that "almost every newspaper editor . . . has SUPPRESSED my letters or articles" as too new and shocking, his writings may have been passed over as too old-hat and unappealing.

I freely admit that old hats may prove very serviceable, especially when crafted by such experienced hatters as E. G. Macfarlane. A retired teacher and World Parliament Party candidate for Dundee East in 1952 and 1970, he has for some decades kept the banner of direct political involvement flying in humanist circles. He calls himself "a UNIVERSALIST NATIONALIST" who is "ready not just to socialize this planet but to socialize beyond the Milky Way if possible!"

There is much in his "tract" I would commend, beyond his transparent sincerity. I have long held that "of all the evil influences at work in human society the two which are most divisive and even survival-dangerous are armed nationalisms and dogmatic faith sects". Today it is probably true that "NATIONALISM IS A MORE POWERFUL SOCIAL AGENCY THAN IS ANY FORM OF SECTARIAN FAITH". It's good to find somebody still wanting to write disestablishment of the Church of England into political platforms and taking "THINK FOR YOURSELVES" as his primary slogan.

Unfortunately, these insights tend to be masked by some highly contentious special pleading. Basically the booklet has been written to advance two propositions: (i) agnosticism is the only realistic

creed for individuals and nations; (2) World Government is the only political solution to global problems. Both these theses flourished in rationalist circles 50 years ago; both have very real conceptual and pragmatic problems. That is the main reason why they have become old-hat today.

Agnosticism's philosophical dilemma is that if nothing can be known then we cannot know that we know nothing. It is fair enough to state that there is no means of testing claims, and therefore *knowing* anything, about first and final causes. On "ultimate" questions we should all be agnostic. That does not mean that we need have no views on any and every preposterous assertion put to us. Quite apart from their intrinsic merits or demerits on abstract principles, the various theistic propositions lack independent evidence and are mutually exclusive. They cannot all be right, and it is perfectly reasonable to deduce that they are all wrong and declare oneself an atheist. That is what an increasing number of freethinkers, and even religionists, are now doing. Macfarlane asks rhetorically, "Can you really see Christians/Muslims/Atheists uniting mankind?" I would ask, "Can you really see Agnostics uniting mankind—or even a metaphysical society?"

Then there is the practical dilemma. There is growing evidence that the brain functions as a computer on a multiplicity of on-off nervous responses. Any attempt to achieve a half-on-half-off situation results in breakdown — electronic or nervous. In other words, in matters of day-to-day importance to us we work on computer programmes (definite views) and cannot be truly agnostic. *Truth* itself reveals that. Though admitting that "I MAY BE WRONG", the author's title, general tone, catapults of capitals and sprinkling of phrases like "the obvious truth of the AGNOSTIC principle" "which I would expect EVERYBODY in a LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC STATE to adopt" do not accord well with open-minded humility. Whatever the views of its citizens, he believes an agnostic State is a practical proposition because of "the basic stumbling block to ANY particular positive guess . . . EVER being generally accepted as the real TRUTH". This is the main argument in favour of a "secular" State, which does not *recognise* any particular ideology to receive special favours. Why abandon this realistic aspiration in favour of the phantasm of an "agnostic State"—which, like an "open society", is a contradiction in terms?

Many readers will similarly regard advocacy of World Government with a conceptual caution and a practical caution. If every nation-State develops an Establishment hostile to minority views, why should a world State be any different? As we approach 1984, "Big Brother" looms ever larger in our imagination. E. G. Macfarlane may become so disenchanted with the princes and prelates of the United

Kingdom that he wants to emigrate. He can do so. Where would one emigrate from universalist nationalism? But suppose one seeks to achieve World Government. What practical steps will ultimately facilitate, and what impede, its progress? Should one proceed by expanding local alliances and federations, or should one go directly to more cosmopolitan bodies like the British Commonwealth or the United Nations and its agencies and give them more political muscle? The author does not appear to have thought through any of his proposals.

Confidence in the tract's main propositions will not be enhanced by a nagging doubt over details. Where did Marx make "the mistake of asserting that EVERYBODY SHOULD BE ATHEISTS"? No doubt he believed that, but did he ever assert it? Is "pursuit of the federation of the states in the EEC into a fully federated United States of Europe" a "humanist measure"? Before Britain's entry into the EEC it could be (and was) argued by many British humanists either that the marginal political benefit of the Community in reducing European conflict was more than offset by economic disadvantages to the United Kingdom resulting from the Common Agricultural Policy and easier access of German manufacturers to the British market, or that the particular trans-national grouping in the EEC represented a Caucasian clique dominated by Roman Catholicism in the short term and possibly by neo-Nazism or neo-McCarthyism in the long. For the same reasons these humanists would now try to take Britain out of the EEC rather than push her further in.

Finally, I wonder if Madalyn Murray O'Hair and science teachers in some American states would agree that "the social climate for the expression of atheistic ideas in the USA is much better than in Christian Britain itself"?

DAVID TRIBE

CINEMA

REDS. On General Release

It takes courage to produce a mass-audience film about the birth of Communism in the United States where the ghost of Senator McCarthy still stalks abroad. *Reds* is set mainly in the USA but also in parts of the Soviet Union at the time of the first world war and the Russian Revolution. It tells of the stormy relationship between John Reed (Warren Beatty), the radical journalist and activist and author of *The Ten Days That Shook the World*, and Louise Bryant (Diane Keaton), writer and feminist. The film is a celebration of their sorely tested enduring love for each other, and shows the conflict between

that love and their professional drives and ambitions and the new permissive attitudes both were exposed to.

If it takes courage to finance and publicise such a movie, it also takes a weak and blinkered vision to make a three-and-a-half hour film about Communism which only once, and then briefly, allows us to glimpse the poverty and injustice the Reds set out to eradicate. This glimpse comes in a scene where Reed attends a Union meeting in the early days of the Wobblies, and gets his face punched by the workers' boss. A few frames later, Beatty is back before our eyes, his boyish good looks unmarred.

To me, this movie is little more than a protracted exercise in filmic radical chic. It is exquisite to look at—like most sentimental epics—shot by Oscar-winning Vittorio Storaro in the smoky, muted tones of stylish nostalgia. All too often in crowd scenes I felt that the jostling extras did not represent a striving mass of angry, committed people, so much as a frame for the luminous beauty of Diane Keaton's face, shown in soft focus. True, it is a face to watch, expressing a fascinating mixture of cool wit and tremulous frailty, repose and mettle. But there's something altogether too romantic and personal about this film, something which clashes with the seriousness and grandeur of its subject-matter. It's as though Oscar-winning director Beatty were using the turbulent and momentous events through which Bryant and Reed lived and in which they participated, as a backdrop for his love story. In much the same way, fashion photographers sometimes use "mean", desolate locations to set off the most glamorous and frivolous pieces of haute couture.

There is something that smacks of the aphrodisiac about the combination of exotism and danger to be found in many of the sequences set in deserts and vast snowy tracts or in revolution-torn Petrograd. The film succeeds best in the domestic scenes. *Reds* is hardly worth considering as a biographical work. It tells us almost nothing about the protagonists' lives before they met, or about Bryant's few remaining years after Reed's early death.

There is, if anything, an autobiographical element in the film. The bohemian ménage à trois of Reed, Bryant and Eugene O'Neill (Jack Nicholson, giving a performance of unwonted and very welcome stillness and reserve) is, the gossip columnists would have us believe, not a million miles from the lives of the three actors portraying them.

Far from being a subversive film, as Beatty asserts it is, *Reds* "recuperates" Communism, making it into a harmless curio, like a bee in amber. It is hard to believe that our own Trevor Griffiths, author of such rigorous dramatic masterpieces as *Occupation* and *The Comedians*, should have been

Gloriously Uncommitted

ANTONY GREY

No, there is not a spelling mistake in the title. Antony Grey writes in celebration of his decision to resign from all committees.

My New Year's Resolution was to be gloriously uncommitted in 1982. After 20 years of compulsive committee-sitting, I've resigned from the lot. But it wasn't easy: for invitations to join committees have an insidious lure and the virtuous voluntarism of committee membership is a characteristically British pastime.

Passing time is what I have found a lot of committees do better than anything else. Every now and then, at a committee meeting where a dozen or so people have foregathered from all corners of Britain at increasingly vast expense, I've gazed out of the window (I always endeavour to secure a seat with a view through a window at committee meetings and regard those committees which meet in windowless, artificially ventilated dungeons with especial disfavour) wondering what on earth we all believe we are doing.

So often, the talk on such occasions rambles gloomily around money—how to get it, how to save it and how to spend it as frugally as possible. All the committees I have sat on were up against cash crises—although cost-consciousness in terms of the committee's own effectiveness is not often spelled out; for after all, it's the spirit of service which counts. So countless committees cheerfully meet once every month or so (at a cost of several hundred pounds a time in fares and person-hours) in a mood of public-spirited sacrifice ("I give up a whole day to come here") and achieve—what?

Something, I suppose, or they wouldn't go on

doing it. Self-satisfaction? Certainly there are personal compensations to be got out of committee-sitting: your name on the notepaper of this, that and the other organisation; the chance of being asked to stand for office; a warm inner glow at being "needed" and making your "contribution". And, if you're not wary, a flurry of invitations to join yet more committees.

Committee-sitting, for some, can easily become almost a way of life. And, like so many insidious diseases, it's relatively painless at first. Only as the roll-call mounts, and you find the weekly list of meetings you're booked for creeping up from one or two to half a dozen or even more, do you realise that you are hopelessly hooked. It's then that the dynamics of the committee syndrome impinge upon your awareness.

Committees resemble one another as the members of a large family do. Though of course they are not identical in form or even atmosphere, a pattern of common expectations runs through all committee meetings, making any new committee a familiar and relatively safe place for the hardened committee hand.

Even before your first appearance, you have a pretty good idea of what's likely to go on—and you know what won't. There will almost certainly be a table, a chairman (who may be female if it's an old-style committee: new-style committees tend to have chairpersons) and an agenda. The papers you have been sent before the meeting will give a fairly reliable indication of whether the chairman and/or the secretary is firmly on top of the committee's business or not. A committee which spends a lot of its meeting time haggling over the minuting of matters arising from the previous meeting, or postponing the consideration of major agenda items

associated with the writing of this flabby, self-indulgent script.

It's as a tragi-comedy of sexual manners that this film works best. Deep it isn't, but life-affirming it certainly is. The couple's early courtship is a joy to watch, especially as Keaton is such a fine comedian, and the infidelities, fights, reconciliations and bungled attempts at domesticity are pure champagne. They show where Beatty's true skill as a director lies.

The "witnesses"—people who knew Bryant and Reed and the period they lived in—and who interrupt the narrative from time to time to reminisce, give *Reds* a lot of much-needed edge and immediacy, not least because they are sometimes at variance with each other. To me, they evoke the period more truthfully with their words and with their vitality

than Storaro does with his self-conscious images.

Unfortunately it is not made clear who is who, as the witnesses are neither introduced nor given subtitles, but I recognised Dame Rebecca West and Dora Russell, and thoroughly enjoyed their wry, affectionate insights into the time and the character of Bryant. More on the credit side — Maureen Stapleton, as is to be expected, gives an excellent performance of Emma Goldman. I wish the film had been about her! The Academy, in one of their lucid moments, awarded Miss Stapleton an Oscar as best supporting actress for this performance. The score by Stephen Sondheim is very stirring. *The Internationale* dominates it. That's how I knew *Reds* is supposed to be about Communism.

VERA LUSTIG

until the last ten minutes so that important decisions are rushed through "on the nod" because the catching of trains has become the most urgent preoccupation for nearly all those present, has chosen one familiar way of avoiding adequate discussion and (more importantly) of evading potential rows.

Anything for a Quiet Life

Rows, in my experience, are not relished in most committees (except, maybe, Labour Party ones). Even calmly expressed disagreements are liable to cause discomfort to at least some of the members, whose personal response to open conflict is embarrassment and/or fear. Most of the committees I have belonged to haven't coped with conflict very well. When it does arise, some people feel they are being personally "got at", and display resentment. Others feel uncomfortable even by efforts to smother and bypass the slightest hint of discord, instead of getting the issues out into the open and dealing with them in a clear and straightforward way.

Those who have read Eric Berne's *Games People Play*, and who realise that it is more than just a brilliantly ironic spoof but is, in fact, part of a far-reaching and incisive therapeutic system (Transactional Analysis) of great psychological insight, will recognise in its pages many dear old committee friends and their ploys.

I'm not suggesting for one moment, needless to say, that all committees are a waste of time or all committee sitters drones. Obviously, much valuable—indeed, essential—work is done by, through and on committees. I like to think I've helped. But I also think that a good many of the hundreds of hours which I've spent on committees during the past two decades might have been put to much more effective use, both by myself and the other committee members.

As Sir Winston Churchill said of Parliamentary government, the best argument for committees may be that any alternative way one can think of to run things would indubitably be worse. However that may be, this year they'll ponder and pontificate without yours truly. I'm uncommitted at last.

ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

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LETTERS

THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE

After reading Francis Bennion's article, "Sexual Orientation and the SDP" (April), I cannot help feeling sorry for him. Like many SDP supporters, he has been well and truly conned. But what else can we expect from a party led by a group of politicians whose record when in office has been anything but progressive. Williams' position on abortion is a prime example.

I found Mr Bennion's views on defence quite alarming. They are way out of step with the secularist aim of promoting the fraternity of peoples. To my mind, support for a policy which could mean the death of millions of human beings is neither fraternal nor humanistic.

As for the EEC, far from contributing towards world unity it has strengthened the hand of the multinational monopolies and the NATO militarists whose aims are the polar opposite of humanism. It has also threatened the right of the British people to self-government and may yet subject us to the rule of a super State in which power is in the hands of the so-called Christian Democratic parties, the modern expression of Rome's ultramontaniam.

It is obvious that what the SDP is interested in is not people but power. And if opposition to gay rights can win reactionary votes then gay rights will be opposed just as the Bomb and Eurocracy will be supported.

Considering the failure of all political parties to bring about reforms advocated by humanists, there may well be a need for a revival of the type of radical politics pioneered by Bradlaugh. Were he alive today it is difficult to know where he would fit into the political spectrum. But I feel sure he wouldn't be in the SDP and I hope humanists, Mr Bennion included, will not be in it or support it either. The politics it advocates are not something new but the old mixture as before. And unless something is done soon to change this crisis-ridden country for the better there may well be no Britain left to change.

TERRY LIDDLE

DEMOCRACY, SDP-STYLE

After welcoming to its ranks a star convert like the Duke of Devonshire, Francis Bennion's resignation after one year's membership must have been a blow to the Social Democratic Party.

Mr Bennion tells us that he resigned because a resolution on sexual orientation of which he (quite rightly) disapproved was passed at the party's Constitutional Convention in London. Two questions come to mind. Did he really expect a radical approach to sexual matters from a party which includes a Vatican mouthpiece like Shirley Williams among its leaders, not to mention Islington's Irish Catholic Mafia.

The second question is this: does Mr Bennion accept a majority decision? Or does he, like the leaders of the Social "Democratic" Party who left the Labour Party, walk out when the vote goes against him?

Mr Bennion's phrase in describing how he "flocked to join the SDP" is most apposite. Thousands of sheep followed the Gang of Four without the slightest idea where they were going. Perhaps it was the realisation he was being led to the political slaughter that really prompted Mr Bennion to shout: "Stop the party—I want to get off".

O. S. PELHAM

ANIMALS' LIB

I joined the Social Democratic Party for similar reasons to those quoted by Francis Bennion in the first part of his letter (April), but was pleased rather than shocked when their Constitutional Convention threw out the reference to a special place for women.

We want equality of the sexes and not a sexually-orientated Constitution. By all means debate the subject, at some time, along with many other minority issues we might stand for. Above all, in my opinion, should be a concern for animals, who can do practically nothing to help themselves, while we people can do very nearly all we want for ourselves.

Carry on the good work, SDP!

MARJORIE MEPHAM

MARXISM AND ITS CRITICS

Forty years ago, Marxist texts, commentaries, and discussions were rarer and generally regarded as esoteric. Now all are common, and almost anybody may speak authoritatively without, it seems, even troubling to read Marx.

The dissolution of the old British Empire, the shock to the United States of the cruel folly of Vietnam, the emergence of the Third World countries in which, like it or not, Marxism in all its variants and caricatures is immensely potent, have combined to promote a profusion of hitherto unregarded, often unpublished texts, and a legion of commentators. One effect of this central presence of Marxism has been to further the idea that by a pejorative reference to Marxism, anyone may buy himself into any argument—a temptation to which academics and journalists are of all people more susceptible than any.

My original intervention was against just this. It does not become agnostic, atheist or humanist—most of whom would regard themselves as committed to clarity of argument and justice in its pursuit—to make false assertions about one major thinker in order to praise another. There is nothing in Marxism that contradicts the Darwin theory of evolution; nor do the present attacks on Darwinism theory come from Marxists any more than it did from Marx himself. Neither Darwinism nor Marxism is, nor can be by their very nature, complete and finished; neither Darwin nor Marx aimed at a closed system, but both at rational, evidential and critical accounts.

I will address myself to Professor Flew's letter (May). It begins by meeting on proper ground my contention that Marxism is no religion and recognises that philosophically there is no ground for so describing it. It then shifts its ground, and Professor Flew will recognise that the new ground is simply that of the "argumentum ad hominem" slipped from the individual to the social plane. This is a different area of contention. The issue was not the morality of Marxism, or of those who in any way and however truly or falsely account themselves Marxist; the morality of marxists is as open to question as that of Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, humanists, Buddhists, atheists or of any reader of "The Free-thinker". It was, that Marxism is not a religion.

S. E. Parker (April) proposes an argument by formal analogy which is no whit more applicable. Marxism at no point erects an abstraction into a present reality. Nobody who essays a theoretical account of the universe and its variety of life processes, including our own (whether biological or social), can do so without some degree of abstraction. But that necessary intellectual skeleton of discourse is not, by serious thinkers, ever regarded as the reality itself, unless perhaps in the tradition of classical German philosophy, in which,

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Hotel, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 4 July, 4.30 pm. Tea party; 5.30 pm. Annual General Meeting.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Thursday, 24 June, 7.30 pm. Gay Pride Week meeting. Speaker: Maureen Duffy.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London, SE6. Thursday, 24 June, 7.45 pm. "Nuclear Disarmament Today" (CND speaker).

Merseyside Humanist Group. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 18 June, 7.45 pm. Enid Halling: "Health in Danger? The Crisis in the National Health Service".

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Meetings, 11 am. 13 June, Harry Stopes-Roe: "Science and Values". 20 June, Lucy de Bruyn: "Experience in China". 27 June, Mervyn Jones: "Wales and the Autumn of Nations".

Summer School at Beamish Hall, Durham, 21-28 August: "Some Aspects of International Arrangements". Cost: £80.75; details from George Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 7896.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Details of activities available from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, telephone Kenilworth 58450.

of course, Marx himself was trained. So let me end by a pertinent quotation from him: "Philosophy, and the study of the actual world, stand in the same relation to one another as masturbation and sexual love".

RAY WATKINSON

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS FOR A RATIONALIST

I am not particularly interested in your correspondents' dispute over the Marx-Darwin correspondence. The point should be made that anti-Marxists as well as Marxists can be bigoted and fanatical.

The unscrupulousness of the Unification Church (the Moonies) is well known, as are its methods of enticement, indoctrination and mind control. Most of its victims are young people whose educational and career prospects have been ruined by this evil organisation. Yet Professor Antony Flew, an implacable and combative opponent of Marxism, appears to have no qualms about attending Moonie conferences. He is a prominent academic who must realise that they will exploit his attendance at such gatherings for their own nefarious ends.

Professor Flew's writings and his Vice-Presidency of the Rationalist Press Association would indicate that he does not endorse the Unification Church's ludicrous religious principles. We can only conclude that he attended the conferences because he found the Moonies' ultra-Right, fiercely anti-Communist politics attractive.

It is not only the Left that has its bigots and fanatics.

F. H. KEMP

Charity Law: MP Demands Action on Moonies

The Charity Commissioners have been dragging their feet to such an extent about investigation into the Unification Church's registration as a charity that Sir Timothy Kitson, MP (Conservative, Richmond, Yorkshire), is asking the Prime Minister to intervene. He is one of over a hundred MPs who are calling for the sect to be struck off the charities register. He said: "I think it is disgraceful that when there is so much public concern the Charity Commissioners say there is nothing they can do about it. We are not prepared to wait indefinitely. There are other avenues which we can pursue through the Home Secretary if the Commissioners don't act".

Sir Timothy's exasperation is understandable. It is now a year since the Unification Church lost its libel action in the High Court against the *Daily Mail* which had described the Moonies' power as "sinister and wide-ranging". Despite public disquiet and pressure from MPs, the Charity Commissioners have not been noticeably energetic in implementing the jury's recommendation that the Church's charitable status should be investigated.

Mr Denis Peach, the Chief Charity Commissioner, has been told by Sir Timothy Kitson that there is the possibility of an appeal against the High Court verdict. The appeal will be heard in November and could be a long-winded affair. Sir Timothy believes

that if the appeal fails and the Moonies take their case to the House of Lords, it could be years before the Charity Commissioners act.

It is evident that the Charity Commissioners intend to sit tight unless there is considerable public and parliamentary pressure. Readers of *The Free-thinker*, and everyone who is concerned about the activities of the Moonies and other harmful sects, should write to their MPs and to the Home Secretary in support of Sir Timothy Kitson's endeavours to activate the Charity Commissioners. Address: House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1.

● Charles and Hazel Raine successfully resisted an attempt by the Unification Church in the High Court in London to disclose the whereabouts of their daughter Nicola. The sect claimed that she was being detained against her wishes. Miss Raine, who is 24, joined the sect in the United States. Lord Justice May said parents were not obliged to disclose to others who have no authority to demand it the whereabouts of members of their family. He added that Mrs Raine was understandably concerned that the sect should not know where her daughter was staying. The Unification Church was "clearly very possessive of its members".

Ignorance, Squalor and Religion

This in turn will mean that living standards for whole communities and nation states may continue to be deplorably low".

Lord Houghton said it was a matter of deep regret that the need for a strict and effective programme of family limitation is not recognised by the Roman Catholic Church. "If they could change their position on this", Lord Houghton declared, "and join with other religious leaders in facing the grim realities of the modern world, there would be more hope for mankind.

"When shall we hear from Pope John Paul II what enlightened and compassionate opinion throughout the world is earnestly waiting for?"

It appears that in Britain enlightened and compassionate opinion — including Roman Catholic opinion—is not waiting for an official change in the Church's policy on contraception. Shortly before the Lords debate Clifford Longley, *The Times* Religious Affairs Correspondent and a Roman Catholic, wrote that there was an embarrassed silence on the subject. According to Mr Longley: "Many priests, the majority of lay people, and even possibly most

bishops in this country do not support their church's official teaching".

The Catholic birth-rate in Britain has fallen to a point where it is not significantly different to the rest of the population. The Pope may hold fast to the traditional line on contraception, but the pastoral congress in Liverpool last year did not.

One *Times* correspondent, a Roman Catholic lawyer with 20 years' experience in advising family courts, described *Humanae Vitae* as "this ostensibly fatuous document". He recalled: "Thirty years ago in the North of England priests often preached to 'family congregations' about the evils of contraception, and tawdry little Catholic Truth Society pamphlets upon this and related topics festooned just about every church bookstall".

Patient and consistent work and propaganda by secularists over many years is bearing fruit. The Roman Catholic and other churches have lost the battle against family planning. They are losing the battle against legal abortion, sensible sex education and rational divorce laws. But there are still plenty of tawdry little pamphlets being churned out by the Order of Christian Unity, the Responsible Society and the Nationwide Festival of Light.