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DOCTORS CRITICISED FOR PANDERING TO RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION

Barbara Smoker was re-elected President of the National Secular Society at the annual general meeting in London on 6 November. In her presidential address she described the recent furore in the Press about Dr Robert Edwards' observation of—or even, as first reported, experimentation—on batches of newly fertilised human eggs left over from “test-tube baby” implants. Such reactions “indicate the deep vein of dark fears and fantasies that is touched by this whole subject”, she said.

“Most of us, having a greatly inflated view of our own importance as individuals, feel that it would have been a grievous loss to humanity if our potential lives had been extinguished when no more than a group of cells, occupying no more than the area of a printed full-stop. Rationally, however, we recognise that what the world has never known it cannot miss, and in any case that the potentiality of human lives infinitely exceeds the number of births.

“The little cluster of cells that caused all the fuss—with references in several newspapers to Baron Frankenstein—were no different from millions of such clusters, or early human embryos, that are extinguished every year in spontaneous abortion, generally before the mother even knows she is pregnant. They are ‘human’ only in their developmental potential, not in actuality, and have not even reached so high a stage of life as an unborn fish. At that stage they could still separate into several potential individuals—twins, triplets, quads—so what price the individual unique soul that is behind the irrational outcry?

“The Christian organisation, Life, which campaigns against abortion, demanded the intervention of the Director of Public Prosecutions, although it was not clear whether they wanted Dr Robert Edwards actually to be charged with murder.

“A year or two ago, when it was reported merely that there was bound to be a surplus of fertilised eggs for every test-tube baby, a devout and worried lady wrote to a Catholic newspaper pleading that these little human beings should not end up in the sewers. What else did she think happened to those that nature—or God—renders surplus? Are women supposed to be on the look-out for early indications of early miscarriage, so as to salvage the full-stopped embryo for Christian baptism, last rites and burial?

“Even doctors, who ought to know better, seem to be so anthropocentric that an entity with human potential but no capacity for feeling has to be protected above a sentient animal with the obvious capacity to suffer. One never hears spokesmen for the British Medical Association pontificate on the ‘ethical problems’ of experimenting on non-human animals. In fact, neither causing suffering nor relieving it seems to be uppermost in the minds of many doctors. Rather, they exhibit a fanatical obsession with saving and prolonging human life at all costs, even when this is contrary to the patient's own wishes.

The Vital Difference

“The absurd declaration by Dr Walter Hedgcock—who, now scientific adviser to the Bishop of Norwich, was formerly Deputy Secretary of the BMA—that experimenting on fertilised human eggs would be ‘like pinning a baby down on a board and doing experiments on it’ is tantamount to saying that boiling a breakfast egg that has been fertilised is like throwing a live chicken into boiling water.

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

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NEWS

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

The result of a world-wide survey of religious relics by the Italian newspaper, *Repubblica*, will annoy the credulous and amuse the sceptical. For it reveals that John the Baptist had ten heads and the Apostle Jacob nine arms, whilst our own St George had enough bones to make up 30 complete skeletons. These and numerous other bits and pieces have long been revered by the faithful and a useful source of income for churches and monasteries.

Needless to say there has never been a shortage of pious gulls who were willing, indeed anxious, to believe any tall story. The relics industry flourished for centuries, with the clergy in fierce competition with one another for customers. Their displays of bones, teeth, hair and apparel which they claimed had belonged to holy (and usually mythical) personages, put them in the front rank of showmen and charlatans.

Roll up! Roll up! See the handwriting of the Archangel Gabriel in a letter which he wrote in 78 AD; or a finger of the holy ghost, exhibited at a monastery in Jerusalem. Musical buffs were not forgotten—the trumpets which caused the walls of Jericho to fall down could be seen in one cathedral. Pilgrims to the holy land were shown the bush which Moses saw being consumed by flames and—not to be missed on any account—the pillar of salt that had previously been Lot's wife.

When the Empress Euodia married, she converted to Christianity and later went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She returned laden with relics, including a portrait of the Virgin Mary painted by St Luke.

Other relics which drew crowds to various shrines included Jesus' baby-linen and his umbilical cord (at least seven churches possessed one), phials of the Virgin Mary's milk, a piece of Aaron's rod, some of the manna that fell from heaven, feathers from Gabriel's wings and hairs from Noah's beard.

One of the most renowned collectors was the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine. This fervently religious lady sought relics with the single-mindedness of a suburban matron hunting for a bargain at Harrods sale. She acquired an astonishing hoard of junk, her greatest find being "the true cross".

One story goes that Helena, with the aid of a Jewish guide, found three crosses, which had somehow remained undetected and undamaged, buried on the site of the alleged crucifixion. A sick woman was placed on each of them and her prompt

AND NOTES

recovery determined which one was the genuine article.

For centuries pieces of "the true cross" were sold to pilgrims and wealthy collectors. In order to account for the endless supply of this very special wood, priests asserted that it had the miraculous power of re-growth. This yarn was acceptable not only to the doltish faithful but also to a formidable intellect like Cardinal Newman.

No doubt the Church would prefer to forget about the miraculous jumble that was commercially exploited by the clergy and treasured by relic devotees for hundreds of years. The hoo-ha over the Shroud of Turin has caused apprehension among thoughtful Catholics.

Anyway, tourist resorts like Lourdes, Fatima and Knock are more acceptable (and profitable) than collections of old bones.

THE BUTCHERS OF BEIRUT

Christian apologists were quick on the job with the whitewash brush when news of the horrifying massacre of refugees in Beirut emerged. The description of Phalangists as "so-called Christians" by one fruity-voiced gentleman on the BBC religious programme, *Sunday*, set the tone for other commentators. Religious spokesmen and correspondents, with a few exceptions, did their level best to explain away the embarrassing fact that one of the most outrageous atrocities of the last decade was carried out by their co-religionists.

The Phalangists were first established as a Christian youth movement, and the quasi-fascist salute is still used by members. It has always been authoritarian, puritanical and extremely religious, placing great emphasis on virtues of patriotism and family life (which are high on the list of several well-known evangelical Christian organisations in Britain today).

Bechir Gemayel, a commander of the Phalangist militia, was described by one of his allies as "a war criminal fit only for the gallows", and his forces as "bloodthirsty madmen". It was these Christian butchers, almost certainly with Israel's connivance, who created the carnage in the refugee camps.

Christians who express surprise at the very suggestion that "real" Christians could possibly commit such acts are either being utterly cynical or they are totally ignorant of their own history.

There were angry scenes at the historic Newmarket Town Plate meeting last month when punters were prevented by the police from laying bets because the race was run on a Sunday. Nearly 5,000 people were present for the meeting which dates from 1665. The car-parking and race-card receipts are donated to a stable lads' charity. A police spokesman said: "It is illegal to bet like this on Sunday. If punters want the law changed they should write to their MPs".

UNLOVELY PARTY

Well, that's it for another year. The Conservative Party's annual moronathon at Brighton was a bland affair, punctuated by standing ovations for the great ones and concluded by an hysterical demonstration of support for the Grocer's Daughter. The only excitement came when one representative, a local councillor no less, became a national figure for at least two hours by accusing the party bosses of stage managing the conference from start to finish. Rather unsporting, what? The blighter should have been chucked off the Palace Pier at high tide.

As the deity is widely regarded as being part of the fixtures and fittings at Conservative Central Office, it was only proper to start the proceedings with a religious service. It must have been consummate acting ability—so essential in a successful clergyman—that enabled Father David Rae, of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, to keep a straight face while he read the Lesson (Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 1-11).

Just imagine telling an audience of Tories: *Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* And when it came to... *at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow*, Father Rae mercifully avoided what would have been a monumental (if excusable) slip of the tongue—substituting Thatcher for Jesus. The conference stage managers would probably have been happier if he had included verse 14: *Do all things without grumbling or questioning.*

Political conferences are an elaborate exercise in self-deception, with party activists kidding themselves that they are actually formulating policy and making decisions. That is true to a point, but the fundamental decisions on national affairs are made in board rooms, country mansions and Whitehall offices, not at conference halls in Brighton, Bournemouth and Blackpool.

The Liberal assembly and the Labour conference are patronised by all sorts and conditions from the deadly sombre to the wildly anarchistic. Many of the participants have as little respect for the platform as they have for sartorial correctness. Fringe activities are often an organisational shambles. But the Liberals and Labourites are, for the most part, an

amiable lot.

The Conservative conference is somewhat different. It attracts jingoists, racists, capital punishment freaks and other nasties like a dunghill attracts flies. Representatives try to look purposeful as they walk to and from their hotels. Inside the conference hall they are fawning toadies. Outside it they are bristling gents and shrill memsahibs who throw their weight around in shops and restaurants. With over three million unemployed it's easier to show working-class Johnnies just who's in the driving seat.

It's all enough to make one lose interest in politics and join the SDP.

Freethinker Fund

After a rather flat period the Fund has perked up with readers donating nearly £200. It is such loyal and generous support that has kept *The Freethinker* in existence while so many journals have gone under. We appeal to individuals and groups for continued financial support. The latest list of contributors, which includes some new names with the regulars, is given below. We thank all of them most warmly.

C. F. Ablethorpe, £2; G. A. Airey, £2; M. C. Ansell, £3; S. Berry, £2; J. A. Blackmore, £3; H. Bowser, £2; P. Brown, £3; P. R. Buckland, £1; J. Busby, £11.90; K. Byrom, £2; D. M. Carter, £1; E. F. Channon, £2; P. B. Cooper, £3; E. L. Deacon, £5; N. Divall, £1.50; H. G. Easton, £4; S. Exley, £7; E. C. Gibson, £1; J. R. Grant, £2; W. R. Gray, £2; N. Haemmerle, £2; R. J. Hale, 75p; M. D. Hallett, £10; J. Harper, 50p; E. Henderson, £5; E. Henry, £2.50; C. Honeywell, £5; F. C. Hoy, £2; J. R. Hutton, £2; P. Lancaster, £15; J. Laverty, £2; T. Liddle, £1; J. Little, £7.50; P. B. Lloyd, £10; A. M. Marshall, £2; A. J. Martin, £2; J. Massey, £1.75; A. N. Negus, £2; F. J. Pidgeon, 50p; W. Ramage, £2; M. Rasic, £2; S. O. Rogers, £2; M. Rushforth, £2; E. W. Sinclair, £10; N. Sinnot, £1.50; G. Spiers, £1; C. Sumner, £5; G. Swan, £2.75; G. D. Thompson, £2; G. Walton, £5.25; J. Warren, £10; J. R. Watson, 75p; P. L. Willig, £15.

Total for the period 4 September until 6 October 1982: £195.15.

Sales of Jim Herrick's "Vision and Realism—a Hundred Years of the Freethinker" are very encouraging and his history of this journal has been well received. Readers are urged to buy a copy of the book and to get it into public and university libraries. Librarians will require the author's name, title of book and publishers' name and address, all of which are in the display advertisement on page 172.

Another Voice from Ulster

BOB HUMPHRIES

I was born and grew up in Belfast, the third of six children—three girls and three boys—of Protestant parents. Father was a plumber by trade from Armagh and Mother was from a farming family near Portadown in the same country. All except Dad were keen Christians, churchgoers and supporters of the Unionist cause. Dad's interest was his work in Belfast Shipyard and very little else—altogether a reasonably happy working-class family just able to make ends meet.

It was during my teenage years that I began to have doubts about religion, mainly because I couldn't understand the bitter hatred between Protestants and Catholics. Around this time a fierce controversy took place in the *Belfast Telegraph* between a Protestant clergyman and a Catholic priest over which of their institutions was the "true Church". I followed the debate very closely and got quite a number of books mentioned in the correspondence from the Central Library. Eventually I decided it was all poppycock and ceased to have any connection with churches or religion of any kind.

This upset the family—except Dad who did not care—and relatives and friends did their best to persuade me that I was wrong. But despite all the pressure I stuck to my convictions.

I also read a number of articles in newspapers and magazines about socialism and joined the local Labour Party, a step which nearly led to my having to leave home. Mum, although deeply upset and disappointed, would not agree to this so I stayed on under sufferance. This made a great change in my life. I was fortunate enough to meet like-minded people one of whom loaned me books, magazines and pamphlets.

Some time after the 1939-45 War started I left for England and six months later joined the RNVF. That was the beginning of my travels which took me to places like Colombo, Singapore and Melbourne. I lived in Australia for 18 years and during much of that time was a member of the Humanist Society of Victoria.

On returning to Belfast in 1973 I was agreeably surprised to find the central shopping area in such a state of hustle and bustle that it gave the impression conditions had returned to normal and nobody had a care in the world. Unemployment, though bad enough, was within manageable limits; wages were good, prices reasonable and the shops were doing a thriving trade. Even the cursory body and bag search for fire-lighting equipment was accepted as part of daily life.

(continued on page 169)

Evolution and Politics at the British Association

This year marked the centenary of Charles Darwin's death and there have been innumerable books and articles enthusiastically proclaiming the demise of his "theory of descent with slow modification by means of natural selection". Indeed, for the past few years the theory of evolution has appeared to be in turmoil, much to the delight of the creationists eager to exploit any signs of disagreement among the scientific community. It was, therefore, fitting that the Geology and Zoology Sections of the British Association for the Advancement of Science should have devoted a full day of its annual conference to a discussion on evolution.

Beverly Halstead writes: The public were presented with a heady mixture of biology, philosophy and politics, much to the disgust of the splendidly irascible chairman, Professor Arthur Cain of the University of Liverpool. The *New Scientist* remarked that "the sight of scientists disagreeing violently can be a nasty experience for the onlooker. There they are, the cool guardians of empirical knowledge, tearing into one another, almost red in tooth and claw if not in face".

Indeed, the evolution debate was the only item of this year's conference to make the front page of *The Times*. The *Guardian* ran the headline, "Neo-Darwinism holds the evolutionary ring", and at the end of the day this seems to have been the consensus.

For many, the evolution debate ranked high in entertainment value but seemed to generate more heat than light. Nevertheless, there were several major controversies that were resolved and a number of complex issues clarified. The battle lines for the future conflict were more clearly delineated and, most surprising of all, there were some fundamental realignments among the leading protagonists.

These related particularly to the question asked earlier in the year in a *Guardian* headline, "Is there a Marxist message in every fossil?" To everyone's astonishment, this was answered resoundingly in the affirmative.

At present there are two competing patterns and hence inferred processes claimed by scientists who study the fossil record. The gradualist or Darwinian version (explained by Brian Charlesworth in the September *Freethinker*), has been linked with mid-Victorian capitalism. In contrast, the "punctuated equilibria" theory of Niles Eldredge (one of the speakers at the conference) and Stephen Jay Gould postulates that the fossil record gives an impression of jumps simply because the actual process was one of jumps. Eldredge and Gould themselves emphasised that their theory was more consistent with the Marxist view of the history of life.

The BA fortunately had present an evolutionary scientist, Mike Howgate, who is also an avowed Marxist and he spoke on "Marxism and Evolution—the new Synthesis". He considered that the punctu-ationists, seeing punctuations between every species, were like armchair revolutionaries expecting the revolution every Sunday afternoon after tea. Indeed the brand of Marxism of the Radical Science Movement and Steven Rose, and the Science for the People and Steve Gould, was peremptorily dismissed by Howgate as a mainstream Marxist himself. He recognised that most evolutionary changes were gradual but that there were major qualitative changes related to major changes in the environment.

One outcome of the debate was that the present writer, an avowed anti-Marxist, was content to be associated with the Marxism of Engels and Lenin as presented by Howgate—which caused some surprise in the columns of the Trotskyist daily paper, *News Line*.

After the dust of the evolution debate had settled, Brian Goodwin, the biological structuralist from the University of Sussex, delivered an attack on "the persistent fashion of Darwinism in biology". He claimed that neo-Darwinism in its use of metaphor showed itself with its "selectionist paradigm" to be capitalist, elitist and sexist, as for example when geneticists spoke of "housekeeping" and "luxury" genes, the former being feminine, worthy but boring, the latter masculine, interesting and adventurous.

Here was one of the new radical scientists parading his ultra-Leftist beliefs.

But he had reckoned without the presence of a Marxist, Mike Howgate, who simply picked up all of Goodwin's metaphors and stood them on their head, hence demolishing the entire edifice, Howgate finally collapsed the audience: "To continue Dr Goodwin's extended metaphor, speaking as someone on the Left, I would prefer to stick to the belts and braces of Darwinism to keep my biological pants up, rather than rely on the latest punk safety-pin from Sussex".

The 1982 BA conference was remarkable in that instead of "Marxist" being seen as an adjective of approbation, due to the presence of Mike Howgate it was faced fairly and squarely. It became evident that the new trendy Left with their "modern Marxism" were on the non-scientific or even anti-science side of the fence, whereas the type of Marxism espoused by Howgate seemed to have something to contribute to the scientific understanding of the natural world. Howgate's cool and scholarly approach through an emotive minefield of political jargon and slogans performed an important intellectual service for both the general public and the assembled scientists.

The Price of Progress—50 Years of the Progressive League

FANNY COCKERELL

The Golden Jubilee of the Progressive League is a cause for celebration. It has survived many crises, including a world war, and without assets or a single full-time worker still organises an impressive range of activities throughout the year. PL members' initiative, hard work and loyalty belie glib assertions that people are entirely selfish and self-centred. Fanny Cockerell, a PL foundation member and Editor of its monthly journal, tells the League's story.

The year is 1932. The place is Victoria Station, London. The boat train to France is about to pull out. The guard stands ready to blow his whistle. All the carriage doors are shut—but one. A girl comes rushing through the gate and up the platform. Just as the train is about to move off eager hands pull her into the carriage where she almost collapses and finds herself staring up into the bearded, laughing face of a lively man with twinkling eyes. That was my first encounter with Professor Cyril Joad.

Little did I guess at that time that 50 years later I would be one of the very few survivors of the first conference of the Progressive League. Indeed, if anyone had told me that I should one day be regarded by some as the grand old lady of the PL I should have laughed aloud. For one thing I have never been remotely grand, for another I have never thought of myself as a lady, and in the third place—well even after 50 years I still don't regard myself as old. But then, does anybody in the PL?

This is, perhaps the secret of our survival. In the PL people don't grow old. Age seems completely immaterial. Our minds remain lively and receptive to new ideas. Our bodies remain active. Where else will you find great grandfathers swinging their country dance partners with inordinate gusto, and great-grandmothers who think nothing of rambling 14 miles in a day?

The mental resilience is something we share with kindred societies like South Place Ethical Society, the National Secular Society, the humanists and the members of many other organisations who are not satisfied to accept opinions laid down by the Establishment, but are always searching for the truth—at whatever cost.

It was perhaps this basic realisation that led to the formation of the Federation of Progressive Societies in that summer of 1932. The basis was laid in a beautiful country house, the Chateau de Bures, outside Paris, which was at the time a boys' school, owned by a distinguished American, Pryn's Hopkins, and lent to Joad and his colleagues for a preliminary conference.

It was a busy conference; we worked hard and played hard. In addition to Joad, the party included Professor Flügel, Professor Neville and Janet Chance, whose book, *The Cost of English Morals*, about the hundred thousand illegal abortions which were taking place every year, had scandalised the country. There were also a few of Joad's students and their girl friends (which is where I came in).

There was a walled garden, surrounded by statues of the major poets, where practising sunbathers took off their clothes and played ball games. My friend Janie and I, two prim and rather proper virgins, were persuaded into joining them. But we kept our bras and pants on until the end of the week—by which time we began to feel so indecent that we had to conform and join the nudists.

Hard Struggle

Readers of *The Freethinker*, familiar with the struggles of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, and aware of the fight against obscurantism that the apostles of birth control had to wage, may be well aware of the climate of opinion on sexual matters that was still rife as late as the 1930s. It was not very long since women had got the vote. Even if no longer regarded as their husbands' chattels, they were still ringed around with restrictions. The mention of abortion produced either disgusted snorts or prurient sniggers. (So did the idea of nudism!) It was an age of consummate hypocrisy. It was also an age of mass unemployment, hunger marches, economic turbulence and political unrest. The slump of 1929 was not far behind us, the threat of world war II always before us.

Of course many organisations were trying to do something about some things. And their struggles were hard and often unavailing. Then one day Jack Coates had the thought: suppose all these organisations combined and formed a federation, lending support to each other in their various activities. Might this not produce some great results?

It was a brilliant idea which Joad and others took up and began to implement. And in that lovely Chateau de Bures the groundwork was done. In September 1932 there was a conference at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, in Hertfordshire, and the Progressive League was born.

There was a full house and a magnificent conference which aroused a great deal of enthusiasm and attracted a great many people. The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals was formed with Cyril Joad as its first President. Joad was a brilliant speaker and a vivid personality. He said that either the infant FPSI would snowball and

become an international organisation with world-wide influence or it would collapse and die within a few years. The one thing it would not do would be to turn into just another little society. So much for prophecy!

A year after the formation of the FPSI we published a book, *Manifesto*, whose authors included Janet Chance, Flügel, Joad, Olaf Stapleton and a range of distinguished contributors. Norman Haire, the prominent Australian sexologist, organised public meetings which were well attended. There were excellent conferences with prominent speakers. *Plan* magazine, recording the views and activities of the FPSI, was edited by John Dudding. Groups were formed of members with particular interests like peace, education, divorce and abortion law reform.

There was liaison with other progressive societies, but somehow the basic idea of the Federation never got very far. Not many societies actually joined; when it came to sacrificing something of their own sovereignty in order to help other groups it didn't really work out. As Joad put it, each cock preferred to crow on his own little dunghheap. Instead of attracting more groups to the Federation the reverse happened. The divorce and abortion law reform groups became separate entities, concentrating on their own work outside the PL. Some of the affiliated groups went out of existence or lost connection with us. The FPSI ceased to function as a Federation and became the Progressive League.

So gradually the character of the PL changed. While the Federation was failing, the involvement of the Individuals remained. There was obviously a strong need for an organisation of like-minded people to meet and work together for various ends while continuing a relationship with kindred societies.

Over the decades we have seen many changes in the pattern of society that were in line with our thinking-reforms in divorce and abortion laws; more tolerance towards minority groups; the abolition of hanging; greater emancipation of women. All these are things that we have worked and fought for. Some have been achieved. But at what price?

A Voluntary Society

The real strength of the Progressive League has always been in its personal relationships. In one sense the League is a community which produces—without ever demanding it — an astonishing loyalty and support among its members, both for the PL and for each other. The League as a community is a reality soon felt by those who take an active part in it. It is democratically run and has continued for 50 years with a very low subscription, no premises, no money, no assets and none of the benefits (or worries) that go with all these things. Its unpaid officials last for years if not decades. At the moment it arranges about 15

meetings every month, mostly in private houses.

Conferences are the PL's greatest feature. They range from the Arts to the Health Service, from the Third World to Prison Reform, from the Atom Bomb to Hypnotism. The summer conference welcomes families with children.

In addition to discussing anything and everything, we dance, we sing, we swim, we ramble, we paint, we act, we write poetry, we make music, we make love. You name it—the PL will find a time and a place for it.

This is what makes the PL unique. There can be few organisations so wide ranging, covering so many human needs and desires, prepared to listen to so many views. Perhaps this is what has kept us going for 50 years and enabled us to survive when many of the organisations forming part of the original Federation have fallen by the wayside. For while our basic aims, rewritten and updated several times, have altered very little, we have been ready to adapt to the changing climate of our times. The PL has always been flexible.

And now, having reached the League's Golden Jubilee, we propose to celebrate in fine style.

A book of poems by *Plan* poets is being published with an introduction by James Berry, a PL member and winner of the 1981 National Poetry Competition.

Those who visit London's Conway Hall will see an immense and colourful mural, more striking than anything those walls have ever known, which was painted by members at last year's summer conference. There will also be works by other PL painters.

The Golden Jubilee conference, 10-12 December, will be at High Leigh, where the first PL conference took place. We shall be looking at the world of today, all we have achieved in the last 50 years and the road we have to travel in future. It will be an assessment, an examination and, above all, a celebration. We hope that our friends in the various humanist organisations and readers of *The Freethinker* will celebrate with us.

● Details of the Progressive League's Golden Jubilee activities are given in the "Events" column, page 175.

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Dora Russell, a veteran campaigner for peace, comments on Peregrine Worsthorne's bellicose attack on pacifism. She asserts that such criticism is a ploy to divert attention from the dangerous activities of politicians, militarists and armaments manufacturers.

The *Sunday Telegraph*, which I believe prides itself on being one of the quality papers, recently carried a long article by Peregrine Worsthorne entitled "Why Pacifism Brings a Smile to the Devil". This mouth-piece of the Establishment finds it useful to pay people like Worsthorne, cunning enough to play the fool with comical extravagance, thus amusing his readers while thoroughly confusing the issues and their minds so that they fail to notice the true purpose of his malicious nonsense.

I do not think that Peregrine Worsthorne believes either in God or the Devil, and probably not in the Christian religion, however he may choose to define it. What he does in this article is to take up the topical theme of the argument that arose over the ethical content of the thanksgiving service for the Falklands victory. So doing, he cannot avoid the fact that differences do exist in Christian doctrines. He chooses to ignore their historical origins and to define for himself just what shall be stigmatised as heresy.

Everyone knows that Christ preached pacifism in the Sermon on the Mount. Christianity became a fighting religion when the Emperor Constantine adopted it as an official orthodoxy by which his soldiers might march to victory. "In this sign we conquer"—and the Cross went at the head of the marching battalions. Ever since, the Church has been exercised to decide how to define a "just war".

Cross and Sword

As all kings and emperors since Constantine have known full well, a fighting religion is what is needed to carry out the purposes of the State. So this is what Peregrine Worsthorne says:

Pacifism is a vice, not a virtue, a lie, not the truth. And in so far as the Christian Churches allow themselves to make propaganda on behalf of this heresy, they will have become institutions serving the Devil, not God, far less virtuous than such secular seats of instruction as, say, Sandhurst, where the young are taught a much less corrupting set of moral values.

The arch-heretic who serves the Devil by preaching "love your enemies" is thus none other than the founder of Christianity, Jesus himself. How can this be?

Peregrine Worsthorne is perfectly right—his Fascist type Christian soldiers have been ready at all times and places in history to train and use their physical strength, and suborn the brains of their men of science, to kill all infidels, ignorant savages, alchemists, witches, niggers, gooks, terrorists, guerrillas, free-thinkers, subversives. The carnage has been world-wide: nor is it only perpetuated by Christianity. Fanatical religions have always carried the gospel of "convert to our faith or die" in the service of their rulers' greed and territorial ambition.

Folly and Futility of War

That great Renaissance humanist, Shakespeare, has a very relevant passage in "Hamlet".

The Captain of Fortinbras' troops seeks permission to cross Danish soil, and answers Hamlet's queries.

Captain—Truly to speak, sir, and with no addition,
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm
it;

Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

Hamlet—Why, then, the Polak will never defend it.
Captain—Yes, 'tis already garrison'd.

Hamlet—Two thousand souls and twenty thousand
ducats . . .

This is the imposthume of much wealth
and peace,

That inward breaks, and shows no cause
without

Why the man dies . . .

Hamlet reflects:

I see

The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain.

So is it today in the Falklands; so is it in Lebanon—two dog-in-the-manger wars costing agonies of pain, death, waste of material and wealth, the fury of the aggressors triggered and enhanced by their gods in whose name they claim and sanctify the soil they seek to own and are destroying.

Yet they are not ignorant people of limited vision; they have world-wide knowledge, influence and power. In reality they make use of their gods as scapegoats, to avoid responsibility for what of evil or good they themselves do. With this I would have no quarrel, if it were honest and discarded religion. Once accepting responsibility and rejecting gods, humanity could meet together to establish some tolerance, harmony and peace.

In past history, long ago, the earth was revered and had to be served by all, in order that people might be fed. It was not allowed to be parcelled out

as private property. This has never been more necessary than today, when the dangers we face are not limited to small areas, but, by their very nature, threaten us all. It is no longer possible to talk about "chosen people", superior and inferior races, "my country right or wrong". War is now total, directed against entire populations, with mechanised and computerised weapons, backed by the H Bomb.

Those who are behind people like Peregrine Worsthorne know this, which is precisely why they seek to mislead the public by attacking pacifists. They know that the answer to their total war can only be a total demand for peace from a total population.

The protest is for survival. But it is quite plain that we shall get little help from statesmen and politicians.

Invention, preparation, sale and stocking of arms is their primary concern and objective. Nothing will stop them, but obstinate resistance from ordinary men and women.

More especially, I appeal to women to see this as the one issue today that blocks all others. It causes and perpetuates constant tension and anxiety, so that the world cannot get on with the business of life. Women down the ages, held in subjection and in contempt, have been giving birth to the millions slaughtered and exploited. They should unite, not only to lose their chains, but to save their children and the future.

• A 15-millimetre film of the Women's Caravan for Peace, a journey by road through nearly every country of Europe from West to East, is available for hire. There is an introduction and postscript by Dora Russell. Details are obtainable from Dora Russell, Carn Voel, Porthcurno, near Penzance, Cornwall.

The following statement has been issued. "The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), horrified by the massacres of defenceless citizens perpetrated in cold blood in Palestinian refugee camps in West Beirut, appeals to everyone concerned to put a stop to the tragic events occurring in the Middle East, and in particular in the Lebanon. Humanists—for whom the respect for one's fellow-men and women and their right to be different are fundamental values—condemn the effects of fanaticism and tolerance the world over. They object to the oversimplified attitude to set down the blame for this inadmissible situation to one party or another. All who tolerate such a degradation of humanity because of personal motives or who look on passively, should be held responsible. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) strongly urges national and international authorities to take the necessary steps to enable the peoples of the world to live in peace, thus putting an end to the atrocious scenes of bloodshed in so many countries".

AMERICAN AUTHORS

Although Matilda Joslyn Gage was one of America's leading feminist writers and campaigners in the 19th century she is not particularly well known today. When her *Woman, Church and State* was published in 1880 it attracted considerable attention and was surprisingly well reviewed. Its re-publication by Persephone Press is very welcome. So is its availability in Britain at Sisterwrite, 190 Upper Street, London N1, price £4.75 plus £1 postage.

Another book by an American author and of particular interest to freethinkers is available in Britain again: Corliss Lamont's *The Philosophy of Humanism*. First published in 1949 under the title *Humanism as a Philosophy*, this work originated as a course of lectures at Columbia University. This edition is a 330-page paperback and is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co., 702 Holloway Road, London N19, price £3 plus 60p postage.

A 53-year-old American doctor and his wife have been released unharmed after being kidnapped by an anti-abortion group known as the Army of God. Dr Hector Zevallos runs the Hope Clinic for Women which has been the scene of several demonstrations by anti-abortionists.

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Another Voice from Ulster

As soon as possible after settling into my new abode I attempted to contact the local humanist group. Unfortunately it did not work out too well for me. I searched the telephone directory, newspapers, library and other sources of information but without success. Only later did I learn that the Belfast Humanist Group broke up when the present troubles started in 1969 and did not reform until 1978.

Eventually I saw an advertisement in the *Guardian* for the Centenary issue of *The Freethinker*, and through *The Freethinker* I found the address of Belfast Humanist Group which I joined. We are slowly but surely attracting new members, including young people who are greatly needed if the Group is to survive and grow.

And is there any other part of the British Isles where humanist ideas and organisation are so necessary as they are in Ulster?

BOOKS

NAMING NAMES by Victor S. Navasky. John Calder, £7.95

There is a strange error on the back cover of the book: “. . . this . . . history of the witch-hunt initiated by Senator Joe McCarthy of the House Committee on Unamerican (*sic*) Activities. . . Senators aren't on House Committees, Congressmen are. McCarthy had nothing to do with the HUAC hearings which began in 1947. McCarthy, a Johnny-come-lately to witch-hunting, started the campaign that made his name a synonym for character-assassination in 1950.

I wonder why it took so long for this book to appear? There have been others that dealt with the subject, Stefan Kanfer's *A Journal of the Plague Years* and *Only Victims*, by Robert Vaughn, the actor. There was the book and the play, *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been*, by Eric Bentley, both being direct transcripts of the HUAC hearings. Navasky's book should be from now on the definitive work. The research is astonishing and I can think of no aspect of that dreadful soul and career destroying time that Navasky hasn't investigated and reported. Navasky is the editor of *The Nation*, a weekly not unlike the *New Statesman*, so he obviously writes from a liberal point of view. Yet he is fair, never biased, and if a man is condemned it is because he has condemned himself in his own words; no editorial comment is necessary.

The book goes far beyond its subject — it is valuable to show how people react under pressure. Some — not many — held out. Some resisted the Committee, went to jail for contempt and a few of those, after they came out, changed their minds and decided to cooperate after all, which meant “naming names”. That is the key point: naming names was what the Committee wanted. No names, you got no clearance, and that meant that you remained on the blacklist, unemployable.

One pathetic case was that of Larry Parks, who became an overnight star by his portrayal of Al Jolson in *The Jolson Story* and *Jolson Sings Again*. Parks had joined the Communist Party in 1941 because it was “the most liberal” party around and he left it in 1945 through “lack of interest”. He was willing to testify about himself but begged, pleaded, not to be made to be an informer. At first it looked as though he had won his point. One committee member asked: “How can it be material . . . to have the names of people when we already know them?” The chairman seemed to agree. But they called Parks back for a second hearing and this time he broke; he named the names. In his case it did him no good. He was resented for holding out, for trying to save his self-respect, for trying not to become an informer.

FREETHINKER

He didn't get Committee clearance and his career was effectively ended. He went into real estate and died in 1976.

Larry Parks is the informer with whom I can sympathise. He didn't want to inform, he tried not to, but finally caved in. The most fascinating case is that of Elia Kazan, to whom Navasky devotes an entire chapter, “Elia Kazan And The Case For Silence”. As Navasky points out, Kazan is the one man who *might* have broken the blacklist; he was the most important name to be subpoenaed by HUAC. He was big in films, he was big in the theatre and—important to remember—the blacklist never reached the theatre. It is true that, had he defied the Committee, he would have been black-listed in films but he would still have been a major director of plays on Broadway.

In fact, after it was known that he had been summoned, he told his friends that he would never cooperate, never name the names. I sat at a table in Sardi's, in a group that included Abe Burrows (later to give the longest list of names of any of the witnesses), Frank Loesser and the screenwriter, Harry Kurnitz. Kazan told us how he was going to tell the Committee where to get off.

“I've got two million bucks in the bank”, he said, “and no one can make *me* talk”. Good old Gadge, I thought (Gadge was his nickname), he's got guts.

Kazan appeared twice before the Committee. In the first he admitted previous membership in the Communist Party, but he got out. “The last straw came when I was invited to go through a typical scene of crawling and apologising and admitting the error of my ways. . . I had had a taste of police-state living and I did not like it”. Ironic, because what he didn't like doing for the Communists is exactly what he did do before the Committee. On his second appearance he said, “. . . that I did wrong to withhold these names before, because secrecy serves the Communist, and is exactly what they want”.

Kazan not only gave a long list of names, he took a quarter page advertisement in the *New York Times* to justify his action. It explained why he didn't like Communism but it didn't explain the informing. In fact that wasn't mentioned. The word around in showbiz, which Navasky hints at, is that Spyros Skouras, the head man at 20th Century Fox, told Kazan that principles were very nice things but that Fox had several million dollars tied up in two unreleased pictures, and that he should cooperate with

REVIEWS

the Committee. True or not, Kazan certainly cooperated.

I was in New York at that time (1952), preparing a recital at the Town Hall. There was pressure on the management not to rent the auditorium to me. Through Norman Thomas, the perennial Socialist candidate for President, I did get the hall. The day after Kazan's appearance I visited my agent, Abe Lastfogel. After a wait the secretary said I could go in: at that moment Kazan came out of Abe's office. It was about 11 am. Kazan was unshaven, his eyes bloodshot; he looked like a man with a bad hangover. He stopped when he saw me.

"Hiya, Larry", he said. I gulped. I didn't know what to say. I despised him for what he had just done but I felt sorry for him too. "Hello, Gadge".

"Abe tells me you're giving a Town Hall recital. I'm taking 12 tickets. You're going to knock 'em dead, Larry".

"Yeah, sure—glad you're coming, Gadge". He waved goodbye, started to walk down the hall and I went into Abe's office. Suddenly Kazan was back: he gripped my right hand in both of his.

"Larry—it's up to you to lick those bastards. Don't forget, you've gotta *lick* those bastards!" He burst into tears and fled from the office. I think I was near to tears myself.

Kazan has never given a full explanation of what he did and why he did it. If he is asked about it in interviews—inevitably it comes up—he says the subject is too complicated to cover in the allotted time and that he is writing a book about it. He has never written that book.

After Kazan's HUAC appearance he made a film, *On the Waterfront*, which won every award going. The writer was Budd Schulberg, another who had informed to the Committee. The picture was undeniably a masterpiece: it was also an apologia for the informer. Marlon Brando, as Terry Malloy, takes the advice of a priest (Karl Malden) that it is his Christian duty to inform on his former union friends, which he does. The union boss was played by Lee J. Cobb, another informer.

In other chapters Navasky examines the reasons why the informers chose to give names, letting them put their case in their own words. It is a constant refrain: "I never hurt anybody—I only named people who had already been named". This was often untrue but also irrelevant. The main point was you didn't get back to work unless you gave names; that was the test of "sincerity".

There are astonishing revelations in this book.

Sterling Hayden was persuaded by his *psychiatrist* to turn informer. Another psychiatrist, Phil Cohen, seems to have worked for the FBI, sending material from his patients straight to Washington. Certainly quite a few of Cohen's patients *did* end up as cooperative witnesses before the Committee.

There is the case of Edward Dmytryk, one of the original Hollywood Ten, the writers who went to jail rather than cooperate with HUAC. Dmytryk went to jail, came out, found he was still blacklisted and decided that he would cooperate with HUAC after all. He is one of many who claim that they did no harm by naming names, that those they named had already been named, they weren't hurting anybody. But all too often this isn't true. Lee J. Cobb named at least five people who hadn't been named before.

One informer, the writer Isobel Lennart, had her own credo: ". . . I would mention no name that had not been mentioned ten times before. . .". She named several who hadn't been named ten times.

Dmytryk says, ". . . I don't think I put anybody in trouble . . . because they had all been mentioned before". Again, that simply wasn't true. He mentioned at least four people whose names had never been given before.

Navasky renews the argument that the witch-hunting got its charter from of all people, President Truman. Truman, when he signed Executive Order 9835, which required all Government employees to sign a loyalty oath, was giving *carte blanche* to the blacklists. (I remember Robert Taylor, a friendly witness before the Committee, insisting that his fellow-members of the Beverly Hills Tennis Club should sign a similar loyalty oath. When I refused, Taylor tried, unsuccessfully, to get me expelled from the club.)

That Loyalty Order was followed by the Attorney-General's list of about 200 organisations deemed subversive. They included Russian War Relief which had both Eleanor Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower on its letterhead. Based on that list, two ex-FBI men put out a book, *Red Channels*, which became the blacklisting bible. It contained around 800 names — mine, beginning as it does with A, headed the list—and after each name the organisations that the listee belonged to, did shows for, gave money to, etc. There were about eight citations after my name—rather small, I could have given them a much larger one—but even so, two of the organisations I had never heard of. If you were named in that book, you were blacklisted. Every theatrical booker and advertising agent had that book in his desk drawer though they would never admit it. And, as I have made clear, there was only one way to get back to work: but that is the title of this book.

One friend of mine, Philip Loeb, committed suicide rather than cooperate. Another, J. Edward Bromberg, had a heart attack on the stand and died

shortly after. John Garfield died of a similar attack two days after his testimony.

All of this and much more is reported in detail in Victor Navasky's book. I have often heard it said that yes, those were terrible days, but it could never happen again. America has learned its lesson.

I am not so sure. One of the most popular television programmes, *Lou Grant*, has been cancelled, taken off the air, because Edward Asner, its star, spoke on behalf of guerrillas in El Salvador. Asner was the president of the Screen Actors Guild. A former president of that guild was Ronald Reagan who saw to it that both Communists and non-cooperative Committee witnesses were expelled, which meant that they could no longer work in their profession.

And to what end? HUAC uncovered no Communist conspiracy. The Party was never strong and the rumour was that half its membership consisted of FBI men infiltrating. One man owes his career to his work on the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Richard Milhous Nixon, by making the prosecution of Alger Hiss a virtual crusade, made himself a national name and was selected to run on the Republican ticket with Dwight D. Eisenhower. (This led to the famous "little black dog, Checkers" speech—but that's another story.)

HUAC led to McCarthyism, from which the United States, in my opinion, has never recovered. If you think it can't happen here, read this book. Given the right circumstances I think it could happen anywhere.

LARRY ADLER

JIM HERRICK

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THE IRRESISTIBLE DIDEROT by John Hope Mason.
Quartet Books, £15

Of all the great thinkers of the Enlightenment, Diderot alone declared a firm belief in atheism and attempted to carry the implications of that belief into every aspect of his thinking. In this as in his endlessly speculative intelligence, more given to posing questions about the universe and man's place in it than to answering them, he seems the most readily our contemporary among that select band. He too is unique in the extent of the contrast between his reputation when he died in 1784 and his reputation today. At the time of his death he was admired as Editor of the massive *Encyclopédie* and worthy of greatness if only for that vast labour. But many of the works which must assure him an eminence quite the equal to Voltaire and Rousseau, most notably *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, were virtually unknown. (Amongst the many services rendered by Mr Mason is a useful list of "Posthumous publications"; the final date in that list is as recent as 1978.) Diderot's materialist philosophy, his apprehension of human psychology (which won praise from Freud), his views on the fictionality of fiction or the "paradox" of stage-acting, are but some of the numerous ways in which this universal genius continues to challenge and excite our imagination.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of such a thinker is never easy. For Mr Mason it is particularly difficult, as a sizeable part of the book is given over to translated extracts, often running to many pages (the extract from *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* is 32 pages long, from *Le Neveu de Rameau* 28), which necessarily restricts the time spent on describing Diderot's work. In effect, what we have here is a general introduction, with selected passages, for those readers who would like to know something of what Diderot wrote but would find him too difficult *in extenso* or in the original French. Mr Mason is right to discern the need. As he says, Diderot is one of the most attractive but least-read writers of modern Europe. Whereas Voltaire's *Candide*, for instance, is lucidity itself, Diderot's literary explorations are always demanding, made up of conflicting argument and are often couched in language both highly concise and idiomatic.

This book should fill that need. In helping to make Diderot better known, as the *philosophe* deserves, the author has given us an excellent all-round introduction to his subject. A brief biography is followed by a baker's dozen of topics like Fiction, Painting, Aesthetics, Encyclopaedia, which separate out more or less neatly (though the difference between "Atheism" and "Discovery" seems somewhat gratuitous). In each case the author demonstrates that he is well informed on the latest scholarly work, which he handles with unobtrusive mastery.

Nor does he settle for a safe manual-type set of conclusions. He wrestles manfully with the hydra that Diderot's varying attitudes on morality seem to represent. He does not fear, with textual support, to point out Diderot's limitations in political theory or in his views on sexuality in the *Supplément de Bougainville*. He is particularly good at bringing out the originality in Diderot's art criticism (which Baudelaire was later to rediscover with admiration). This book will be read with profit not only by those who are strangers to Diderot but also by students, at every level, of the great *philosophe*. Mr Mason does not claim to break new ground in his interpretations, but he does provide a thoroughly reliable account of Diderot's genius.

Inevitably, perhaps, there are cavils to register. The author rather underplays the quality of Diderot's dramatic criticism, which is coming belatedly to receive the recognition it merits. The debate on whether matter can think seems to be equated with whether animals reason (p 46); the two arguments may run in parallel but do not necessarily overlap.

The notorious *Encyclopédie* article on Geneva did not suggest that the Genevans scarcely believed in Christ's divinity (p 76); it alleged that several of the Genevan *pastors* did not believe in it *at all*, which was much more scandalous. The astronomical problem referred to in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* concerns the precession rather than the procession of the equinoxes. Maupertuis's name is consistently misspelled. Prévost did not translate Richardson's *Pamela* (p 152).

These are but blemishes on the wider scene. Mr Mason has chosen his passages well, rightly and generously giving to major works like *Le Rêve* and *Le Neveu* the importance they deserve. By the end of this book Diderot is presented honestly, with much sympathetic understanding of his complex and shifting focus. After *The Indispensable Rousseau* (published in 1979) and *The Irresistible Diderot*, may we now look forward to *The Incomparable Voltaire*? Given Mr Mason's talents for synthesis, this would be a pleasure to anticipate.

HAYDN MASON

FAMOUS BLASPHEMY TRIALS (5)

The Bigot and the Bill-Poster

J. R. SPENCER

Mental instability was no defence against prosecution for blasphemy in the 19th century. Thomas Pooley was informed on by a Christian clergyman, accused by a Christian prosecutor and sentenced by a Christian judge. But public protest led to his release from prison after five months.

The fuss that followed the imprisonment of George Jacob Holyoake for blasphemy in 1842, and the lull in prosecutions which followed the fuss, was widely taken to signal the end of blasphemy prosecutions. But the lull broke in July 1857, when the Rev Paul Bush prosecuted Thomas Pooley, a deranged Cornish labourer, and got him a prison sentence over three times as long as Holyoake had received.

A sombre, Hardy-esque character, Pooley was a kind of religious maniac in reverse. If anyone would listen he would pour out to them a series of weird anti-Christian beliefs: the earth was alive; if a well was dug too deep, it would perforate its vital parts; if all the bibles were burnt and their ashes spread on the fields, this would cure the potato-blight; and that he, Pooley, had been born to bring such truths as these to light. He was, however, an upright and sober man, and a devoted husband and father; his fellow citizens of Liskeard and the hamlet of Duloe tolerated him as a harmless crank. Neither his infidel views, nor the long flowing beard he wore in

Old Testament style, got in the way of his doing a thriving trade as a bill-poster and a freelance digger of wells.

Unfortunately, Pooley, unlike most of his neighbours, could write, and eventually he took to scribbling bizarre anti-Christian slogans on fences and gates. He put one on a gate belonging to his rector, the Rev Paul Bush, a Puseyite clergyman with contacts in the Vicc Society. Bush thereupon prosecuted Pooley for blasphemy. Two magistrates, one of whom was another clergyman, committed him for trial at Bodmin assizes. In view of the appalling nature of the allegations—scrawling rude words on a parson's gate—they remanded him in prison pending trial.

If Pooley was unlucky in his magistrates, he was unluckier still at assizes. The judge, Sir John Taylor Coleridge, was the former literary critic who had written the famous attack on Shelley over his poem *Queen Mab*:

For men like the writer . . . there are no terms of infamy sufficiently strong. . . . No atheist, as such, can be a true friend, an affectionate relation, or a loyal subject. . . . A disciple following his tenets would not hesitate to debauch, or, after debauching, to abandon any woman; . . . to such it would be sport to tell a deserted wife to obtain with her pretty face support by prostitution, and, when the unhappy maniac sought refuge in self-destruction, to laugh at the fool while in the arms of associate strumpets . . . etc.

Now a judge, he was able to put his prejudices

against infidels into practice. To make matters worse—or apparently worse—for Pooley, the barrister whom the Rev Paul Bush had briefed to prosecute was none other than John Duke Coleridge, the judge's son!

Pooley, undefended at the trial, was rapidly convicted on three counts. The first was for chalking the words, "Duloe stinks of the monster Christ's Bible", on the gate. For this, Coleridge senior gave him six months' imprisonment. The second was for telling one Richard Crapp, another labourer, his horticultural theory about bible ash and potato-blight in a pub. For this enormity, the judge gave him another six months, consecutive to the first. The third count was for saying to the policeman who was carting him off to gaol after his committal for trial: "If it had not been for the blackguard Jesus Christ when he stole the donkey, police would not be wanted. He was the forerunner of all theft and whoredom". For this, Coleridge gave him a further nine months, hoping "you will reproach yourself, in the bitterness of heart for the words you have uttered". So Pooley got 21 months' imprisonment.

A Storm of Protest

In prison, Pooley rapidly went from staring to stark mad. He tore up his prison clothes, refused food, resisted forcible feeding until he vomited blood. He was eventually committed to the local lunatic asylum where, for the first time, the authorities treated him kindly. The Rev Paul Bush, meanwhile, wrote an exultant letter to the *Guardian* advertising what he had done, and urging "others, and particularly those who are more especially bound to check all profaneness and irreligion, to take the course which I have done".

The public, however, was not impressed. It was widely felt that Pooley was not responsible for his actions, and that the sentence was outrageously severe even if he was. Holyoake launched a public campaign for his release, and large sections of the national Press backed him up. Many people, including devout Christians, lobbied the Home Secretary about the case. Five months later he took the point; Pooley was pardoned and released.

The outcry, however, went on. There were calls to abolish the offence of blasphemy. J. S. Mill criticised the Pooley case in his *Essay on Liberty*, and the historian, H. T. Buckle made a ferocious attack on the "unjust and unrighteous" judge in the pages of *Fraser's Magazine*.

At the time, nothing seemed to come of this further agitation. The crime of blasphemy remained. Mr Justice Coleridge weathered the storm, as did the Rev Paul Bush, who remained the Ayatollah of Duloe until his death in 1904. Poor Pooley's punishment continued; he was destitute because no one would now employ him. Coleridge junior, the pro-

secuting counsel, rose to become Lord Chief Justice of England. In that capacity, however, he did eventually deliver a celebrated judgment limiting the scope of the crime of blasphemy. So someone may have learnt something from it.

LETTERS

EVERYONE'S CAUSE

Margaret Moulton's cause—the rights of women—is just, but her letter (September) is not quite fair.

It is inaccurate to include male homosexuals in a long list of women-haters from St Paul to the ayatollahs. Many gay men deeply value the friendship of women. Gay men have suffered the oppression of patriarchal, macho-dominated societies and they question rigid, traditional gender roles. They often, therefore, see women's rights and gay rights as part of the same struggle.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that separatism and man-hating are aspects of the woman's movement. I can understand women wishing to meet together exclusively to discuss strategy, to give each other moral support, and to exchange views without being dominated by men with neanderthal, patriarchal attitudes. But there are dangers in separatism and in excluding men from important public discussions. I can understand women's anger at the ingrained prejudices of a male-dominated society. But there are dangers in emulating the qualities of your oppressors. I can understand women's detestation of the portrayal of women in pornography (although I think the widespread picture of the submissive woman in the kitchen or sexy woman draped over a motor car in advertisements has a far deeper impact on society as a whole). But if you burn down sex shops, as happened in Leeds where do you stop?

Incidentally, any perusal of the bound volumes of "The Freethinker" will show that women's issues have often been covered.

There are many men who agree with Shelley's cry: "Can man be free if woman is a slave?" The fight must be yours, but please allow men to listen to your arguments, to share your feelings, and to play a part in your struggle.

JIM HERRICK

ANTI-MAN, ANTI-HUMAN

Oh dear, in attempting to clarify my position I seem to once again have excited Margaret Moulton's ire (Letters, September).

It is not only man-hating, but also the irrational hatred of one social group by another which I regard as pathological. But I do not believe this problem can be dealt with by legislation, particularly legislation which limits the liberty of the individual. It is only within the context of a conscious effort to change the social conditions which create these problems that they can be solved. People should think and act for themselves rather than rely on the supposed goodwill of politicians!

Yes, I can buy "Spare Rib", but I can't buy "Wires", although there is much in it with which I sympathise. There are also numerous feminist meetings closed to me and other men. Attempts to criticise this attitude, even when well-intended, are not met with reasoned argument but hysterical abuse. Is it any wonder that many women and men are coming to see radical feminism not as a philosophy of liberation but as an

EVENTS

ideology of oppression, and as such anti-human and anti-humanist?

It is not only male egos which have been harmed. Criminal damage, including arson, has been done to shops and cinemas displeasing to feminists. And feminists have marched through the streets chanting "kill men" | Where does criticism of reactionary attitudes on the part of men (criticism often well justified) end and terrorism begin? If the aim of feminists is to replace relationships based on hate, fear, violence and oppression with ones based on love, understanding, tolerance and compassion, they seem to be going the wrong way about it.

TERRY LIDDLE

CURIOUS AND UNCONVINCING

As a "Freethinker" reader on and off for more than 20 years, I found Brenda Able's letter (September) rather curious.

I have read a considerable amount of news and many informative articles about reforms and campaigns which were very much in women's interests. These have included divorce, family planning and abortion. There has been a high proportion of women writing for "The Freethinker", which does not indicate an anti-woman attitude.

Brenda Able's defence of the exclusion of men from meetings is totally unconvincing. Radicals have always been misrepresented by the Press, so that is no justification for discrimination. Radical feminists will also be misrepresented, and not always by men.

URSULA NEWBOULD

WRONG TARGET

Instead of attacking "The Freethinker"—and indeed anyone who rebuffs their insults—the men-hating minority of feminists should direct their fire elsewhere.

For instance, as "The Freethinker" has often pointed out, there are many groups of evangelical and puritanical people who campaign for censorship, oppose sex education and try to undermine hard-won social reforms. They prefer women to be in their traditional place—the kitchen. But "radical" feminists would discover to their embarrassment that most of those groups were started or are run by women.

STEVE RICHARDSON

This correspondence is now closed.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

Barbara Smoker, in her report on the World Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (September), says that English, French and German were used, "but English-speaking people are always at an advantage at the IHEU". A bit unfair is it not? Delegates from Turkey, Italy, Japan, Spain and elsewhere would have to be selected not because of their qualities as humanists but because of an ability to speak and understand English, German or French.

The only practicable and fair solution is for everyone in the world to learn Esperanto, and to use that language alone at all international gatherings and when you have to communicate in speech or writing with someone whose language is not your own.

I know there are humanists who speak Esperanto. If they would like to get in touch with me at 44 Morley Road Twickenham Middlesex, I would gladly join them in getting a world-wide Esperanto Humanist Group going.

PETER DANNING

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road, Brighton (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton station). Sunday, 5 December, 5 pm for 5.30 pm Eric McGraw: "Overpopulation is Everybody's Baby". Saturday 13 November, 6.30 pm for 7 pm. Annual Dinner. Tickets £5 from Russell Dale, 10 Buci Crescent, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 12 November, 7.30 pm. Speaker: Maeve Denby, General Secretary, BHA.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

Humanist Holidays. 24-28 December: Christmas at a central Brighton hotel. Details of this and other holidays from Mrs Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 14 December, 7.45 pm. Peter Robins: "The Youth Culture of Today".

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 25 November, 7.45 pm. Barbara Smoker: "Voluntary Euthanasia—is it the way out?"

The Progressive League. Golden Jubilee celebrations. Exhibition of paintings by PL members, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Opening ceremony by John Morley, Monday 29 November, 7.30 pm. Exhibition continues throughout December. Conference at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts, Friday, 10 December until Sunday, 12 December. Lady Jean Medaware: "Progress and the Family"; James Hemming: "The Confused Generation"; Patricia Hewitt: "1984 is Just Around the Corner"; James Berry: "The Place of Poetry Today"; Fay Weldon: "The Communication Explosion". PL Conference fee, £30. Bookings and information: Joan Miller, 50 South Hill Park, London NW3, telephone 01-435 5393.

The Steyning Humanists. 49 Penlands Vale, Steyning, Sussex. Sunday, 14 November, 3.30 pm. Wm McIlroy: "A Hundred Years of 'The Freethinker'".

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

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 26 November, 3.30 pm. Dr John Durant: "Science and Religion in Contemporary America".

Workers' Education Association and the Thomas Paine Society. Vaughan College, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester. Saturday, 27 November, 2.15-5.45 pm. "Thomas Paine and the English Radical Tradition". Tutor: Dr Edward Royle. Fee £1.70 payable to WEA, c/o T. F. Mahony, Vaughan College.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 28 November, 5.30 pm. Robert Clare: "Electrical Reform".

No Sermons for the Young at Brook Centres

The annual report of Brook Advisory Centres for 1981-82 is a telling indictment of irresponsible societies of Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants which have conducted a relentless vilification campaign against organisations like Brook, the Family Planning Association and the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Brook centres helped over 60,000 people last year, 75 per cent of them under the age of 25. Four per cent of all clients and seven per cent of new clients were under the age of 16.

Far from causing or encouraging a barrier between parent and teenager, as its mud-slinging opponents often claim, advisory centres such as Brook frequently reconcile an alienated adolescent to his or her parents. Young people who attend Brook centres can relax and talk to a doctor or a trained counsellor. They are encouraged—except in obviously inappropriate circumstances—to confide in one or both parents.

Many public authorities see the value of providing help such as Brook offers to young people, over 70 per cent of whom have their first sexual experience while still in their teens. Health Authorities, Social Service Departments and Family Practitioner

Committees now grant over half a million pounds annually to Brook centres.

The economic sense of making such grants has been confirmed by the Laing study earlier this year which showed that for every £100 spent preventing unwanted pregnancies, £530 is saved on supplementary benefit, residential child care, sickness benefit and abortion.

In financial and social terms teenage pregnancies are a great strain on national resources. There is, in addition, the emotional distress which often results from an unwanted pregnancy.

It is during teenage years that most males and females are very active sexually and therefore at greatest risk. They need information and advice on contraception that is based on physical reality and emotional needs. The last thing they want is a mini-sermon based on the moth-eaten moral codes of sex-hating and envious religious fanatics.

Sunday Opening Down Under

Hotels in the Australian state of Victoria will be allowed to open their bars for four hours on Sundays under new legislation. The Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne and other church leaders are opposed to this change. The Presbyterian Church is concerned about "the desecration of the Sabbath".

Baptists say that Sunday opening will play havoc with attempts to reduce the number of road accidents. But Dr Peter Bush, a senior police surgeon, commented that "if it is accompanied by a publicity campaign outlining the dangers of drinking and driving, there's nothing to be frightened of".

The secretary of Victoria Police Association said he could see no reason why people should not be able to buy alcohol 24 hours a day in some circumstances. "Let's have a law which takes in account community requirements", he added.

Doctors Criticised

"It suggests that the embryo and the baby are essentially identical—a suggestion that can only be based on the magical idea of the 'temple of the human soul', thus pandering to religious superstition and human ignorance".

Miss Smoker added that "whereas the early embryo, having no nervous system, cannot possibly experience anything, the baby is obviously a perceiving, experiencing being; and whereas the early embryo can be seen clearly only with the aid of a microscope, and might easily get lost on Dr Hedgcock's imaginary board, the baby is a fully visible—and audible—presence.

"Even the Christian fundamentalists who whipped up the outcry against Dr Edwards for allegedly experimenting on surplus human eggs were puzzled by its hysterical ferocity. Why, they asked, was the great British public, who accepted abortion readily enough, so much more protective of the early embryo than of the foetus? Why indeed?

"But while the Christians implied that there should be more vociferous opposition to abortion, we secularists take the view that the protest in the mass media about the embryos was quite unjustified—even had experiments been taking place, which they were not—and was based on irrational ideas engendered not only by religious zealots but, less expectedly, by members of the medical profession".

It was decided at the annual general meeting of Exit, held in London on 9 October, to revert to the organisation's former name, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Members also endorsed the executive committee's decision to cancel the membership of former general secretary, Nicholas Reed. He had been nominated for the committee and had refused to withdraw his candidature. It was felt strongly that his serving on the committee would be against the interests of the Society and the cause of voluntary euthanasia. It was also against Nicholas Reed's own interests in view of the promise made in mitigation at the trial by Counsel on his behalf.