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NSS REPORT WARNS AGAINST "OVER-SIMPLE SOLUTIONS" TO RECESSION

The last year has not been an encouraging one for secularists, according to the National Secular Society in its annual report. The Society's aim is to combat the pernicious influence of religious leaders and ideas. Its principles include promoting "the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace . . . to further common cultural interests and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind". Many of the serious developments that have taken place in Britain and elsewhere are highlighted in the report.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Britain and the upgrading of diplomatic relations with the Vatican to ambassadorial status are seen as evidence of the Church's increasing influence. The Pope's hard-line approach to family planning is condemned. He lacks knowledge of family problems and buries his head in the sand when confronted with the facts of over-population.

The NSS maintains its anti-militarist stand and is disdainful of jingoism. "Although secularists would not agree on their analysis of the proper response to Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands, the 'bash the Argies' approach of the popular Press and the aggressive patriotism of the Prime Minister were an unhappy sight", the report says.

The war in Lebanon resulted in atrocities that shocked the world, and the belligerence of the Israeli leader, Menachem Begin, shocked even many Jews. After the wholesale massacre of refugees by Christian Phalangists, Christian commentators referred to "so-called Christian" Phalangists. "But the religious element of the conflict is apparent to all observers of the situation".

Sectarian strife was accelerated in Northern Ireland where "two distinct cultural groups have been rendered irreconcilable by their divisive sectarian

education and the impact of religious dogma on cultural influences.

"A small gain for reason was the passing of a law decriminalising homosexual acts between adults, thus bringing Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom". But even that reform was achieved because of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights.

Once again the question of disestablishment is raised. Anglican leaders resisted the Government's attempt to turn the Falklands "service of thanksgiving" at St Paul's Cathedral into a victory celebration. And the Church of England has offered unpalatable reflections for the Government in the form of a report recommending a measure of unilateral disarmament. Arguments for disestablishment, put forward by the National Secular Society for over a century, gain a new validity. There may now be Anglican clergy who might be happy to see disestablishment.

"But", the report warns, "there is no sign that the Church of England is ever likely willingly to relinquish its power and endowments".

Influencing the Young

Education ought to open young people's eyes to the dangers and illogicalities of religious groups, whether traditional or new-fangled. But a period in which orthodox Christianity declined has seen a boom in other forms of religious superstition. Fringe cults like the Moonies have flourished. And as the report points out, "more than a year after the Unification Church lost its libel action in the High Court against the *Daily Mail*, no steps have been taken to put into effect a recommendation from

(continued on back page)

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NEWS A

THE PERILS OF PATRIOTISM AND PIETY

Therefore. . .

Be it thy course to busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels; that action thence borne out,

May waste the memory of the former days.

(King Henry IV, Part II—Shakespeare)

The dying usurper's advice to his son remains relevant to modern politics. Fleet Street and the Thatcher pushers are obviously determined to make the most of the Falklands factor. Mrs Thatcher's trumpeting about Fortress Falklands was just what they wanted to hear, and the General Election will be safely over before the appalling cost of this policy is realised. Her visit to the Falklands last month, which included the inevitable church service, was another notable contribution to the campaign being conducted by the Committee for the Re-Election of the Premier (CREEP for short).

Popular patriotism and jingoism are a serious health hazard, particularly to those of military age and of a gullible disposition. The armed forces' public relations officers are highly skilled salesmen whose work has been made considerably easier by mass unemployment.

Perhaps the most sickening episode in recent history was the spectacle of men being cheered on to their deaths by bombastic windbags at Westminster, cynical journalists and saloon bar patriots. Servicemen's families lined the dockside and joined in the cheers. A few weeks later the cheers were turned to tears with the realisation that it was not just "the Argies" who were being maimed and killed. But the tears of those who mourned the loss of relatives were genuine, unlike the crocodile tears with which the pages of newspapers like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* were awash.

The *Daily Mail* rounded off 1982 with an article by Sir Arthur Bryant which helped to keep the patriotic pot on the boil. "This Vintage Year for the Real Spirit of Britain", by "one of Britain's most distinguished historians" read like a Saatchi and Saatchi handout à la Peter Simple.

Sir Arthur was quite emotional over those Argentinians who suffered at the hands of "a military dictatorship notorious for its treatment of dissidents". It is odd how he, like so many other patriots, became aware of the repressive regime in Argentina only after that country tried to occupy a group of islands which Britain had grabbed during her Empire building days. The reign of terror in Argentina had

S AND NOTES

been widely reported, such reports being dismissed as Communist propaganda.

The deafening silence in patriotic circles about military dictatorships in South American countries can be accounted for by the fact that most of them are heavily backed by the United States. And some dictatorships are good customers of our patriotic armaments manufacturers. British firms—including British Aerospace, 49 per cent of which is owned by the Government—had no compunction about selling arms to such regimes. As Douglas Hoyle, MP, told the House of Commons: “It is likely that some of those missiles which killed British troops were manufactured by British workers”.

Daily Mail readers were informed by Sir Arthur that “Britain’s first woman Prime Minister . . . staked her future and that of the country in sending a fleet and amphibious force of arms in wintery seas, 8,000 miles from home . . . to storm and liberate a rocky archipelago. . .”. The cost was great, but never mind: “The words Task Force South recalled that England had a soul”. (This will be immensely comforting to the widows, fatherless children and bereaved parents of non-English British servicemen.)

Sir Arthur implied that the welfare and wishes of the inhabitants of the Falklands, “a small, self-governing British community”, was one consideration that led to the despatch of Task Force South at a vast financial cost and loss of life. This touching concern for the 1,800 inhabitants of the Falklands would be more credible but for the fact that not so long ago the present Government was proposing to deprive them of British nationality. And Britain has evicted hundreds of people from their island homes so that these could be used as military bases or for nuclear tests. There was no question of those islanders deciding their own future; that privilege enjoyed by white British settlers is not extended to dark-skinned natives.

“One of Britain’s most distinguished historians” managed to squeeze in a puff for two matters of vital importance to the nation — his book, *Spirit of England*, and God (in that order). No doubt Sir Arthur was being unintentionally funny when referring to the tolerance that “has rested in the last resort on the Christian belief in the sanctity of the individual”. The “Argies”, whose destruction sent Thatcherites and other patriots into paroxysms of jubilation, are a far more Christian people than are the British. They were also praying to the Christian God of Margaret Thatcher and Sir Arthur Bryant for the safe return of their men.

Mrs Thatcher’s Falklands gamble may come off

and her second term at 10 Downing Street ensured. The cost of Fortress Falklands will mean even more depleted hospital, welfare and educational services. Critics of this disastrous policy—including those in the Conservative Party—can expect no mercy from the pro-Thatcher gutter Press.

The Prime Minister has had her way. Ageing jingoists should now have the decency to shut up.

A religious zealot who beat his 14-month-old daughter and two-year-old son until they were black and blue in order to “drive out the devil” has been sentenced to two years’ imprisonment at Winchester Crown Court. He and his wife, who received a suspended prison sentence, were found guilty of causing grievous bodily harm to the children who were beaten with a bamboo cane. The man’s mother said of the couple: “All they do is read passages of the Bible to each other”. A detective told the Court that the man said: “If you are a Christian you will know it says in the Bible he who spareth the rod does not love his children”.

THE AWFUL RECORD OF BIBLE-BASED CHRISTIANITY

“Over the centuries a lot of ugly and vicious things have been done in the name of Christianity, but it is time that certain humanists summed up enough concentration to distinguish between angry, ambitious people who use a distortion of Christianity to fuel their lust for power and Christians who take their faith from the Bible and base their beliefs and behaviour on the words and actions of Jesus Christ”. Thus writes Christian Weekly Newspapers columnist Tim Lenton in a commentary on an item in our December issue.

Who are the angry, ambitious people and what motivated them? Anger has always been a Christian characteristic. Their deity commanded, “You shall have no other gods before me”, and believers have always been extremely angry with those who choose to live without their preferred god. They have been even angrier with fellow-Christians whose interpretation of the scriptures and understanding of “God’s will” was different to their own.

Ambition is a common human failing, but it reaches its apogee in the true Christian. Could there be a more inordinate ambition than the attainment of personal salvation?

It is the modern peddlers of religious propaganda who use a distortion of Christianity to make their brand of clapped-out superstition more acceptable. Mr Lenton prefers to ignore or, more likely, conceal the historic fact that some of the ugliest features of life and bloodiest episodes in human existence derived from Bible-based Christian teachings.

For instance, the biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (tarted up in the RSV as "You shall not permit a sorceress to live"), was acted upon by Catholics and Protestants who took their faith from the Bible. Such teachings were honestly regarded as justification for the killing of thousands of men, women and children in the crazy witch-hunting mania that swept Europe.

Christian teachings instilled terror in not only the victims of witch-hunters and inquisitors. Its revolting doctrines, particularly that of eternal punishment, blighted the lives of millions until hell fire was extinguished by freethinkers. Some of the greatest Christian preachers and writers described the lower regions in lurid detail, often using biblical texts to illustrate their warnings about the wrath to come.

Defenders of the slave system had no difficulty in finding scriptural justification for the practice. But the Christian minority of abolitionists looked in vain to "the good book" to find support for their cause.

In the Bible, woman occupies a position of inferiority and is constantly reminded of her subjection. It is not surprising that "Christians who take their faith from the Bible" have been the most resolute opponents of movements for the emancipation of women.

Tim Lenton gives credit to *The Freethinker* for publishing letters "containing views markedly at variance with its own". He refers to a letter from Simon Kirk (also in the December issue) implying that we see religious fanaticism as being the cause of all wars and disputes. Mr Kirk did not give a specific example of our alleged claim "that the Irish or Palestinian situations are solely the products of religion". But his rather glib assertions were good enough for Tim Lenton who declares that he "could not have put it better".

Can even the most determined apologist for Christianity deny that for centuries Europe was devastated by wars fought between rival Christian rulers and armies? The Crusades were expeditions by Christian knights and soldiers who waged war on all who did not submit to the Cross. The history of colonisation by Britain, France, Spain and other imperialist powers shows that the Christian churches were not concerned with preventing bloodshed and plunder but with their right to proselytise.

Freethinker readers and contributors hold differing views on the part that religion has played in causing war and conflict. But perhaps the best summary of majority opinion can be found in the February 1982 issue. It was an extract from the National Secular Society's annual report.

"The aims of terrorists . . . may well be social and political. But their commitment is according to their religious backgrounds, and their methods are the methods of religious extremists through the ages. Such atrocities as burning alive at the stake, as

cutting off hands and shooting knee-caps, have rarely been carried out except in the name of a god or a deified leader, in accordance with the divine will as revealed in sacred texts or in the visions of fanatics".

It is time certain religious journalists recognised why ugly and vicious things have been done by Christians. Christianity is an ugly and vicious creed.

Canon John Collins, the radical churchman and supporter of many progressive causes, has died at the age of 77. As a pioneer of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament he led some of the biggest peace demonstrations ever seen in Britain. John Collins was born into a family of keen Anglicans. As a boy he was taught by the maid to spit every time he passed a Nonconformist chapel.

A DISTURBING AFFAIR

Although freethinkers hold no brief for people who disrupt church services (such behaviour is usually motivated by strong religious emotions) it does seem that fines of £20 each imposed on four schoolgirls last month was somewhat excessive. The girls, whose ages ranged from 13 to 15, admitted that they had disturbed the rector and congregation of St Mary and St Margaret parish church, Castle Bromwich.

The case was brought under the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act of 1860 which abolished "the jurisdiction of the Ecclesiastical Courts . . . in England and Ireland in certain cases of brawling". It decreed that "any person who shall be guilty of riotous, violent or indecent behaviour" in places of worship or burial grounds "shall, on conviction thereof . . . be liable to a penalty of not more than five pounds for every such offence".

The girls' action was silly and annoying, but it hardly constituted "riotous, violent or indecent behaviour". And were the magistrates justified in bumping the fines up to £20? The parents are probably the real losers in this case.

It would have been more just, and an awesome deterrent to future misbehaviour, if the window-tapping minxes had been ordered by the Court to attend morning service the following Sunday.

JIM HERRICK

VISION AND REALISM—A HUNDRED YEARS OF "THE FREETHINKER"

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Hopes and Fears for Peace

NICOLAS WALTER

An active member both of the freethought movement and of the nuclear disarmament movement discusses the present situation, as the revived campaign for unilateral disarmament enters a critical stage.

For more than a century most freethinkers in this country have supported the peace movement. They have generally worked in the existing peace organisations, though not always—before the First World War there was a Rationalist Peace Society led by such figures as J. M. Robertson and Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner. Since the Second World War many freethinkers have been active in the peace movement, especially that part of it which has concentrated on nuclear disarmament. Again, they have generally worked in other organisations, though not always—Barbara Smoker led Humanist contingents on the Aldermaston Marches from 1961 onwards, and contingents from the National Secular Society and the Socialist Secular Association have appeared on more recent demonstrations.

I have always taken this tradition for granted, and it seemed appropriate that the best-known member of the old nuclear disarmament movement 20 years ago was also the best-known member of the freethought movement, Bertrand Russell. Similarly, I don't think it is coincidental that I first met so many of my friends in the freethought movement in the Committee of 100. I am sure that most members of freethought organisations now support some measure of unilateral disarmament by Britain, yet this is hardly reflected in our own activities. The British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society have passed resolutions supporting the revived nuclear disarmament movement, but haven't been able to do much more; the members of the Rationalist Press Association and the South Place Ethical Society probably have much the same views, but these organisations don't pass political resolutions. There has anyway been a realistic reluctance to risk polarising our organisations, which already have plenty of problems, over an issue which isn't central to our concerns. So we still generally take part in the activities of other organisations.

The past three years have seen the appearance of new organisations, such as the World Disarmament Campaign and the European Nuclear Disarmament Movement, and the reappearance of old organisations, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Once more one of the best-known figures is a well-known freethinker, Fenner Brockway. Compared

with the old days, there is far less political and religious sectarianism, there is far less disagreement about policies and methods, and above all there is increasing support from ordinary people. CND is much more of a genuine umbrella organisation than before, it is supporting a much wider range of activities, and its membership and demonstrations are larger than last time. Indeed the London marches and meeting in June 1982 became the biggest peace demonstration held in this country. Public opinion surveys and media coverage confirm that a larger proportion of the population than ever before opposes British nuclear weapons, American nuclear bases in Britain, and new nuclear weapons in Europe, and that larger numbers than ever before are active in unilateralist activities and are also in favour of direct action and civil disobedience.

The movement is now entering a critical stage, for this is the year when new American Cruise missiles are due to be installed in Britain, and when there is likely to be a General Election in which for the first time a major political party will campaign for a nuclear disarmament policy (the Labour Party is officially committed by resolutions passed at the 1982 Annual Conference, and is led by Michael Foot, the veteran unilateralist—and freethinker). The next major demonstrations will be at the proposed Cruise missile base at Greenham Common in Berkshire and the proposed Trident missile base at Faslane in Clydeside next Easter. Meanwhile, the main focus of the movement has been on the peace-camps which have been established at a dozen bases all over the country since September 1981, and which have been the sites of several demonstrations.

Women Only

The most important of these demonstrations were held at Greenham Common in December 1982, and they were successful in almost every way, but one sour note was the appearance of an unpleasant and unfamiliar element of sexism—the exclusion of men from the peace-camp since January 1982 and from an active part in the recent demonstrations. There are strong arguments for women-only organisations and demonstrations, especially on specifically women's issues, but there are strong arguments against introducing sectarian and separatist principles into a movement which concerns and has always involved both sexes—especially when some of the reasons given were equal and opposite to the sexist

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Church Power in Northern Ireland

PETER BROOKE

Although there has been a marked decline in church allegiance among the British people, those institutions still command considerable support in Northern Ireland. They effectively control the education system and exercise considerable influence in public life. The writer of this article examines the historic development of the present situation in the province and believes that a closer association with Westminster will help towards the secularisation of Northern Ireland. Dr Brooke is the author of a PhD thesis, "Controversies in Ulster Presbyterianism 1790-1836" (Cambridge, 1980). He also contributed a chapter on "Religion and Secular Thought" to the recently published "Belfast: the Making of the City".

When talking about "Church Power in Northern Ireland" we have to consider first the power of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland as a whole. The Roman Catholic Church is by far the most substantial clerical power in the island. By contrast, the Protestant churches in Northern Ireland (they are not significant independent forces in the Republic) are divided, and church attendance, though higher than the UK average, is well below that of the Catholic Church. The Church of Ireland requires the same level of commitment as the Church of England; those churches, such as the Rev Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church, which require a level of commitment similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, are a small, if noisy, minority.

The Free Presbyterian Church and the much smaller, more sober Reformed Presbyterian Church both aspire to establish schools under their own control, mainly to counter the teaching of the theory of evolution. This, however, remains a remote and unrealisable aspiration. Even if it were to occur they would not receive State support (at least as long as these things are decided at Westminster). The Roman Catholic Church on the other hand has complete, unfettered control over the education of one third of the population, with all current costs and 85 per cent of capital costs fully paid for by the State. And this, of course, was the case under the old Stormont Unionist regime.

It is true that the Protestant churches are represented on the boards of many State schools. This is because, when the denominational primary schools were handed over to the State in the 1920s, a right of representation for the "transferors" was written in. After the 1947 Education Act this was extended to the new secondary schools. It is of course a minority representation and though it is disgraceful—especially the extension to the secondary schools—it is difficult to work up an agitation against it given the much greater power over education exercised

by the Catholic Church. It should be added for those in England, who might be tempted to feel a sense of moral superiority, that the Catholic Church exercises similar power over its State supported schools in the rest of the United Kingdom.

What is the secret of the strength of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland? Why is Ireland the only Catholic country in Europe that has not generated a substantial anti-clerical movement?

To answer that question requires a great effort of the imagination. We have to imagine Gaelic Irish society as it was prior to the 18th century. Ireland, as everyone knows, has been "Christian" since the days of St Patrick and, notionally, Catholic. But the Catholicism of Gaelic Ireland was hardly recognised as such by the Pope. Adrian IV gave Ireland to Henry II in the hopes that Henry would convert it. From the time of the Norman invasions the Irish church was divided into an Anglo-Norman church which participated in the Roman Catholic Church, and a Gaelic church which remained an integral part of the pre-Christian clan system. In the 17th century, before the final collapse of the clan system under Cromwell and William III, the Gaelic church successfully resisted the reforms of the Catholic counter-reformation.

Isolated Catholicism

The Irish "Catholics" of the 18th century, leaving aside a small aristocratic crust, bore very little resemblance to European Catholics. The society was well supplied with priests trained in Europe but, under the penal laws, there was no functioning hierarchy. The priests had no institutional back-up and were isolated in communities which continued time honoured, localised, neo-pagan religions of their own. It was a clan society that had lost its clan leadership. Their culture was not functional in the new type of society imposed on them by Britain. They spoke a language which cut them off from their new rulers and, indeed, from Europe. And although they conducted effective terrorist offensives against local landlords, they had no national organisation, political or religious.

The conversion of this society into a modern, stable, independent English-speaking State within about one hundred years (from the formation of O'Connell's Catholic Association in the 1820s to the establishment of the Free State) is one of the most impressive developments in recent European history and, compared with the attempts of, say, Czechoslovakia, Poland or Lithuania to establish independent statehood, it has been achieved with remarkably little shedding of blood. The credit for this very considerable achievement must go to the two institutions most involved with Irish affairs at the

time—the British government and the Roman Catholic Church. Our main interest at present lies with the latter.

The process of the Irish people becoming a modern, English-speaking nation coincides with the process of the formation of the church as a truly Roman Catholic Church with an effective national hierarchy. They can best be understood as the same process by which at the end of the 19th century, the demoralised and non-functional society of the 18th century was evangelising China—it was full of a sense of mission and purpose and believed it had lessons to teach the world. This “spirit of the nation” was provided by the Roman Catholic church, its own priesthood and religious orders being massively supplied with personnel from Irish families, so that it would be wrong to see it as something apart from the society imposing itself. It was the society, and it stands as a remarkable tribute to the organisational abilities and political acumen of the Irish people.

It was this essential Catholicism which eventually made the break with Protestant Britain inevitable. The Republic of Ireland separated from Britain in order to develop freely as a Catholic country (and the liberal secular froth which danced on top of the national movement was quickly blown away after 1920). We can see this as a progressive development if we understand religions as humanly created phenomena which serve human ends and are modified through time. But we could hardly expect, or even admire, such a lofty historical perspective on the part of the population of the North East part of the island, who did not have to go through this process of development, who felt at home with the culture of Protestant Britain and whose major 19th century achievement was the creation of Belfast as a great industrial city.

Political Distortion

This population was unable to develop a radical-conservative political division along normal British lines because, throughout the 19th century, it was faced with the possibility of subjection to an increasingly self-confident and numerically stronger Catholic nationalism. It therefore had to cohere as a “Protestant Unionist” population (and this distorting effect was fully operational well before 1886).

Even after they had secured continued membership of the UK in the 1920s the further development of the Ulster Protestants was distorted by the quite unnecessary and mischievous imposition of a devolved Parliament and by the refusal of the British political parties to organise in Northern Ireland. Thus the maintenance of the Northern Ireland state required a continual exercise of will on the part of the Ulster Protestant population (the maintenance of a coherent majority in the devolved Parliament) and prevented the development of the kind of deep-rooted political disagreements that

would have eventually rendered the religious label obsolete. Ulster Catholics on the other hand, already cut off from the free development of the Catholic State in the South, were put in the intolerable position of being ruled directly by their traditional enemies.

The introduction of Direct Rule in 1972 provided an opportunity to put an end to this state of affairs. In Westminster, Ian Paisley is the head of a party with three MPs. The Catholic, nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party has at present no MPs—it might have three after the number of Northern Ireland seats in Westminster is increased (a move which the SDLP opposed). In that perspective our problems begin to seem less formidable. In any devolved assembly, however, Paisley and the SDLP each have one third of the seats. The denominational conflict dominates everything.

The last ten years have been marked by successive governments trying to move us back from the hopeful and potentially liberating situation opened up by Direct Rule to the fixed, sterile and immovable religious conflict that will inevitably dominate any parochial Parliament in Northern Ireland so long as a substantial minority wishes to be incorporated into the Catholic Republic—and why wouldn't they, when faced with the prospect of being ruled by an Ulster Protestant dominated Parliament?

If Westminster starts to govern us directly in a principled manner, as if it felt it wanted and had a right to be here, and if we are granted the opportunity to participate fully in Westminster politics through joining and voting for the major Westminster parties, then we will have taken a considerable step towards the much needed secularisation of Northern Ireland.

Hopes and Fears for Peace

arguments traditionally used against women.

So far this development hasn't mattered much, because the positive spirit and effects of the women's demonstrations outweighed the negative assumptions and implications of the anti-masculine rule, but it has aroused anxiety and argument, especially about the revised version of the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the Fall, whereby only Adam ate the fruit of the tree of patriarchy and only his male descendants have inherited his sin. Let us hope that it doesn't become a permanent feature of a movement which faces such real problems as the nuclear arms race between the Superpowers, the pressure of the military-industrial complex, the propaganda of the Right-wing press, and a Conservative Government presiding over military victory in the Falklands and economic defeat in the recession. If we are to win in 1983, we must work together, women with men as well as freethinkers with believers.

A Warning From the Schools

T. F. EVANS

The education system is being savaged by the present Government's programme of expenditure cuts and false economies. A recent survey by the National Union of Teachers, published under the title "Schools Speak Out", has revealed that nearly 40 years after the 1944 Education Act thousands of Britain's children are being taught in large classes, teachers are thoroughly demoralised and school buildings are often in a deplorable state.

It is inevitable that, at a time of economic difficulty, everyone should think first of the dire consequences to himself. If he is a motorist, he thinks that the rise in the price of petrol is shocking and it is not very long before the dispassionate current of his thought leads him to conclude that total disaster to the entire country will be the result. If he is a commuter, and railways fares rise steeply (if anyone can imagine such a thing), he sees the country being brought to its knees (almost literally) through the lack of a satisfactory system of public transport. If the cost of postage should rise, then the end of the world could be near. But the subject is painful and we will not dwell upon it in a publication designed for family reading.

Byron once wrote: "if I laugh . . . 'Tis that I may not weep". It is all too easy to find a bitter humour in our continuing discontents. Perhaps it is all that we can do, and it helps us to bear them more philosophically than might be otherwise possible. Things are, or should be, very different when the economic difficulties bear most harshly on those parts of our national fabric which are most vital and most vulnerable. The National Health Services is one example that comes quickly to mind, and the agonies of the strike of last year with its unsatisfactory ending, have done damage, the extent of which cannot yet be assessed.

The education service is another example. Since the end of the war, when Butler's monumental act was placed on the statute book, we have tried in this country to build a system of schools that would offer to every child the opportunity to develop his own potentiality and to place his talents at the service of the community. That has been the object. Of course, we are conscious of failures. There have been bitter disputes that have impeded progress, but progress has been made.

In a wide general sense, the vast majority of the country has agreed that a publicly provided education service is essential for any society that considers itself civilised. This agreement has crossed many boundaries which have previously divided the coun-

try. Thus, while the religious bodies have been concerned for a good education system as, incidentally, a means of promoting their own influence, the humanists have pursued the same ends with, it is hoped, a different view—that the pursuit of education for its own sake will bring about true freedom of thought. What is important is that both have seen the importance of education.

If both the parties to such a continuing dispute can see the importance of a public education system, it is no less vital that they should realise the seriousness of the threats that are now being presented to such a system. Of course, people with professional interests have been in the forefront of those who seek to draw attention to the blows being dealt at their life and livelihood. Thus, the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers' union in the country, has understandably been deeply concerned, not simply at the cuts in education expenditure that have been imposed by different governments during the last decade, but by the accompanying fact "that their efforts to minimise the impact on children of the cuts in education finance had, in fact, masked the severe damage being done to the education service".

The Wasted Years

Accordingly, the NUT sent out a questionnaire to selected members, the object of which was to gather facts about the way in which "society is prepared to treat its youngest generation". The meaning of these words is that the survey was to apply to primary schools only, not necessarily because these are the most important part of the education service, although many would argue that this is so, but because in the stark words of the General Secretary of the Union, Fred Jarvis, "these children will not have another chance — these are their formative years".

It must be made clear that this survey does not purport to be one in which facts that nobody knew are brought to the surface and a conclusion then reached. The conclusions—and to say this is in no way to reflect adversely on anyone — had been reached long ago. Teachers knew from their day-to-day experience that most serious damage was being done to the service, but they did not feel that everyone else yet realised how serious the damage was. The survey is thus a publicity exercise in the best sense; it does not pretend to be more, and should certainly not be thought of as less important for that reason.

The replies to the questionnaire were received from primary schools of different types in different parts of England and Wales. The sample was fully

representative of the different types of school and of the different types of local education authority. The questionnaires that were returned represented 71 out of the 104 local education authorities in England and Wales.

The respondents were asked to give details of the effects of cuts since 1979. For some, from, for example, Dudley, Somerset, West Sussex and Cornwall, replies were received explaining that the effects of the cuts actually made in that period did not seem very great as the starting line was so low. Nevertheless, in total, it is clear from the replies that the effect of the cuts is extremely damaging and deeply distressing. Thus, despite the falling school roles, there were in 1981 still over a million children in classes of over 31 pupils, in spite of the efforts through the years to reduce the tutor-pupil ratio. Details are given from all sides of the growth in large classes, with consequent increases in mixed age teaching, causing growing difficulty, severe strain on existing teachers and an unavoidable decrease in non-classroom activities as well as undesirable effects on the curriculum itself.

Vandals at Work

Major effects are also seen in the reduction of remedial work and, of course, the effects of all these developments have been most serious in socially deprived areas, giving added significance to the scriptural injunction that "from him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath". School meals and school transport have all had to be cut or severely reduced. Cuts in the capitation allowance have meant that essential equipment, even paper, is hard to come by and is sometimes provided by local firms from their waste, or by Parent Teacher Associations out of funds originally raised to provide for the schools various facilities that are not normally provided by the authorities. The picture is described in the report as "consistently dismal".

Teachers were asked to report on the maintenance of the fabric of the buildings in which the young children receive their introduction to the education system. From all sides come reports of neglect in both internal and external maintenance. It may be argued that teaching can be carried on in schools where paintwork needs renewal, where windows broken by vandalism remain unrepaired and where the playground is dangerous for the smallest children. It could be argued that, in order that young children be encouraged to learn their first lessons, it is not necessary for schools to be cleaned regularly. Indeed, if cleaners can be employed on so-called "productivity schemes", the effect of which is often that essential work is skimmed, the result can only be to the public good—that is, more money can be saved!

There is only one response to this. It is to ask

whether such principles and practices operate elsewhere—in the banks, for instance. The answer is "No". There is one law for the private sector and another for the public. The schools in which the children are educated do not deserve the same care and attention and style as the temples in the High Street, not where the money is made, but where the money is managed. Every reader is free to draw his own conclusions.

The last section of the report is headed "Teacher Morale". To comment on the replies that are recorded, it may be best to set out one set of replies: *There is a lack of incentives to put one's heart into teaching* (Lincolnshire);

I have never seen morale lower (Newham);

I have never known teachers so concerned for the future and the likely difficulties the school will have to face (Durham);

Morale has been damaged almost irreparably (Manchester);

Morale has never been lower in my thirty years' experience (Wiltshire).

Quotations of this nature may be thought to be specially selected. They may be thought to exaggerate, for special purposes, professional, or even (though there is no evidence of this in the report) political considerations. Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid the general impression that a profession that is hard-working and dedicated, is beginning to feel disregarded, under-valued and even betrayed.

A sentence in the final chapter of the report presents a conclusion: "Throughout England and Wales over-worked and demoralised teachers struggle to teach children in decaying buildings". Three teachers in different primary schools read this comment in the report and they all said it was an over-statement. At once, however, they began to add reservations. They themselves taught in a part of England that has not yet felt the full effects of the depression as have, for example, the Midlands and the North and parts of Wales and Scotland. They were in areas where parents take an interest—and have the money with which to help the schools—so things were not so bad. Put in another way, theirs were not socially deprived areas and the children in their schools did not come, on the whole, from broken homes or from areas where the problems of the immigrant communities added immensely to other difficulties.

Schools Speak Out is a disturbing document. It is disturbing because it provokes thought on the essential values by which our society purports to live. Education more than any other subject is the one that is a touchstone of our real interest in guarding the civilisation that we purport to value so highly. With the evidence of 1982 now behind us, it is hard to be as convinced as we may once have been that society has its priorities right.

(continued on page 27)

BOOK

GEORG BÜCHNER by Julian Hilton. Macmillan, £10 and £2.95

Georg Büchner's play, *Danton's Death*, written in 1835, contains one of the best discussions of atheism ever to have been conceived for the stage. The play is set during the terror following the French revolution and the deist, Thomas Paine, is inaccurately turned into a mouthpiece for atheism in a scene in Luxembourg prison: "There is no God—since either God made the world or He did not. If He did not make it, the world had its germ in itself, and there is no God—since God is only God if He holds in Himself the germ of all being. Now God cannot have made the world, since either creation is eternal like God, or it had a beginning. If it had a beginning, God must have made it at a given point in time. So that God, having rested for eternity, must have become active suddenly—and undergone a change in Himself, which made Him apply a new conception—Time. Both of which assumptions are contrary to God's essence. So that God cannot have made the world. Now since we know clearly that a world exists, or at least that we exist, and that, from what I have just said, that world must have its roots in itself or in some other thing that is not God, there can be no God. *Quod erat demonstrandum*".

The prisoners continue to discuss the "first cause", the use of reason, and the creation of perfection and Paine argues passionately: "I prefer an earthly father [to God]. At least I don't have to say behind his back that he brought me up a galley slave or fed me at a pig trough. Remove our imperfections—then you can demonstrate your God; but not before. Spinoza tried it. God might satisfy your reason, but your feeling denies Him and rebels. We can deny evil, but never pain. . . Why do I suffer? There's my rock of atheism. The smallest stab of pain, if it only stirs an atom, cracks your creation from top to bottom".

This is a fascinating scene in a play which shows Danton struggling to come to terms with Robespierre, the future of the revolution, the inevitability of history, and the fact that all life leads to death—"We scratch for fifty years on coffin lids".

An excellent recent production of *Danton's Death* at the National Theatre and a new study of the plays of Georg Büchner by Julian Hilton are valuable reminders of this exceptional man who was a rare combination of revolutionary activist and revolutionary writer. In his short life of 23 years (1813-1837) Büchner wrote three plays which have all been seen as seminal masterpieces in the 20th century, a prose fragment describing a poet's collapse into madness, philosophical essays covering Descartes,

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Spinoza and the Greeks, and a scientific doctorate in physiology. As if that were not enough for a 23-year-old, he had also written the greater part of a revolutionary tract, the *Hessian Peasant Courier*, which contained statistics attacking the injustice of a tax system which brought luxury to the court and starvation to the peasants. He was involved with the Darmstadt branch of the Society for the Rights of Man and friendly with activists. He only narrowly escaped imprisonment, and was haunted by the sufferings of his colleagues in gaol. *Danton's Death* was written while Büchner was virtually in hiding in his father's house in Darmstadt and there can be no surprise at the vividness with which he depicts a revolutionary facing death.

Büchner escaped to Strasbourg and spent the final two years of his life in exile in Switzerland. His anatomical studies, his appointment as a lecturer in Zurich and the continual ferment of his writing suggested he was set for a distinguished professional and creative career, but he was suddenly smitten with typhus. His fiancée, the daughter of a Swiss pastor, was at his side when he died. His letters to her and his family had displayed charm and thoughtfulness and are quoted to good effect in Julian Hilton's study. Publication of a selection in translation would be valuable and enjoyable for English readers. Alas, many of the letters, a diary and a play, *Pietro Aretino*, were destroyed by his fiancée shortly before her death in 1880, for the usual reasons that relatives and acquaintances destroy invaluable papers—to remove evidence of unorthodoxy.

A schoolfriend of Büchner recalled him saying "Christianity does not please me: it makes you pious, like a lamb". At his death, according to the notebook of a friend who nursed him, he said: "We can never have too much pain, we can only have too little. Through pain we come to God!" and "We are death, dust, ashes, how can we complain?" Setting aside the reliability of witnesses who tend to hear what they want to, the whole direction of Büchner's thought suggests that by God he can have meant no more than a metaphor for love or nature; but his contemporary, Heine, said of deathbed conversions: "In the end they prove only that it was not possible for you to convert those free-thinkers so long as they went about with healthy senses under God's open sky and were completely in command of their reason".

An indication that Büchner would have sustained his rational, naturalistic view of the world is the

REVIEW

work of his two brothers, who outlived him by many years. Ludwig Büchner wrote *Force and Matter*, a key book on the nature of matter, the publication of which lost him his position at Tübingen University. Alexander Büchner taught philosophy and literature and in his preface to his brother's essays, *Last Words on Materialism* (1901), made his own rationalism quite clear.

Büchner's last play, *Woyzek*, takes the case of a murderer and explores where the origin of his action lies—in society which allows him no freedom or in his own failure to understand himself or his life. Hilton suggests "Büchner is engaging intellectually with Christian teaching, and annexing to his own beliefs certain Christian propositions about human behaviour". I find Hilton a bit vague in his attempt, elsewhere, to establish Büchner's belief in the "essential primacy of nature . . . a primacy whose acceptance brings the emancipation of the individual", but he is particularly good in putting Büchner in the context of the enlightenment background, with emphasis on the great deist playwright Lessing.

Incidentally, Hilton is wrong to write of Robert Owen that he was a man who "believed that God would give the sign for action in His good time. . .". Owen wrote in his *Autobiography* that as a child he was "forced, through seeing the error of their foundation, to abandon all belief in every religion which had been taught to man" and his conversion to spiritualism in his 80s hardly qualifies him as a deist. A description of Thomas Paine as "the American revolutionary hero" would have been more happily phrased "the hero of the American revolution" lest his Norfolk roots be forgotten.

But this is a useful and readable study, avoiding the tone of the lecture room, despite the student market at which it is presumably aimed. Hilton presents Büchner as a man of ideas, which are alive today, and of the theatre, where he finally came into his own after nearly a century of neglect.

Some of Büchner's most interesting ideas are found in his letters to Gutzkow, who was a German literary leader. Gutzkow first arranged for the publication of *Danton's Death* and was prosecuted and imprisoned for his own anti-Christian and erotic novel, *Wally the Sceptic*. (More information about Gutzkow from Julian Hilton would have been welcome.) Büchner wrote to Gutzkow: "You set out to reform society from above, by means of the educated classes. Impossible! Our time is strictly materialist. If you had gone more directly to work, you would soon have reached the point at which all reform

would have stopped of itself automatically. You can never bridge the gulf between the educated and the uneducated. I have convinced myself that any well-to-do minority, no matter what concessions it may wring from the people in power, will never be willing to give up its privileged position to the great masses. And what of these masses themselves? For them there are only two levers—want and religious fanaticism. . .".

Want and religious fanaticism—look around the world today and imagine how Büchner's peculiar combination of passionate indignation and probing analysis would be kindled were he alive today.

JIM HERRICK

A Warning From the Schools

Without going into the rights and wrongs of the Falklands episode, it cannot be denied that we were prepared to spend on a small war immense amounts of money, as well as the loss of life that this involved. At the same time, we prepare for vastly more expensive greater wars, saying, with perhaps diminishing confidence, that this is the way, costly as it is, to ensure that they will not happen. Society as a whole seems to be preparing itself to spend tremendous sums on cable television. The things on which we are prepared to spend money may, alas, be the things that we really prize.

When the Education Act of 1944 was passed, it placed on the Minister a duty "to promote the education of the people" and "the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose". It is hard to be sure that we are keeping to these objects. When Lord Butler, as he had then become, looked back in a lecture delivered in 1965 on the work that he had done in bringing the Act into law, he remarked that a "success story has been that of the primary schools".

Lord Butler died in 1982. If he had been spared to read this NUT report, he might have felt that this was still true. On the other hand, he might have had to revise his opinion. What he would not have changed was another comment in his lecture, one that this report now underlines with an almost sinister irony: "Primary schools are 'primary' in more than one sense. They are the foundation of our whole educational system and we neglect them at our peril".

• Since this article was written another large teachers' union has published a survey on the effects of educational cuts. Fred Smithies, General Secretary designate of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, has summed up their report as follows: "Pupils' prospects are being blighted and the economic future of Britain is in danger".

Freethinker Fund

Freethought journals have always depended on the financial support of readers to bridge the inevitable gap between income and expenditure. *The Freethinker* is no exception, and every month a list of donations is published.

During 1982 a grand total of £1,698.80 and \$70 was donated. In thanking everyone who contributed to the Fund we also express the hope that more readers and humanist groups will support the only campaigning monthly journal of the movement. The final list of contributors during 1982 is given below.

T. Atkins, £2; E. Barnes, £1; J. Bickle, £5; D. C. Campbell, £12; A. C. F. Chambre, £1.40; J. H. Charles, £6.40; N. L. Child, £1.40; B. E. Clark, £2; M. Clowes, £5; A. F. Dawn, £2; J. W. Darling, £6.40; F. Docherty, 50p; F. C. Dowson, £5; F. Evans, £7; N. Ferguson, £1.40; J. Galliano, £2; R. Gerrard, £6.40; A. Glass, 90p; E. B. Gwinnell, £2.40; E. Haslam, £3.60; E. M. Hay, £4; H. R. Haydon, 40p; J. Holland, £2.40; J. L. Hope, £1.40; E. C. Hutchinson, £2; J. Lauritsen, £3; J. Lippit, £5; P. T. Murray, £1.40; E. A. Napper, £3; A. Oldham, £4; J. G. Peace, £2; C. A. Pugh, £6.40; A. J. Rawlings, £5; B. J. Reid, £1.40; E. M. Richard, £2; R. V. Samuels, £2; F. T. Sefton, £2.75; W. Shannon, £7; K. Sharpe, £5; R. Shergold, £1.40; W. M. Shuttleworth, £6.40; S. Smith, £5; F. J. Wooley, £1; K. Wootton, 40p.

Total for the period 7 December until 31 December 1982: £152.80.

VETERAN FREETHINKER DIES

Robert H. Scott, the veteran American freethinker, has died at the age of 93. Despite a severe disability from the first world war, he was an extremely active man.

Mr Scott was not afraid to proclaim his unbelief. In 1946, after a five-year fight with broadcasting companies, he made what was claimed to be the first broadcast on atheism in the United States. He spoke during a time usually allotted to the Salt Lake City Tabernacle Choir.

Newsweek reported that "in measured terms . . . Scott defined his place as a defender of the rights of the disbeliever. In scholarly terms he outlined the atheists' arguments. Predicting that 17,000,000 Americans now living will die of cancer, he reasoned: 'Do not speak to me of an Almighty God who is merciful and just'".

There are two notices affixed to the disused United Reformed Church in Cromwell Road, Hove, Sussex. One proclaims "What God has Created Stands Forever". The other announces that the building is "For Sale".

LETTERS

ALLIANCE PARTY LOOKS TO WESTMINSTER

I have for the last 18 months been an avid reader of your newspaper and a firm supporter of your views on the evils of religious fanaticism, bigotry and superstition. Indeed, being a resident of Northern Ireland, I have had plenty of opportunity to witness the pain and suffering caused by religious intolerance. It was with the aim of countering this intolerance, and promoting equality of citizenship and freedom from dogmatism, that I allowed my name to go forward as a candidate in the recent Ulster Assembly elections. It grieves me, therefore, that your editorial, "Where Christ Reigns", in the December 1982 issue, should be so ill-informed about the results.

First of all, let us be under no illusions as to the elections employed by Provisional Sinn Fein in these elections. The party is pledged to achieve a United Ireland "with a ballot paper in one hand and an Armalite (rifle) in the other". There was no democracy or sense of fair play in the PSF campaign. The hustings were conducted in an atmosphere of flag-waving, drum-beating, and hysteria. The polling was characterised by plural voting, impersonation and intimidation. People who plant car bombs are not bound by the rules of electoral etiquette.

Yet despite these tactics, the Provisional Sinn Fein gained only five seats out of 78 in the Assembly. The party which I represented, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, gained twice that number. Were we not worthy of mention in your article? It is hard enough for our party to gain publicity. We do not have the control of the Press or television. We do not believe in blowing up reservoirs or vandalising sports grounds. We are mocked by political extremists and bigots as the party of "atheists and Englishmen". Even if this is not true, surely we deserve the support of English atheists.

For behind the scenes we have achieved much. We have proved that Protestants and Catholics can work together for the same cause. We have won many battles against blind prejudice and naked sectarianism. No longer have the Unionist majority a stranglehold on every major public office. Our work is not spectacular in terms of making the headlines. But it is gaining every day in momentum and credibility. It can succeed. Given time, it will succeed.

That is why it is very mischievous of "The Freethinker" to join with misinformed elements of Fleet Street in calling for a British withdrawal. Surely you are not allying yourselves with the "Daily Mirror"?

I can sympathise with your impatience. I heartily concur with your abhorrence of the Rev Ian Paisley and his sanctimonious cronies. Yet I would beg you to reconsider the course of action that you are proposing. Not only are you encouraging the IRA and INLA to commit further atrocities by giving them a whiff of victory, but you are also denying the very principles of secularism. At present, it is only the British connection that wards off the worst effects of evangelical Protestantism. Sunday drinking, legalised adult homosexuality and family planning clinics would never have been established in Ulster without legislation from Westminster. But by advocating rule from Dublin you are supporting a Roman Catholic regime where contraception and abortion are still illegal. How can a freethinker defend that?

You are unfair to James Prior in saying that he was thinking only of Unionism in his Assembly proposals. The opportunity was there for anyone who believed in democracy to come forward to try to make the pro-

posals work. Many Roman Catholics have taken this opportunity by teaming up with the Alliance Party. For to be truthful, the party of "atheists and Englishmen" really consists of everyone who believes in peace, brotherhood and equality of opportunity . . . in short, everyone who believes in "humanism" in its broadest sense.

Would it not be possible for "The Freethinker" to encourage us, instead of advocating bloodshed and massacre.

JOHN T. HASLETT

The Editor replies: While applauding Mr Haslett and the Alliance Party on having "won many battles against blind prejudice and naked sectarianism", it would appear that they arrived on the scene far too late. Moreover, the cause around which they are endeavouring to unite Catholics and Protestants is basically unionism with a small "u", and consequently a non-starter. While he constantly refers to the acts of terrorism perpetrated by the IRA and INLA, Mr Haslett makes no mention of the reign of terror and discrimination which Protestant Unionists conducted against Catholics for 40 years, and to which successive British governments turned a blind eye.

Ulster Protestants were prepared to accept the benefits of union with Britain, but they spurned British standards of democracy and civil liberty. They pose as the champions of social reform when it suits their purpose, pointing to their six-county statelet as an oasis of liberalism and progress in an Irish desert of reaction and conservatism. Mr Haslett is honest enough to admit that reforms were imposed upon, rather than willingly accepted by Ulster Protestants.

If the Alliance Party is as successful as Mr Haslett claims then it should be able to mobilise liberal opinion in defence of personal freedom by seeking allies on both sides of the Border. Their representation in an all-Ireland parliament would encourage similar forces in the south where, although still far too powerful, the Roman Catholic bishops and priests are losing their grip. The Border separates progressive forces in the country and fosters a master race, settler mentality in the northern Protestants.

Rather than advocating bloodshed and massacre, freethinkers and civil liberty campaigners constantly warned of the dangerous situation in Northern Ireland. They asserted that the aggressive, discriminatory behaviour of the Protestants and their so-called "loyalist" organisations would not be tolerated indefinitely. Those warnings were ignored, and the consequences have been tragic.

NO COMPROMISE

Barbara Smoker appears to compromise on the word "humanist" ("It Depends What you Mean", December 1982). I abhor labels, particularly cowardly ones like "humanist" and "agnostic".

When pressed for a self-description I now say: "There are no gods or goddesses in my world; if you must label me, call me an atheist". This unequivocal statement is usually understood.

On page 188 of the same issue, Margaret McLroy begins: "Christmas is a time for families to foregather . . ." Not for secularists: I need no excuse for enjoying myself or for foregathering with my family. The "mass for Christ" is irrelevant.

Lastly, Simon Kirk's thoughtful letter highlights an error in which I remained for years—that religion causes misery. Not so, I belatedly discovered. Certainly religion and misery go hand-in-hand, but the fallacy is to label the first the cause and the second the effect. Surely the truth is that the unenlightened, the gullible,

the cowed, are some prime candidates for both religion and misery. Both afflictions spring from the same basic causes, namely fear and ignorance, with pride being skilfully and subtly exploited by the priests—of whatever denomination.

DONALD WOOD

IDENTITY CRISIS

The following remarks are not to be construed as an attack on humanists or the humanist movement. With regard to the London scene, I have always thought that "The Freethinker" should just be called that and not have the words "Secular Humanist Monthly" under its title.

In my view, the humanist movement—while still full of very good and sincere people who truly believe in a secular society—has been taken over by "trendy" people who do not even know about the dreadful history of Christianity, and is facing an identity crisis. As Harry Pearce, a former President of the Rationalist Association of New South Wales, once said: "Some humanists wished to Christ that they were Christians".

The Rationalist Press Association has also suffered as a result of so-called Rationalists who thought it was about time to change the name of their publication, "The Literary Guide", to "Humanist" and later to "New Humanist". Now what is the difference between "Humanist" and "New Humanist"? I think it was a case of trying to keep up with the times, to be a bit modern, to be popular and respectable.

Barbar Smoker is right. The word "humanist" is meaningless in this day and age. I think it is about time the humanist movement should be considering its position and where it is going in this post-Christian era in which, in the main, Christianity is undergoing some changes in order to update its doctrines and its god.

It is a great mistake, as so many humanists do, to dismiss Christianity as irrelevant or think that it can be accommodated on a co-operative basis.

RON MARKE

Editor, "The Rationalist News", New South Wales.

PRIOR CLAIM

I would like to take up Barbara Smoker's point about the word "humanist" and any necessary prefix required for clarity.

I have always been keen on the "humanist" title as a clear, one-word description of our attitude to life. It is far more positive than "agnostic", "atheist", "freethinker", etc.

May I suggest that we should assert a strong prior claim to the use of the title "humanist" without a prefix, on the basis that only we are concerned solely with the earthly human condition. Presumably all other users of the word have to temper their concern for humanity with the acknowledgement of a greater power or cause to which humanity must bow. Let other users therefore acknowledge that fact with a prefix.

As evidence of our claim on the title, may I cite an excellent little book entitled "Humanism", written by one Barbara Smoker.

D. C. LANGDOWN

NO PROBLEM

I have rarely found it necessary to describe Humanists as anything other than Humanists with a capital "H". Let us define our meanings of course, but if you always describe your views as secular humanist, or with some other adjective as suggested by Barbara Smoker, you are then involved in describing different views and are side-tracked from putting your own case clearly.

If a religious person says "I'm a Humanist too", a good reply might be to look surprised and ask; "Do you put God first or human beings? If you put God first you can't be a Humanist, and if you don't put God first you can't be a Christian".

There is no need for deference on the part of the President of the National Secular Society to fundamentalist clergymen or to the Pope. If other groups wish to call themselves Humanists let them differentiate themselves from us. Why should we add to their status by redefining ourselves.

ROY SAICH

A MEANINGLESS WORD

I have always liked the word "humanist" and felt "secularist" to be extremely ugly. But it was not for euphony alone that the word became fashionable in some secularist circles—it was just another in the long line of lily-livered euphemisms.

Barbara Smoker thinks that the word has now become almost meaningless. It always was. But perhaps we can rescue it and put it to good use. Paying no attention to the various and inconsistent dictionary definitions and historical usages, I class myself as a humanist in contradistinction to racist—in matters of religion I am just a plain, old-fashioned secularist.

BRIAN AUBREY

SECULARISTS AND ISRAEL

The thought occurs to me, on reading Gabriel Glazer's letter (December) that there is a definite contradiction in terms contained within the name of his organisation, The "Israel Secular Humanist Association". "Israel" is an archaic, biblical word which, with its undeniable religious connotations, should not be appended to the name of a secularist group. Moreover, I do not think that Mr Glazer's espousal of the Zionist creed is tenable for him, given the close links between Zionism and Judaism the religion. To take things to a logical conclusion, I do not understand why a secular humanist could support the State of Israel, let alone be a willing citizen of it.

Mr Glazer accuses the Palestine Liberation Army of being anti-semitic on the ground that its charter denies the right of Jews to national self-determination. Yet this national self-determination in practice has meant the displacement and oppression of the Palestinian Arabs, and has meant anti-Arabism.

Secularists everywhere should support the long-term aim of a secular state to replace the exclusively Jewish State of Israel. The setting up of such a state would not necessarily mean a mass expulsion of Jews, though it has to be said that all the displaced Palestinian refugees have an absolute right to return to their homeland.

T. C. THOMPSON

NOT CHOSEN

B. Goshen writes as though he was still at the Wailing Wall, waiting to smell out a conspiracy, much in the same way that the professional anti-semitic cites. The Protocols of Zion. What is to be done about the "wailers": like Begin, the professional Jew and, alas, terrorist to boot, his warmongering fascist General Sharon and way down the line, but still in the same camp your wild and woolly correspondent who accuses the little "Freethinker" of being part of a large conspiracy: taking gold from the Arabs?

Goshen may be "small fry" incapable of reading the signs and not understanding that until Jews become citizens of the world there will never be peace. It is

small satisfaction to realise here how completely fanatical insularity emphasises criticisms in the past, as well as the present, of those like Einstein (who frequently injuncted the Jews to moderate their ardours in Palestine) Disraeli, Spinoza, Freud and Chapman Cohen (now there's an anti-semitic surname for you, Mr Goshen), all of them freethinkers.

Like Hitler, Begin regards those who turned a blind eye to Lebanon as God's "chosen" when that wretched country was invaded in conditions of indescribable misery, torture and annihilation, then His taste must be greatly at fault. The Children of Israel are as much "chosen" as the rest of humanity. Unless Begin, Sharon and their reactionary followers become aware of that fact, the longer it will take civilised countries—the few that are left—to accept them as desirable neighbours and friends.

PETER COTES

MR LENTON'S BELIEFS

Thank you for the kind remarks about me in your December 1982 issue. Being arid, I suppose I am at least not wet . . . ?

I appreciate your reminder that I had not included details of where to obtain Jim Herrick's book in my Christian Weekly Newspapers column—an omission which has now been rectified.

In answer to your editorial question, the Faith I referred to—and always refer to—is the New Testament Faith founded on the words and actions of Jesus. I believe the Bible is God's revelation to man, and I believe the Holy Spirit is active in the world now, changing people's lives, healing them and making them more like Jesus. Naming professed Christians who do not appear to have been affected in this way would not alter the fact that very many have. (Concerning "religious" disputes past and present, I would refer you to the excellent letter from Simon Kirk, also in your December issue).

Sorry I can't oblige you with a list of social reforms initiated by the bishops, but compiling a list of that kind would do my reputation no good at all. Perhaps instead you could supply a list of secular humanists who have made spiritual breakthroughs.

TIM LENTON

MAX STIRNER

While I welcome Michael Duane's sympathetic review of Max Stirner's "The Ego and Its Own" (January), I must point out that Stirner did not regard himself as an anarchist. Indeed, one of his favourite targets was Proudhon whom he considered as yet another "pious atheist" preaching sacred moral principles.

Mr Duane's statement that Stirner explored "the true nature of anarchism" and "the true nature of the individual" shows a misunderstanding of his viewpoint. Nothing aroused Stirner's scorn so much as proclamations about the "true" nature of anything. To speak of "the true nature of the individual" is to affirm that this individual existing here and now is not the "real" individual which has to be realised by following some ideal. In other words "I" as I am is split from "I" as I should or ought to be. This kind of thinking falls straight into the prescriptive trap that Stirner saw as the foundation for enslavement by moralism and thus the opposite of self-determination.

Mr Duane is also mistaken in stating that the interval between the publication of "The Ego and Its Own" and its translation was 120 years. It was, in fact 63 years, the first English edition being published in New York by Benjamin Tucker in 1907.

Finally my introduction to the Rebel Press edition, to which Mr Duane refers, was abridged and in a few places re-written by the publishers. So what appears

is not always what I wrote. Fortunately, these mutilations have not substantially altered my text, but I hope readers will keep this fact in mind.

S. E. PARKER

SUPERSTITION ON THE BREAKFAST TIME MENU

Early morning television came to Britain on 17 January with the BBC's *Breakfast Time*. The programme got off to a good start with uniformly good reviews. But Richard Last, the *Daily Telegraph* critic, was not too pleased with some of those who will appear regularly on the programme, including Russell Grant the resident astrologer. However, *The Times* critic, Peter Ackroyd, did a spot of forecasting and predicted that the seer has a great future in the early morning. Russell Grant's "natural ebullience, which comes close to outrageousness" should shock viewers into consciousness.

Many people will regard the BBC's engagement of a resident astrologer as being outrageous. Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, declared that the *Breakfast Time* producers appeared to be on the side of reason in deciding against having a "God slot" on the programme. Alasdair Milne, the Director General, on being tackled about this omission by one of the religious affairs people, replied: "Let's say we tend to leave God to the radio".

Christian Superstition Replaced

This is hard luck on avid radio listeners. Nevertheless it is gratifying that religious propaganda has so far been excluded from *Breakfast Time*.

"But", added Barbara Smoker, "they then introduced something no less irrational than religion, no less harmful than religion, and far older than radio religion: astrology. And on a regular basis too. In avoiding the steam radio hangovers from the Reith regime, *Breakfast Time* has fallen into the sewage of the gutter Press.

"An occasional astrological item would not be too objectionable, especially if balanced by some rational comment on it. But for a daily dose of unassailed superstition of this kind to be prescribed by a respected public authority is totally indefensible".

The NSS President said that if nobody really believed in astrology its inclusion in the programme would be no more than a waste of time and an insult to the viewing public.

"Unfortunately, however, many people today do believe in astrology, and some of them base important decisions on its alleged predictions. The BBC is guilty of playing on this unreason.

"Whatever next? Open University courses in alchemy? Television demonstrations of sorcery?"

"It is time for the Director General to step in and save the BBC's reputation".

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 8 pm.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 6 March, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Philip Bolsover: The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Saturday, 19 March, 8 pm. Silver Jubilee Celebration. Licensed Bar, Buffet, Admission free.

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill. Wednesday, 9 March, 8 pm. Jim Herrick: Diderot and his Relevance Today.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 8 March, 7.45 pm. D. Parker: Marxism.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 24 February, 7.45 pm. S. E. Parker: Is Egoism a Perversity?

Socialist Secular Association. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 9 April, 2 pm. Annual General Meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 27 February, 5.30 pm. John White: Compulsory Hymns and Religious Teaching—or Effective Personal and Moral Education?

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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The Paviour's Arms,
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SATURDAY, 23 APRIL 1983,
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Los Angeles police arrested Andrea Crouch, the famous gospel singer, who was driving erratically in the city suburbs. He and his car were searched and a small quantity of white powder which turned out to be cocaine was found. It is believed that he was not brought to Court because there was too little of the substance for him to be indicted. Andrea Crouch has appeared at gospel rallies with Billy Graham, Pat Boone and Johnny Cash. He sang at the White House for President Carter and his wife. He founded a missionary organisation and, with his sister, a singing group called the Disciples. One of Crouch's songs won him a Gold Disc. It was entitled "Jesus is the Answer".

Extensive New Police Powers Condemned by NCCL and Law Society

The National Council for Civil Liberties has strongly criticised the Police Bill which will give police extensive new powers. The Council says it is wrong in principle to allow the police to enter by force the homes and workplaces of wholly innocent people. Restrictions on police information-gathering will be nullified if they can obtain extremely sensitive and confidential information on innocent people and copy that information for their own records.

The NCCL declares that the Bill covers not only

serious investigations like murder and kidnapping. It applies to any "serious arrestable offence"—an enormous range of offences defined by the subjective view of the magistrate or judge. Search warrants "will become a matter of routine, particularly where the police want to put pressure on a suspect—for instance, by searching the home of his girlfriend or mother. . .

"The police will no doubt need little encouragement to make full use of this new power. But further inducement is provided by the fact that, once a search warrant has been obtained, the police may lawfully seize any item or document which could be useful in any investigation, however minor or however far removed from the 'serious arrestable offence' which formed the basis for the original warrant.

"It is a common complaint that under one kind of warrant—e.g. for illegal drugs—the police seize material such as address books, membership records and mailing-lists. Any organisation whose views are considered 'suspect' would be vulnerable to a search and seizure of records about its members and supporters".

Threat to Confidentiality

The NCCL points out that the Police Bill provides a power to order the production of or the search of confidential records of professional advisers.

This new power makes a nonsense of the legal duty of confidentiality which doctors owe to their patients, lawyers to their clients, priests to their parishioners, journalists to their sources and so on. A police request for confidential information from such people would—and should—be refused; thus the police will have no difficulty in establishing the additional ground required for obtaining an order or warrant.

The Law Society is also critical of the Bill. Like the NCCL, it holds that the new powers will enable the police to inspect confidential communications between a solicitor and his client.

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"Over-Simple Solutions" to Recession

the jury that their charitable status should be reconsidered".

A Parliamentary Select Committee proposed that secondary education should be put under church "guidance" to an extent unknown in Britain since 1870. There is a reference in the report to "a disturbing proposal" in Bradford and London which would allow Islamic Imams to give sectarian religious education in schools. Such an arrangement "breaches the principle of interdenominational teaching of religion, and could restore for all religions the kind of indoctrination which should be the preserve of parents and Saturday and Sunday schools".

There was considerable discussion about the theory of evolution during the centenary year of Charles Darwin's death. Attempts by fundamentalist Christian groups to get "creationism" accepted in the schools as an alternative theory are mentioned. Such groups, especially in the United States, were exploiting developments in the Darwinian theories "which are a proper part of the scientific process".

The report recognises that NSS membership has always been drawn from across a wide political spectrum. Nevertheless "we cannot ignore the worldwide recession, which has hit the UK especially severely and must be reflected in social attitudes. There is always a danger in times of economic depression that despair and disillusion will cause people to turn to over-simple solutions and turn away from the future.

"The Society's outlook at its most general follows the belief of the Greek philosopher, Protagoras, that 'Man is the master of all things'. If we cannot solve world problems by human resources, human analysis and human imagination, they cannot be solved in any other way".

● The National Secular Society annual report is obtainable from 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.