

# The Freethinker

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## LEADING FREETHINKERS DENOUNCE SOLZHENITSYN'S RANTINGS

Three prominent figures in the humanist movement have hit back at Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the embittered and obsessively anti-Communist Russian exile, following his speech at London's Guildhall formally accepting the 1983 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The prize, worth £110,000, was awarded in recognition of his work as "a pioneer in the renaissance of religion in atheistic nations". In the course of his speech, in which he made scurrilous attacks on unbelievers, he said that the principal trait of the 20th century is "men have forgotten God. . . The entire 20th century is being sucked into the vortex of atheism and self-destruction".

Solzhenitsyn looked back admiringly to a time when Russia was "steeped in an Orthodox Christianity which remained true to the Church of the first centuries". In those blissful times "the Orthodox faith in our country became part of the very pattern of thought and the personality of our people, the forms of daily life, the work calendar, the priorities in every undertaking, the organisation of the week and of the year. Faith was the shaping and the unifying force of the nation".

He declared that the "failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimensions, have been the determining factor in all the major crimes of this century". The only possible explanation for the first World War is "a mental eclipse among the leaders of Europe due to their lost awareness of a Supreme Power above them.

"Only a godless embitterment could have moved ostensibly Christian states to employ poison gas, a weapon so obviously beyond the limits of humanity".

Western societies are "losing more and more of their religious essence as they thoughtlessly yield up their younger generation to atheism.

"Atheist teachers in the West are bringing up a younger generation in a spirit of hate for their own

society".

*The Times* newspaper, which praised the speech in a fulsome editorial, later published a letter of protest which was signed by Maeve Denby, General Secretary, British Humanist Association, Barbara Smoker, President, National Secular Society and Nicolas Walter, Managing Editor, Rationalist Press Association. They denied that "the evils of this or any age derive from the loss of faith in God, or that godlessness leads inevitably to revolution or oppression. . .

"For centuries all kinds of suffering and persecution have been accepted and justified by religion in general and by Christianity in particular, as may be seen in the history of all countries—and especially by Solzhenitsyn's own country long before the Revolution.

"We insist that atheists and other non-religious people are just as much concerned as Christians and other religious people with matters of right and wrong, with individual freedom and social welfare, and with the future of humanity, as may be seen in the work of so many humanists, secularists and rationalists — and especially in their opposition to tyranny, whether Left-wing or Right-wing, whether religious or anti-religious. (Even Solzhenitsyn must recognise the part played by Andrei Sakharov.)

"We suggest that Solzhenitsyn seems to be less at home with facts than with fiction, and we regret that he should use his great talent and strong position to distort the truth about religious and non-religious ideas and actions".

Solzhenitsyn's venomous rantings were not directed exclusively at atheists. He made a scathing attack on Billy Graham, winner of last year's Templeton Prize, for failing to notice religious persecution during his visit to Moscow, and the World Council of Churches for allegedly backing Communism in the Third World.

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS A

## WHO ARE THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS?

For over three decades we have been regaled by awful warnings from politicians, leader writers, police spokesmen and conservative religionists that 1984 would be the year of Big Brother. Such prophets may be right as well as Right-wing. For if they have their way, Britain may take another step along the road to a police State.

The fact that those who have been crying "wolf"—or "Russian bear"—have not already established such a regime is due in no small measure to organisations like the National Council for Civil Liberties. But when the NCCL celebrates its Golden Jubilee in 1984 it will receive few plaudits from "freedom fighters" who will be too busy agonising over victims of State oppression in Poland and further afield. Figuratively speaking there will be no shortage of willing hands at New Scotland Yard and Hendon Police College to lower the flags to half-mast on the NCCL's 50th anniversary.

In an introduction to the Council's annual report, Patricia Hewitt, the former General Secretary (a lady who is far more deserving of honour than Solzhenitsyn, Mother Theresa and Mary Whitehouse combined), points out that the Conservative Party "has its own tradition of libertarian anti-statism, as well as a strong strand of tolerant liberalism". She goes on to ask what has happened to both elements under Mrs Thatcher's leadership.

"The answer is that the libertarian tradition has been commandeered by a Right wing who cannot see any greater threat from the State to the individual than compulsory seat belts, while the liberal elements have been routed on virtually every issue on which they have made a stand".

The report is a disturbing chronicle of attacks on freedom and civil liberties by the Government, the judiciary and the police. It recalls that at the end of 1982 the Government published its Police and Criminal Evidence Bill which would have given the police power to arrest for the most trivial offences, detain suspects before charge for six days and raid the homes of people not even suspected of an offence. These are proposals that "would once have been roundly condemned by many Conservative MPs, but which now bring barely a whimper from compliant backbenchers.

"In 1976, Conservative MPs joined NCCL in opposing extension of powers of search and entry for Inland Revenue officials. In 1982 the same MPs had nothing to say against proposed police powers which would be used against ordinary people and

# S AND NOTES

their doctors or social workers, rather than against suspected tax-evaders”.

Another report which was issued recently has caused consternation and embarrassment in law-'n'-order circles. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Police Complaints Board report on police raids carried out in Brixton two years ago was squeezed out of rather than issued by the Home Secretary.

Contents of the report are disturbing enough. The Board refers to “gross errors of judgement” — like illegal entry, wholesale destruction of property and violence against residents — by police officers. Even worse was the deliberate suppression of the report. It was only because of pressure by John Fraser, MP, that the report was made available some months after it had been presented to the Home Secretary. Such tardiness about making the report public was almost entirely due to its unflattering comments about the police.

Of course it is nonsense to assert that all police personnel are bent villains. It is highly likely that the majority of them carry out their duties in a responsible and acceptable manner, sometimes at the risk of life and limb. But their own records, and those of courts all over the country, show that corruption, violence, perjury and other unlawful acts are committed by the police. This does not take into account harrassment, racial insults and other anti-social behaviour that is not reported or recorded.

In view of what is known about the police, and what is suspected to have been covered with layers of whitewash, it is not surprising that opposition to the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill came from the most diverse quarters. But precious few protests emanated from the 1984 scaremongers.

## Public Meeting

### DISESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Speakers:

CANON COLIN BUCHANAN  
BRIAN SEDGEMORE

Chair:

Barbara Smoker

MONDAY, 13 JUNE, 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
Holborn, London WC1

Organised by the National Secular Society,  
702 Holloway Road, London N19,  
telephone 01-272 1266

## SELF-DELIVERANCE AND THE LAW

The permissive legislation of the 1960s was mostly a relaxation of the stranglehold that Christian taboos had until then maintained on our legal system. But British compromise invariably allowed a slight throttle to linger on. Thus, abortion was made legal, provided it is delayed by medical bureaucracy; homosexual acts between consenting adults are permitted, but not until adulthood is well advanced; and suicide is decriminalised, so long as it is not assisted.

The effect of section 2 (1) of the Suicide Act, 1961, is to restrict suicide to those who are healthy enough to carry it out unaided. Anyone paralysed from the neck down, anyone too weak to lift a glass to their lips, anyone in hospital without access to a lethal dose of drugs, is denied the right to die.

The Voluntary Euthanasia Society (founded in 1935) campaigns for the law to be changed so as to allow those who are suffering from incurable illness or disability, that they feel makes life intolerable to them, to obtain medical help to an easy death, if, after full consideration, they so wish. Pending such legislation, the VES in 1981 issued a 32-page booklet, *A Guide to Self-Deliverance*, with the aim of ensuring that people who are determined to take their own lives should at least know how to do so without causing pain to themselves, distress to others, or inconvenience to society at large, and without risking a failed attempt resulting in brain damage or liver damage. A considerable portion of the booklet is aimed at persuading those for whom alternatives to suicide are possible to seek such alternatives. And distribution of the booklet is restricted to VES members of at least six months' standing who are over the age of 25. Some nine thousand copies have so far been purchased.

A few months after the first sales, the Director of Public Prosecutions moved in: the then Chairman of VES, Lord Beaumont, was arrested for police questioning, followed by police questioning of the rest of the VES committee. After some months, however, the DPP dropped the threat of criminal proceedings, and the Attorney-General threatened instead to seek an injunction in the civil courts unless the VES undertook to cease distribution of the booklet or any similar publication. This they refused to do; but again the threat was withdrawn. Finally, the Attorney-General applied to the High Court for a declaration that the booklet contravened section 2 of the Suicide Act.

The motive of the AG for taking this unusual course was ostensibly to save the defendants—who sincerely believed in their moral and legal right to publish the booklet—from a criminal prosecution. At the same time, the case presented a serious

threat to civil liberty, since it was testing the criminal law without a jury.

The hearing took place at the end of April before Mr Justice Woolf, who decided it would be improper for him to grant the AG the declaration he sought, but gave a carefully balanced judgement in general terms. This has the paradoxical effect that, whilst the VES technically won the case—an outcome underlined by the order for costs made by the Judge against the AG—the VES committee and staff are, it seems, more vulnerable to a criminal prosecution than if the booklet were on open sale, the supplier knowing nothing of the purchaser's intentions.

The VES Chairman, Barbara Smoker—who doubles as President of the National Secular Society—told media representatives as she left the court that while their committee was prepared for a criminal prosecution on a genuine euthanasia case, they would be anxious to avoid a case “hand-picked” by the police to show them up in a bad light, since it was very important for a pressure-group like the VES to have a good public image. She added that they were, of course, delighted to have their costs, at this stage, paid by the other side—not only for the sake of the money, but because it indicated that the Judge regarded the VES as a responsible body of people.

Indeed, during the course of his judgement he had said that if it were proper to publish a guide to ending one's life, then this particular publication “provided a satisfactory treatment which it would not be easy to improve upon”. Perhaps the next edition will carry this judicial testimonial as a blurb!

While most of the Press comment was favourable to the VES and its cause, the *Daily Express* carried a predictably hostile comment by the Roman Catholic Conservative MP, Mr Norman St John-Stevas. In one respect, however, he agreed with the VES: that it was really a matter for Parliament to clarify or amend the law. But while he looks to Parliament to tighten up the Suicide Act, section 2, the VES looks to Parliament to make it a defence under that section that the defendant was motivated by compassion, the deceased having been diagnosed as suffering from a serious and distressing illness or disability.

The attempt by the AG to ban *A Guide to Self-Deliverance* is reminiscent of the criminal case brought against Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant in 1877 for the “obscenity” of publishing a pamphlet on contraception. The information it contained was already available in five-shilling hard-cover books, but putting it in a sixpenny pamphlet made it accessible to the lower orders: that was the real crime. Similarly, all the information in the VES *Guide* is readily available to anyone able to understand the technical presentation in a pharmacopoeia; what the VES has done is make it accessible to ordinary people.

It is therefore primarily a case about freedom of information, rather than euthanasia, for it cannot fully meet the aims of the voluntary euthanasia movement. They will certainly be successful eventually with a parliamentary Bill: the only question is how long it will take, and how many people will be condemned to dragging out the process of dying before it happens.

• The Voluntary Euthanasia Society is at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

## AUNTIE'S SISTER AT IBA SAYS “NO SEX PLEASE”

Independent Broadcasting Authority officials have joined the ranks of saboteurs of sex education. By banning a 30-second public announcement on contraception the Mrs Grundys of 70 Brompton Road have followed in the tradition of the League of National Life and the “Responsible” Society. And their action has won the approval of *Daily Telegraph* columnist, Peter Simple, and the Roman Catholic weekly, *The Universe*—praise indeed.

It has been revealed that the offending item was discussed at senior level for three months before a decision was taken to keep it off the screen. The IBA ban, like most acts of censorship, has been largely self-defeating. The text of the announcement, which would have been screened by London Weekend Television, was widely reported in the Press.

The film, made in association with Brook Advisory Centres and the Family Planning Association, was shown at the FPA's headquarters last month. It is directed at teenagers, particularly males, three-quarters of whom are sexually active by the age of 19.

Representatives of BAC and the FPA described the ban as incredible and hypocritical. The ban certainly is incredible when official statistics show that over 40,000 teenage girls had abortions in 1981 and over 92,000 became pregnant last year.

A spokesman for the IBA said that the announcement was banned because “it might prove offensive”. This expression of concern for viewers' sensitivity is utterly hypocritical. The awful commercial advertising mush which is allowed by the IBA is often offensive and anti-social.

No doubt an announcement which gives information about contraception to the young and single will be offensive to sex-obsessed members of certain religious pressure groups who condemn all sexual activity outside marriage and to some who condemn it except for the purpose of procreation. But that is no reason why the IBA should suppress information aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies, abortions and premature marriages.

# God's Banker's Bubble

BARBARA SMOKER

On 13 June, the inquest reopens in London into the death last year of Signor Roberto Calvi, known as "God's banker" because of the close ties the bank he presided over had with the Vatican. Calvi's body was found hanging by the neck from the scaffolding under Blackfriars Bridge, his clothes weighted down with stones. The verdict of the original inquest's jury was suicide; now either "unlawful killing" or an "open" verdict seems more likely. Here Barbara Smoker outlines the story as it has emerged so far. (For further instalments see the daily Press.)

The *dramatis personae* of this real-life melodrama—clerics, financiers, politicians, gangsters, magistrates—makes a tangled web, too extensive to unravel in the space of this article. But two of the more important characters are: a jailed Sicilian industrialist and financier, Michele Sindona (with Watergate and Vatican connections), and the American-born power behind the papal throne, Paul Casimir Marcinkus, known in the Vatican as "the gorilla".

A huge, burly priest, Marcinkus became bodyguard to the late Pope Paul VI, doubling this role with that of the Vatican's chief financier. He was thus both literally and figuratively the power behind the pontiff's throne. He used his intimacy with Pope Paul to gain ever more power, and was made President of the Vatican bank—*Institute per Opere Religiosi* (Institute of Religious Works)—from which he manipulated the vast international empire of Vatican finance, with bank accounts around the globe, but especially in Italy, Switzerland, and South America. He was then made a bishop.

Widespread gossip about financial irregularities—even swindles involving counterfeit bonds—suggested that when Pope Paul died in 1978 Marcinkus would soon be for the chop. A new pontiff, looking at the records, could hardly fail to realise what Marcinkus had been up to. But the prophecy proved wrong. Pope Paul's immediate successor, John Paul I, scarcely had time in his one-month reign to make any changes. The present Pope, however, had plenty of time to go through the books and shuffle Marcinkus off into early retirement—most likely by promoting him to some prestigious office without responsibility. But no such thing happened.

Though the Vatican bank (IOR) lost millions, Marcinkus remained in charge; the Pope was shot, but Marcinkus was still his bodyguard. And the Pope not only made him an archbishop, but also mayor of Vatican City—in charge of all its finances and administration, its buildings, its newspaper, its radio station, and its 3,000 employees. Marcinkus was now far more powerful than any cardinal, with the possible exception of the Vatican Secretary of State

—and his own cardinal's hat was hovering almost within reach. Not bad for the son of a Lithuanian window-cleaner in Illinois!

Then, however, a year ago, the financial bubble burst, the Vatican bank collapsed, and the central role of Marcinkus in the international scandal could no longer be concealed. Though still an archbishop, he has gone to ground in the Vatican, and the imminent cardinal's hat has blown away.

Those of us who, maintaining two cheque-book accounts, have learnt how to play one account off against the other at thin points of the month or the quarter may just imagine what can be done with thousands of bank accounts to play with, many of them offering credit facilities running into millions. The loans went round and round, while actual cash was quietly milked off at various points of the global merry-go-round. But missing millions tend to be missed eventually.

Mafia money, in need of expensive "laundering", helped fill the gaps. Forged bond certificates, vouched for by top financiers, served as security. The American printer of the forged certificates was murdered—as were many other people involved. Whenever interest on a loan fell due, more loans were floated to meet it. Barring miracles of messianic proportions, the bubble just had to burst.

Perhaps the players were indeed banking (literally) on a miracle, in the form of investment profits sufficient to offset the gigantic losses that were building up. If so, their prayers went unanswered.

One of the first to get his come-uppance was the Sicilian "whiz-kid" banker, Michele Sindona, who had first master-minded the whole set-up about 15 years ago. As financial adviser to the Vatican, he had helped Marcinkus revolutionise its affairs by introducing "front companies" to switch the Church's solid investments into speculative ventures in secret. That was how it all started. But in 1974 the Sindona empire collapsed with massive debts. Sindona fled to New York, but since 1978 has been a long-term resident of the up-state New York federal penitentiary.

The man chosen in 1974 to inherit Sindona's role as the Vatican's chief lay financial adviser, again working closely with Marcinkus, was the highly respected Italian banker, Roberto Calvi, then in his mid-fifties. From a job as an ordinary bank-clerk, he had risen, through sheer dedication to his work, to be president of Banco Ambrosiano — Italy's largest private bank. Founded in Milan in 1896, the bank was named after the patron saint of Milan, St Ambrose — and its annual balance-sheet always closed with a prayer to safeguard the accounts. Banco Ambrosiano was so closely involved with the

Catholic Church, and especially with the Vatican — which had become one of the bank's major shareholders — that Calvi was dubbed "God's banker".

During one of the frequent Press interviews that Sindona contrived to give in his prison cell, he once said that he had lighted upon Calvi as "the most internationally minded of all those I came across".

In 1978, however, shortly before his arrest, Sindona started an astonishing smear campaign against Calvi, apparently in a public attempt at blackmail. Posters appeared in the streets of Milan, giving details of Calvi's personal Swiss bank account — code-named Ehrenkreuz (cross of honour) — and demanding his arrest for fraud. But the two men were reconciled, it is said, by the intervention of Lucio Gelli, Grand Master of the P2 masonic lodge, of which both Calvi and Sindona were members — though freemasonry was, until this year, officially proscribed by the Catholic Church. In 1981 the P2 lodge was publicly accused of setting up "a state within a state"; and the following year its Grand Master — wanted on charges of "political espionage" — was arrested in Switzerland for using false documents to withdraw a large sum from a Swiss bank: money that had been deposited by an Ambrosiano subsidiary in South America.

Meanwhile, things were not going well for Roberto Calvi. The Bank of Italy began an investigation into the affairs of Banco Ambrosiano; but there was a breathing-space when the judge heading the investigation was gunned down — a Left-wing terrorist group claiming responsibility for the deed — and the senior bank official carrying out inquiries was jailed on the orders of a Rome magistrate, on an entirely trumped-up charge.

The Italian stock exchange then demanded that the Banco Ambrosiano shares be publicly quoted — a move that would entail detailed scrutiny of some very dodgy accounts.

Early in 1981, Calvi began to receive threatening phone calls in Milan from America, demanding that he make good the losses that the caller had sustained at the hands of the jailed Sindona. Calvi, after asking the authorities to tap his telephone, pleaded that he could not be held responsible for Sindona's swindles, but the caller seemed unconvinced: "You'll have to learn the hard way. If that's the way you want it, that's the way it's going to be. Have a nice Easter". The caller hung up — and a few days later Calvi's house was burned down.

Next, the Bank of Italy demanded an explanation from Calvi of unspecified foreign loans from Banco Ambrosiano, totalling 1,400 million dollars.

All this Calvi faced with apparent composure. But then he was prosecuted for illegally exporting 20 million dollars, and spent two months in custody awaiting trial. Summoning his wife and daughter to visit him one day in prison, he handed them some

documents, on top of which he had written "This trial is named IOR" (the Vatican bank), and told them to ask Marcinkus and Mennini (Luigi Mennini, IOR's managing director) to remove the secrecy so as to save him from taking the blame. As they got into their waiting car outside the prison, Mennini's son Alex jumped in beside them and tried to grab the documents. "You must not mention this name" (IOR), he said — "even in Confession".

The experience of a prison cell left Calvi a changed man, and when the court found him guilty of the currency offence and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment in addition to a £7-million fine, he was ready to do anything rather than serve the prison sentence. So he appealed against both conviction and sentence — though he knew that, for the appeal to succeed, he must name the recipients of the missing \$20 million. He had hitherto steadfastly refused to name names.

Marcinkus, who might have been expected to feel some anxiety at what Calvi would reveal, showed no apparent concern. Calvi's son, Carlo, repeatedly phoned the archbishop at the Vatican to enlist his support, but to no avail. Finally, Marcinkus barked: "Tell your father not to bother us with bank problems: they are his problems, not ours".

Problems they certainly were. The Banco Ambrosiano was now teetering on the verge of bankruptcy.

Meanwhile, Calvi — now on bail pending the appeal — had formed a relationship with a shady property dealer and Mafia member named Flavio Carboni, who began to play on Calvi's nerves, warning him against sleeping in his own house or even trusting his own bodyguard.

On 11 June 1982, ten days before Calvi's appeal was due to be heard, Carboni arranged for him to make his getaway from Italy, huddled in the back of a motor-launch owned and operated by a smuggler on the Italian-Yugoslav run. The smuggler's name was Silvano Vittor. With a hastily doctored passport, Calvi landed on the Yugoslav coast, and a hired car took him over the Austrian border. From there he telephoned his daughter Anna, telling her, in much more buoyant mood, that he was confident he would win through and be able to return soon to his family.

The following day, he had a bulging briefcase brought to him by Vittor from Italy — and during the night Vittor saw him methodically burning most of its contents.

The next move was to London, where Calvi decided he would find a hideout. (He knew London, having done business in the City on many occasions.) So he got Vittor to charter an executive jet from Biggin Hill (for £2,650), and together they flew to Gatwick airport, where Calvi's doctored passport aroused no suspicion.

"Ultra-secure" accommodation was found for him in a Chelsea apartment block—but it was not to Calvi's liking. It was a squalid, barely furnished, two-roomed flat, reminiscent of his prison cell; and being virtually confined to the flat had a depressing effect on him. His confidence evaporated, and he became extremely nervous. He refused to share the one bedroom with Vittor, who had to sleep in the sitting-room.

Flavio Carboni now arrived in London, accompanied by a girl-friend and her sister. But no Chelsea dump for them—they booked into the Hilton Hotel. It was suggested that Calvi and Vittor meet Carboni there, but Calvi was frightened of being recognised, so they met in Hyde Park—where the main topic of conversation was the squalor of the Chelsea flat. Carboni promised to look for somewhere equally secure but less dismal.

He therefore spent most of the following day on the telephone to estate agents, while Vittor went out with the two girl-friends—leaving Calvi alone in the flat, with only a television set for company. Three times during the day Calvi telephoned his daughter Anna in Switzerland, repeatedly warning her that she could be in danger there and should leave at once for the USA, to join her mother.

Vittor—according to his own account of events—returned to the flat during the evening, but left again at about 11.30 pm to meet Carboni and the two girls. When he came in again at 1 am, he found the flat deserted—though the television was still switched on, the screen blank. No one, apparently, had seen Calvi leave. Vittor said later that he had waited anxiously all night for Calvi to return—but early the next morning, instead of searching for his charge, he hurriedly left the country. So did Carboni. While Vittor caught a plane at 10.10 am from Heathrow to Austria, Carboni took a strangely circuitous route to Switzerland, via Scotland, from Gatwick.

On arriving in Switzerland, Carboni withdrew no less than \$20 million from various Swiss bank accounts—not, presumably, his own.

Meanwhile, at 7.30 am, Calvi's body was found—fully clothed, hanging by the neck at the end of a short length of orange rope (of the sort commonly used on the river), suspended from the scaffolding under Blackfriars Bridge. His pockets were full of stones, half a brick was stuffed down his trousers. But the published photograph of his body, just cut down from the scaffolding, shows a calm, proud facial expression—strangely beautiful, more handsome than his living portraits. His age was 62.

The police found on the body Calvi's doctored passport, three pairs of spectacles, two watches, and a wallet containing about £7,000 in various currencies and a flight-ticket to Rio de Janeiro. The autopsy revealed that death was due to asphyxiation by hanging—there were no injuries apart from the

marks left by the rope, and no indication of drugs apart from a moderate amount of alcohol.

Both Vittor and Carboni made written statements for the London inquest, but neither attended it in person—Vittor because he was now under arrest in Italy, and Carboni for fear of arrest if he were to leave Switzerland. Soon afterwards, Carboni was arrested in Lugano, in connection with the \$20-million withdrawals, and was extradited to Italy.

The verdict of the London inquest jury, at the end of a rushed and exhausting 12-hour session, was that Calvi had killed himself. His family, however, refused to accept that verdict—partly because of evidence withheld, it is said, from the jury; partly because of the way the inquest was rushed through, with alleged misdirection from the coroner; and partly because the moral stigma of suicide is too abhorrent for them, as Roman Catholics, to leave unchallenged.

Besides, as the family point out, Calvi was a man of unquenchable optimism. And why, if he had intended to kill himself, did he make his way from Chelsea to Blackfriars, four-and-a-half miles distant, to some scaffolding that is almost invisible? The Calvi family believe that he was murdered.

A few hours before Calvi's death, an extraordinary general meeting of shareholders of Banco Ambrosiano was held in Milan to relieve him of his position as its president. (The most "extraordinary" thing about it is surely the fact that he had, until then, remained in charge of the bank's affairs.) Immediately after the meeting, Calvi's secretary fell to her death from a window in his Milan office. But there is no reason to believe that Calvi ever knew about these happenings.

In November 1982, the Vatican issued a statement saying that it had "discovered" its bank had "ownership and thus juridical control" of two front companies—unnamed, but thought to be Manic and United Trading, the formation of which had, according to the documents, been carried out by IOR, which was in regular receipt of statements of their holdings.

On 29 March this year, three judges in the High Court quashed the Calvi inquest verdict and ordered a new inquest to be held. It is down to begin on 13 June—and this time it will certainly take longer than one day.

Meanwhile, in Milan and Luxembourg (where Banco Ambrosiano had an important subsidiary), a regiment of investigators has been trying to uncover Calvi's secrets. The Vatican has clammed up. As a sovereign state it is able to give Marcinkus protection.

Secrecy is an asset in the world of high finance, especially in Italy, and Calvi was always a secretive man. Some of his secrets have no doubt gone to the grave with him—including, perhaps, the secret of his death.

# "Persons Against Repression Against Persons"

DAVID WEBB

On Saturday, 14 May, as part of their two-week campaign against pornography, a preposterous, but dangerous group of fanatical feminists, parading under the tired, old banner slogan, "Pornography is Violence Against Women", organised a series of bonfires in public places when "the stuff will be ceremoniously destroyed . . . accompanied by singing, dancing, celebrations, music, etc for women and children". The next day they held candlelight vigils "in remembrance of all the women who have suffered from the brutality of men — to make the connection between pornography and male violence". Their suggestions for action between 17 and 20 May included "identification and public embarrassment of men using these (sex) establishments e.g. taking their photographs, etc" and, most lunatic of all, since 24 May was the international women's day of action for peace, the organisers suggested that their supporters should get involved in "putting forward the connection between male violence and the nuclear threat"!

Poor old porn! What has it done to deserve such a reputation? The answer is, of course, nothing at all. It really is high time that the ludicrous assertions made about it by the absurdly named "Women Against Violence Against Women" organisation and other misguided militant feminist groups were exposed for the unmitigated rubbish they undoubtedly are. Over the years, publication after publication, thesis after thesis, investigation after investigation about sexually explicit material — or "pornography" if you will — has drawn the same central conclusion, which is that basically it is harmless and should therefore be freely available to those consenting adults who desire it. Instead of acting on these sensible and rational findings, successive British Governments have not only chosen to ignore them, unlike virtually all other countries of the "free" Western World, to which the United Kingdom almost jokingly nowadays claims to belong, but have paid ever more heed to the "repressionists" and have consistently actually *increased* our censorship legislation.

The "repressionists" once largely comprised of religious groups, as epitomised by the Nationwide Festival of Light (now rejoicing in the equally inappropriate new name of "Care Campaigns"), by Mary Whitehouse of course, and by the Unification Church—the Moanies, the Meanies and the Moonies! —each peddling their own particular brand of moral fascism. Mrs Whitehouse then seized upon the spiffing idea of hitching her depressing band of pilgrims on to the emotively charged child-porn band-

wagon and initiating a carefully orchestrated campaign against a nigh on mythical deluge of such material, which was supposed to be flooding this country from abroad. Having successfully incited the necessary amount of wild hysteria, she managed to persuade a gullible Member of Parliament, Cyril Townsend, to bring in a totally unnecessary private member's Bill which simply duplicated perfectly adequate legislation already on the Statute Book.

Then the "law and order" lobby muscled in on the act with their anti-libertarian, pro-Establishment brand of fascism, which contended that the "permissive society", and pornography in particular, was responsible for the rise in crime in this country. This point of view was colourfully aired in an absurd maiden speech in the House of Lords on 24 March 1982 by Lord Lane, the Lord Chief Justice, when he said that imported "pornography" was to blame for the rise in crime among young people in this country and "quite obviously traceable to the glossy imports which come into this country disguised as Danish bacon or Dutch tomatoes, in very large quantities and which percolate through various shops to find its way into the hands of young people, with the inevitable result which we see increasing every day". This was an extraordinary deduction for someone to make in so high a legal office, since in the crime statistics for 1981, which had just then been published, whereas there was a dramatic increase in all other areas of criminal activity, the only categories which had actually *decreased* were homicide and sexual offences! Furthermore, in both Denmark and Holland, the countries of origin of this supposedly crime-inciting material, and where it had been freely and legally available for many years previously, crime figures generally had not shown anything like the increase we had experienced here.

I suppose it was inevitable that it would not be long before an otherwise very worthy body like the Women's Movement, would tumble to the idea of drumming up some cheap, emotive publicity for their aspirations by citing "pornography" as the root cause of basic inequality in women's rights — and think how much more startlingly effective that publicity would be if it could also be coupled with men's violence towards women? The very names that some of the more extreme offshoots from the movement have adopted are silly enough, but "Pornography is Violence Against Women" is as blatant an untruth as one could find, and "Women Against Violence Against Women" as sexist a slogan as any quoted in "The Naked Ape" columns of "Guardian Women", from that erstwhile excellent



newspaper, now, alas, seemingly obsessed with equal—or perhaps more accurately, unequal—rights for women. The clear message in their sexist slogan is that men—all men and, indeed, some women—are actually in favour of violence against women and I and many like me bitterly resent so offensive an implication.

If a campaign were to be launched for, let us say, "Men Against Murder Against Men", its organisers would rightly be showered with ridicule. And ridicule is the appropriate counter to these feminist dictators who want to suppress the harmless pleasures of others and of which they personally do not approve. Their incitement to the sexual hatred of men is as repulsive and disturbing as incitement to racial hatred. Already their anti-men, anti-violence demonstrations have led to some ugly scenes involving them in actual "punch-ups". They have engaged in the picketing of sex shops, which is illegal, according to a High Court case in 1976 when an injunction was granted against pickets protesting outside the private premises of a London estate agent (*Hubbard et al v Pitt et al*). They have set fire to sex shops in Leeds and, more recently, they have attempted to intimidate an eminent tutor at a North London Polytechnic into abandoning an erotic arts course there by slashing his car tyres, daubing slogans on the car's bodywork and sending him "obscene" and threatening letters.

These are just some of the criminal tactics being used by those women who are seeking a tolerant and non-violent acceptance of their otherwise largely just, fair and equal demands. They are doing their cause immeasurable harm if they believe that they can employ the blunt-edged weapon of censorship to help achieve its aims.

In February 1979, the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, which I founded in 1976, decided to affiliate to the National Council for Civil Liberties. It seemed only right and proper that a body like the NCCL, committed, as the NCROPA is, to fighting censorship, should receive our support. Since then we have sent delegates to every NCCL annual general meeting and at each one have proposed motions in one way or another opposing censorship, usually involving reference to the Williams Report and urging the NCCL to press for urgent Government legislation to liberalise our oppressive censorship laws, to enable adults the freedom to choose for themselves what they see, read and hear.

Originally we experienced no real opposition at all and, indeed, neither did we expect to in a national forum dedicated to upholding civil liberties. In more recent years, however, opposition from some women's rights supporters has been steadily growing and this year, on 17 April, their twisted thinking again manifested itself. Our proposed motion was as follows:

As a body committed to championing freedom of expression, the NCCL strongly condemns the present Parliament's enactment of repressive censorship measures (e.g. the suppression of cinema clubs and sex establishments by viciously restrictive licensing laws), which curtail this freedom even further than the already existing, unacceptably draconian legislation on the Statute Book; and the NCCL further demands immediate Government action to liberalise this country's out-moded censorship laws on the lines indicated in the NCCL's official response to the Williams Report.

Although our motion was carried, another one, still offensively pro-censorship even though its original wording was amended, was also carried. It read thus:

This AGM deplors the production, distribution and exhibition of pornographic material, including advertising, films, video and magazines, as these are symptoms of the sexist attitudes in our society. This AGM considers that suppressing pornography will drive it further underground and will not end sexist attitudes or violence against women. This will only come about through changing society's attitudes. We therefore endorse NCCL's continuing work on women's rights, including opposition to sexual harassment at work.

It was quite incomprehensible to me that many of the NCCL members and delegates apparently found no conflict in voting first of all for the NCROPA motion, which called for sweeping liberalisation of our censorship laws (the NCCL's response to the Williams Report is almost identical to the NCROPA's), and then also for one which "deplors" the very existence of the kind of material the NCROPA motion would, if implemented, legalise. Feminist fascism had, I fear, arrived on the NCCL scene, just as Establishment fascism had arrived on the Freedom Association's scene somewhat earlier, another body purporting to champion freedom and the freedom of expression in its articles of principle but, in practice, dedicated to retaining this country's hide-bound, repressive and restrictive status quo. I found the sight of the NCCL's first steps down that same hypocritical path a sad and deeply depressing spectacle which can only surely signify the beginning of the end of this so desperately needed watch-dog organisation.

Even the Health Visitors' Association — another almost exclusively female body, but one which should know better — has fallen for the insidious propaganda churned out by the moral and feminist fascist factions. At their AGM in Bristol on 14 May, a motion submitted by their Northern Ireland Centre proposed ". . . that the availability and distribution of pornographic material, including literature and video cassette films, be brought under effective control by means of appropriate legislation".

In the background notes to this resolution, published in *Health Visitor* (Vol 56: 4 April 1983), the Northern Ireland Centre readily admitted that "the

(continued on page 91)

# BOOKS

JOHN TOLAND AND THE DEIST CONTROVERSY, by Robert E. Sullivan. Harvard University Press, £19.25

Born in the north of Ireland in 1670, Toland illustrates the maxim that no man is a hero in his own country; for he is far better known on the Continent than in Ireland or in Britain. "Educated from the cradle in the grossest superstition and idolatry", as he tells us in his *Apology* (1697), he threw off Roman Catholicism at the age of 15 by "his own reason and such as made use of theirs". Having neither family fortune—as had freethinkers such as Charles Blount, Lord Shaftesbury, Anthony Collins—nor an Oxford fellowship—as had Matthew Tindal—Toland was forced to live by his pen. That he was an incessant writer and controversialist is amply shown in G. Carabelli's two-volume *Tolandiana* (1975, 1978) and in the present study by Dr Sullivan.

Toland was perhaps the first professional freethinker, the forerunner of Carlile, Bradlaugh and Foote. To eliminate prejudice and religious intolerance was, by his own account, a main aim of his life. Most of his writings, and the best of them, are directed against established religion—not, of course, that he ever avowed this. Officially he claims, as in *Vindicius Liberi* (1702), to be a loyal Anglican, anxious only to eliminate religious abuses. Critics, however, rightly saw him as one of Christianity's most powerful enemies. Toland himself discusses the esoteric/exoteric distinction in *Tetradymus* (1720), where he claims that it is "as much in use as ever".

In 1696 he published in London his most important book, *Christianity not Mysterious*, and it made him notorious. It also began the so-called Deist debate; although part of Toland's position, as Sullivan shows (pp. 85-113), is to be found in earlier anti-Trinitarian tracts. Drawing especially on Locke's *Essay*—"the most useful Book that was ever written in Philosophy" (p. 122)—Toland argued that since mysteries such as the Trinity do not stand for clear ideas, Christianity must either employ meaningless doctrines, or else be non-mysterious; for to assent to a doctrine of which we have no clear idea is like trying to believe in "Blictri"—nonsense.

In 1697 Toland returned to Ireland, where in a short time he had "raised against him the clamour of all parties"; the clergy, especially, were "alarmed to a mighty degree against him". *Christianity not Mysterious* was burnt by the common hangman; and it was even moved by one member of the Irish House of Commons "that Mr Toland himself should be burnt". Yet for all that, his book initiated the one great age of Irish philosophy, 1696-1757.

In 1702 he travelled to Berlin, where he discussed theology with the Queen of Prussia, and to her he

# FREETHINKER

addressed his *Letters to Serena* (1704). The rationalism of *Christianity not Mysterious* is continued in this second major work, but whereas the first may be described as Deistic, the *Letters* embody a pantheistic materialism. Again, of course, Toland does not avow this viewpoint. Indeed, in the penultimate section of Letter 5, "Motion Essential to Matter", he repudiates Spinoza's pantheism—Toland coined the word "pantheist" in 1705—affirming that God is the "presiding intelligence", the "immaterial Being", responsible for the formation of plants and animals. So Sullivan's claim that Toland "openly embraced a coherent materialism" (p. 275) is false; and it is doubly puzzling, given his own paraphrase of Toland's exoteric *caveat* (p. 182) and his statement that "It remains possible that [Toland's fellow freethinker] Collins was sincere when he described God as an immaterial being . . ." (p. 225). But how can Sullivan be confident that Toland was insincere when he asserted divine immateriality whereas Collins was not?

Nor is this the only place where Sullivan obscures the distinction between what an 18th-century freethinker said and what he meant. Thus he mistakenly claims (pp. 207, 215, 220) that Tindal described himself as a Deist. Sullivan is wrong, too, in saying that there is no evidence that Tindal was sympathetic to atheism, as one can see from the *Religious . . . Conduct of Tindal* (1735), p. 25.

In pointing out these errors, however, I would not wish to call in question Sullivan's scholarly contribution to our understanding of Toland. His lively book is packed with original research; he sifts the evidence judiciously and offers new perspectives. Had space permitted I should have discussed Sullivan's stimulating ideas on civil theology (pp. 115-119) and questioned his attributing the *Two Essays* (1695) to Toland (pp. 174-175).

More generally, I am unhappy about Sullivan's condescension towards Toland and the British freethinkers (see, e.g., pp. 33-39, 43-50, 138, 142, 180, 240, 266, 276). He probably caught his dismissive tone from Leslie Stephen and from Edmund Burke, from whom Sullivan takes one of his book's two epigraphs: "Who . . . has read one word of Collins, Toland, and Tindal . . . and that whole race who called themselves freethinkers?" To Burke's rhetorical question J. M. Robertson offered what is still, I think, the best answer in his *History of Freethought* (1936); see especially pp. 749-753.

DAVID BERMAN

## REVIEWS

**PLAN POETS.** Edited by James Berry. The Progressive League, £2

A characteristic item in the Progressive League's Golden Jubilee celebrations is the publication of an excellent collection of poems by its members and friends—some re-printed from *Plan*, some entered for the poetry competition.

The 106 poems, all quite short, deal with every conceivable topic, mostly in a depth which speaks well for the quality of the PL's supporters. This is a collection one can return to again and again and always find something pleasing that had been previously overlooked. Some lines are unforgettable:

*And beetles, mice, ants, vipers to cremate,  
On this, the creatures' Hiroshima Day.*

(*Swaling*, by Margaret Galloway, the second prize winner.)

*and the old wound breaks out again  
in all its agony and pain.*

(*Sometimes in the Night*, by Fanny Cockerell.)

*. . . you  
Shoot, from way up high,  
A lovely bird,  
All brown and speckled,  
With a lazy pattern on her wings—  
I cry.*

(*Reality*, by Madeline Walker.)

*Envy and calummy and fear and hate  
Still crucify the good, and spit at God.*

(*To Wilhelm Reich—In Memoriam*, by Millie Pitts.)

These days there are few ways in which you will derive so much pleasure from an expenditure of £2. Happy browsing!

MARGARET McILROY

• **Plan Poets** is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, price £2 plus 50p postage.

JIM HERRICK

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Local humanist groups which devote considerable time and energy to raising money for other causes should consider following the example of Glasgow Humanist Society. This month's list included their generous donation of £40. Warm thanks are expressed to our Glasgow supporters and to others whose names are given below.

Anonymous, £30; P. W. Brook, £24; J. Busby, £1.40; J. C. Brunel, £1.50; J. S. Clark, 50p; W. H. Cozens, 75p; J. Davenport, £4.40; R. C. Edmunds, £1.40; A. C. Fancett, £1.40; P. G. Gamgee, £2.40; Glasgow Humanist Society, £40; D. Brubiak, £6.40; L. Hanger, £1.40; S. P. Harvey, £6.40; V. Harvey, £5; F. Kennedy, £1.40; L. V. Keen, £5; J. Lavety, £1.40; J. Lloyd-Lewis, £1; N. J. Martin, £1.40; M. Pinkster, £3.90; N. Sinnott, £3.40; J. Westerman, £1.40; S. Williams, £1.40.

Total for the period 7 April until 6 May: £160.65.

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subject of sexual behaviour is still 'taboo' in Northern Ireland", and that "beyond family planning it is rarely discussed". It then went on arrogantly to assert that "Lurid porn is spurring sex crimes in Northern Ireland" and cited as its authority for this extraordinary piece of nonsense "the National Festival of Light, a charity in Great Britain supporting Christian standards in social life". A Northern Ireland women's rights campaigner, Eileen Evason, was then quoted as reporting "that porn is feeding the very things that prompt rape". I wonder if she has ever given a thought to the opposing view that porn is *not* feeding the very thing that *prevents* rape? Perhaps she should be more generous in handing out her health education material.

That "pornography" is distasteful or even causes offence to some people, whether they be men or women, is simply no justification for it to be banned. Women are no more entitled to this "right" than they are of depriving others, including other women who do not think as they do—and men—of their "rights".

In *German Philosophy and Literature*, published in 1840, the German poet and philosopher Heinrich Heine wrote: "When books are burned, in the end people too get burned". I do hope the women book-burners of 14 May will remember that. I am sure lucky Jewish survivors from the last war will. They will certainly not need to be reminded that Hitler began by public book-burning and ended by burning people in the incinerators of Auschwitz, Dachau and Belsen. Sieg Heil, Meine Damen!

# The Biological Time-Bomb: Explosion in Assam

GOVIND N. DEODHEKAR

The February elections in Assam produced gruesome massacres. It is estimated that nearly 7,000 people died. Here is one analysis of the complex situation.

Since 1979 the Assamese have carried on an intense agitation against the inclusion of Bangladeshi aliens on the voting lists. It was claimed that at least half a million of the eight million voters could be identified as aliens.

The Assamese have long held a fear of being overwhelmed by an influx of Bengali settlers. With the partition of India, the Muslim majority areas of Bengal went to form East Pakistan. So did the district of Sylhet, which was in Assam. The Assamese claim that after partition the Bangladeshis have continued to cross into Assam. If the Hindus are fleeing from what has become an Islamic state of Bangladesh, they should be regarded as the responsibility of all India, not only Assam. On the other hand, Bangladeshi Muslims have no right to infiltrate into Assam or any part of India. Such infiltration and settlement could result in a demand for further secession of territory as in the case of Sylhet, the Assamese claim.

Negotiations with the central Government in India failed to settle the final date for legitimatising the entry of immigrants, and other details. The negotiations finally broke down on 4 January. Assamese leaders returning from Delhi were arrested at Gauhati airport on 6 January, the day on which Mrs Gandhi called for elections to be held in mid-February.

The Assamese appealed for forceful opposition to the elections. Bridges were destroyed and clashes took place with the police. The Assamese-speaking Hindus and Muslims were together in the conflict.

All opposition parties in India, with the exception of the Communists, also boycotted the elections. Civil servants in Assam would have nothing to do with the election machinery despite threats of arrests and dismissals. The army and special police were mobilised to protect the polling booths. Mrs Gandhi's few speeches in Assam calling on the Bengali-speaking Muslims and Hindus, as well as the Tibeto-Burman tribals, to come out and vote could have had only a provocative effect.

There are approximately ten million Assamese speakers, two and a half million Tibeto-Burman-speaking Assamese tribals and six million Bengalis in Assam. Although the violence started as a linguistic conflict between Assamese and Bengali speakers, with religious undertones, the insecurity of the tribals

later emerged as a substantial factor in the conflicts. The large-scale and indiscriminate massacres were carried out by the tribals against Assamese Hindus and Bangladeshi Muslims.

At the root of it all, however, is land hunger arising from the population explosion. The East and North East of the Indian sub-continent consist of West Bengal, East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Assam and its allied territory. The two Bengals are plains crossed by many rivers and include the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta. Assam and allied territories are tropical forests and hills except for the valleys of the Brahmaputra. The states carved out of the allied territory are Arunachal (formerly North East Frontier Agency), Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Their total population is about five million; Assam has about 18 million.

In contrast, the Bangladesh population is about 90 million and West Bengal has 45-50 million. The Cachar district of Assam has had a 75 per cent Bengali population for a long time. Tripura, which had a half tribal and half Bengali population in the 1950s, is now dominated by Bengalis (mostly Hindus) who outnumber the tribals by two to one.

About two years ago the Tripura tribals massacred several hundred Bengali Hindus—an outrage that did not receive international publicity. The tribals have lost the demographic battle but continue to support the Indira Congress Party, while the Bengalis generally support the Marxist Communist Party which may yet hold the scales evenly between the two groups. Meanwhile, the Islamic government of Bangladesh has under its control tribal territory in the Chittagong Hill districts which it is trying to settle with its own Muslim peasants. The tribal Chakmas are in revolt against this take-over of their land and there are sporadic clashes with the Bangladeshi Army.

The Bengali-speaking population of the two Bengals, numbering approximately 150 million, constitutes one of the largest linguistic aggregates in the world. The population of India as a whole is growing at the rate of 25 per cent a decade, and this would apply to West Bengal. The population of Bangladesh is perhaps growing at a slightly faster rate.

Apart from Cachar, the Brahmaputra valley where the Assamese live already has a Bengali-speaking minority of 10 to 30 per cent, varying from East to West. The fears of the Assamese are therefore very real. Only a Chinese style programme of birth control (one child per family) could perhaps avoid the demographic clash. Such a programme seems unlikely to be accepted in India where Mother Theresa is applauded for her work among the poor but never

criticised for her support of Roman Catholic policy on birth control.

Even if the long frontier between Assam and Bangladesh were sealed off, West Bengalis (as Indians) would have the right to go into Assam. Only constitutional changes prohibiting the movement of people between the states could close this door. But such a drastic step would be contrary to the spirit of the Indian Union and in any case quite impractical. Restrictions on the sale or occupation of land in Assam may be a partial solution.

The repatriation of a large number of Bangladeshis may result in their being disowned by the Government of Bangladesh, thus producing conflict

between the two states. It is a matter of significance that Bangladesh, which owes its liberation from Pakistan partly at least to India, has now fallen into the hands of military dictators bent on establishing an Islamic state there. While the Islamic state must produce insecurity among its Hindu citizens, causing them to seek refuge in West Bengal or Assam, it can also ruthlessly close its doors on its own nationals returning from Assam and accuse India of expelling people from its territory.

Under these circumstances, no early solution seems possible. So one must conclude, regretfully, that the biological time-bomb will keep on exploding on the Indian sub-continent from time to time.

## LETTERS

### THE FALKLANDS—WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

Mr Francis Bennion (Letters, May) refers to my review of the book, "Iron Britannia" and questions my opinion that the Falklands war was "fundamentally irrelevant". I chose the words with care and I stand by them. The fact that, despite our economic and other difficulties, few of which we are anywhere near solving, we could defeat the Argentine armed forces proved nothing. It certainly does not prove that our cause was right. Does Mr Bennion believe that any country may resort to arms when it thinks it will? Further, does Mr Bennion, or anyone else, really feel safe from the threat of nuclear war because of what happened in the South Atlantic? I have far too much respect for Mr Bennion's intelligence to believe this.

A smaller matter is that Mr Bennion seems to think that I was purporting to write "as an impartial observer". He has misunderstood what I wrote. I cannot think that many people thought my remarks suggested impartiality. I had in mind not myself but the foreign observers whom I met in West Germany when the war broke out. They had no sympathy with Argentina and did not defend that country's actions. They simply thought that the British Government was insane.

T. F. EVANS

### THE FUTURE OF THE FALKLANDS

Francis Bennion (May) says that "if British military action had not been taken, the Falklands would still be under Argentinian rule . . ." is a statement. It is not. It is a speculation. It is one of the tragic "ifs" of history: could less precipitate military action and more determined negotiation have solved the conflict without some 1,000 deaths? We shall never know.

The cynical can say that critics of such hasty military action took an "I'm all right Jack attitude"; equally it is easy to accuse Mrs Thatcher of taking a "Let's cover economic disaster with some patriotic flag-waving" approach. The difference in reality, is between those who judged that a dispute of that scale ought to be solved by negotiation and those who felt only military action could safeguard the lives of the Falklanders. This is an honest disagreement of judgement. There is also, perhaps, an instinctive difference between those who would use armed action as a last resort and those who feel that military action must always be swift and

firm to be effective.

Does Francis Bennion's "unmuddled" thinking allow him to see that the war has not solved the dispute over the Falkland Islands, which geography and economics will prevent from remaining a British fortress for ever. In the long run a solution must be found which returns the Falklands to Argentina while preserving the rights and choices of the inhabitants, as with those British who choose to live in the Argentine mainland without, apparently, being ill-treated, or which offers the inhabitants compensation and a new life elsewhere, which would be a better deal than has been achieved for many in the desecrated wastes of Britain's industrial heartlands.

JIM HERRICK

### CONTEXT OF A COMMANDMENT

I was amused to read Tim Lenton's assertion (April) that "Thou shall have no other god is not an angry command. It is simply, like all commandments, an expression of what is best for people".

To avoid any confusion about the sentiments expressed in Exodus 20. 3, it is necessary to put it in the context of Exodus 20. 4-5 immediately following it: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me".

Explanation for this rather excessive attitude can be discovered by putting Exodus 20. 3-5 into the cultural context of the rest of the Book of Exodus and the Book of Leviticus.

Placed within this context, Exodus 20. 3-5 richly deserves the re-classification that Mr Lenton imposes upon it. However, this re-classification is as relevant to the original context as it was to the witch-finders of the 17th and 18th centuries. In assuming that what is virtuous is necessarily Christian, Mr Lenton has attributed his own conception of social justice to areas of the bible that are quite unworthy of them. When he has learned to differentiate between the two, Mr Lenton can call himself a humanist.

PAUL ROGERS

# A Good Time was had by all at NSS Annual Dinner

Those lucky enough to attend the National Secular Society's annual dinner this year not only had good company and a nice meal but also excellent entertainment from the speakers. Not that speakers in previous years have been lacking in talent, but this year's bunch were in a class of their own. **Brian Parry reports.**

The toast to the guest of honour, Benny Green, was proposed by T. F. Evans. In a witty speech he began with great daring by quoting a clergyman, the Rev Sydney Smith, who had said that "the meaning of an extraordinary man is that he is eight men, not one man". Mr Evans found no difficulty in enumerating the eight Mr Greens who were with them that evening, the journalist, the writer for the theatre, the authority on Dickens, the expert on lesser Dickensians such as Shaw and Wells, the source of all knowledge on popular music, the chronicler of boxing and other "sports" and—perhaps pre-eminently, in Mr Evans impartial eyes, the biographer and informed critic of P. G. Wodehouse plus the encyclopaedic anthologist of the greatest of all books, *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack*.

T. F. Evans clearly shares Mr Green's love of cricket which he declared was far too important to be called a sport, claiming that it was a long held belief that if God was Anglican and an Englishman he was probably a pretty good middle order batsman as well.

In reply, Benny Green explained that, unlike his boyhood contemporaries in the East End of London, he did not have the Jewish religion foisted upon him. His family were far too concerned with important things such as working and reading *Sporting Life* to worry about trivial questions about the meaning of life and whether God was in his heaven or not. So the young Benny did not have any pre-conceived notions on such matters.

He recalled a couple of friends who saw the light and became atheists. Communities displaced during the war often had to put up with make-shift places of worship and the Jewish community to which Benny belonged was forced to use a local hall as a synagogue. One young lad who had discovered that felony was fun had a bright idea. All of the men would be in the hall on the day of atonement and their coats would be hung up in the cloakroom—an opportunity too good to miss. Having obtained a ticket to gain entrance the lad proceeded to go through the pockets of the worshippers. To his surprise he found that not only were these devout pillars of the community, who were supposed to be fasting, concealing food in their coats; they had such forbidden delights as pork pies to boot.

Another friend had a marvellous head for facts and figures which he found a use for while taking care of the local cemetery. During the war the graves had not been well attended and people often could not find their way to the right spot. To this young man it was no problem at all to memorise who was buried where and he was able to guide mourners to the right hole in the ground with unfailing accuracy. He noticed however that the amount of time a party spent by the graveside differed enormously from one funeral to another. Then one day he found out why. He saw a crisp fiver pass between the chief mourner and the Rabbi. The length of prayers said varied in direct proportion to the money paid.

Caroline Woodroffe, Director of Brook Advisory Centres, proposed the toast to the National Secular Society. She recalled that 22 years ago the NSS organised a demonstration outside the headquarters of the British Transport Commission in Marylebone Road, London. This was in protest against the Commission's refusal to display totally innocuous Family Planning Association posters in Underground stations.

Now it looks as though the NSS will have to fight the battle against such censorship again, Caroline Woodroffe added. She told how a public service announcement, made by London Weekend Television at a cost of £10,000, had been banned by the Independent Broadcasting Authority. This has happened at a time when teenage pregnancies and abortions are increasing.

Caroline Woodroffe concluded by paying tribute to the NSS "which, for 117 years, has seen with the light of reason and humanity". She hoped that a member of the NSS would be the IBA's next chairman.

George Vale, responding on behalf of the NSS, said he had been asked to speak because Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, of which he is vice-chairman, celebrated its Silver Jubilee this year. "In 75 years we shall be celebrating our centenary and I invite all of you to come to our place on 15 March 2058".

Mr Vale said that it might look as though religion had lost much of its power.

"But there is still a great need for the NSS. We still need to protect ourselves from advocates of censorship, bishops in the House of Lords, compulsory religion in schools, increased police powers and those who want to solve the problem of unemployment by putting women back into the kitchen".

Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, was in the chair and kept the proceedings going with a swing.

# OBITUARY

## Mrs G. B. Baker

Betty Gladys Baker has died at the age of 54 after a long illness. There was a secular committal ceremony at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium.

## Mr F. Flood

Fred Flood, a militant atheist who remained active until the last week of his life, has died at the age of 82.

As a young man, Mr Flood was deeply involved in the political life, particularly the socialist movement, of his native Manchester. He was a lecturer for the National Council of Labour Colleges and was a marshal for the Gorton and Openshaw contingent in the first Hunger March.

Mr Flood later moved to Cheltenham and helped to form the Cheltenham Humanist Group. There was a secular committal ceremony at Cheltenham Crematorium.

## Mr G. R. Kingbourn

George Righton Kingbourn died in hospital last month at the age of 83. He was an expert on British plants and a noted horticultural journalist. The secular committal ceremony took place at Chichester Crematorium.

## Mr J. Robinson

Jack Robinson died in March at the age of 70. By profession he was a second-hand bookseller, and by conviction he was an antimilitarist and anarchist, being a conscientious objector during the Second World War and working for *Freedom* for many years after it. He was also a total abstainer from meat, tobacco and alcohol. He was an indefatigable writer and speaker, and often discussed freethought topics.

He was cremated after an informal secular ceremony at Ipswich Crematorium.

## Mr. J. Shephard

John Shephard, a co-founder with his son David of the Sunday Freedom League, has died. Born in 1901, Mr Shepherd was a Baptist until he was in his twenties but for most of his life he described himself as an agnostic.

It was in the mid-1950s when John and David Shephard learned that the Lord's Day Observance Society had stopped a group of children in Torquay from giving a Sunday concert under the direction of a Sunday school teacher. The concert was organised to raise money for deprived and handicapped children in the care of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The Shephards drew up a manifesto and a petition

# EVENTS

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

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 3 July, 4.30 p.m. Tea Party followed by Annual General Meeting. Programme of events during the summer obtainable from Joan Wimble, Flat 5, 67 St. Aubyns, Hove, Sussex, telephone Brighton 733215 or 696425.

**British Humanist Association.** Summer Course at Debden House, Loughton, Essex, 15-19 August. Current and Future Problems of Society: What Can we do? Speakers include John Davoll, Celia Fremlin, Richard Scorer, Harry Stopes-Roe. Approximate cost: £61. Details: Margaret Chisam, 41 Penn Road, London N7, telephone 07-607 4755.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 p.m.

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday 30 June, 7.45 p.m. A meeting (subject and speaker to be announced).

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 17 June, 7.45 p.m. Judith Phillips: Equal Rights and the EEC.

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calling for the removal of archaic laws from the Statute Book. They received hundreds of letters supporting their action. But there were also many abusive and usually anonymous messages from sabbatarians and others on the lunatic fringe.

One of John Shephard's pleasantest memories was attending the first Sunday cricket match between Somerset and Surrey. It had been threatened by the LDOS and Mr Shephard hoped to confront some of the Society's officials. Instead, he met Lady Strathcona, one of the organisers of the match, and gallantly offered to take her place in the stocks.

In later years John Shephard spent much time visiting the local hospital and Cheshire Home.

## Mr C. E. Wood

Charles Ernest Wood who died recently was a familiar figure at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, for many years. He spoke at hundreds of open-air meetings and was a forthright advocate of atheism. There was a secular ceremony at Willesden Cemetery, London, where a large number of people attended the funeral.

# Future Uncertain, Scottish Humanists Told

The Scottish Humanist Council's annual conference took place in Glasgow on 21 May. The guest speaker was Dr Malcolm MacEwan, the title of whose address was *Has Man a Future?*

Dr MacEwan said that he did not regard the machine threat as a major danger, because however advanced machines are, they are bound to work within a closed system of logic. He added: "I also suspect that if machines, however complex, were left to exist on their own, they would eventually cease to function, because they would see no logical reason for their continued existence. Perhaps indeed there is no logical reason for ours; but there is an intuitive reason, which goes beyond logic. And after all, most of us assembled here today to consider whether Man has a future would probably on the whole like the answer to be 'yes'. Some people have an urge towards non-existence, even towards the downfall of the whole human race, but they are generally considered eccentric . . ."

"More important, perhaps, than the threat of machines is the threat of growth. What would you describe as the characteristic feature of the modern age? It has been called the Age of Aviation, the Age of Plastics, the Nuclear Age, the Electronic Age and the Space Age. It is all these things, but more than anything, I think, it may be described as the Age of Growth. Virtually everything today is growing faster than ever before in the history of Mankind—except, no doubt, intelligence and wisdom".

Looking to the future, Dr MacEwan predicted major disasters for the human race in the 21st century. "Taking population as the most obvious example", he said, "our present world growth is two per cent a year, which may not seem very drastic, but in only 100 years would lead to the impossible figure of 28,000 million people. As a matter of fact the average rate of increase during the last 2,000 years cannot have been greater than 0.15 per cent a year, and that has been enough to bring up the population from an assumed 150 million to its present inflated figure of 4,000 million . . . If the rate of increase does not fall off very soon, and for various reasons this is difficult to envisage, then some time in the next hundred years we may expect a population crisis, with the population falling suddenly to a fraction of its previous figure.

"Just how will this happen? The possibilities are various. War, very possibly. The rapid population increase will lead to serious tensions. Hitherto, in fact, wars themselves have not often been a major factor in population decline, except in localised instances such as the Thirty Years War. Even the first World War did not really kill such a vast number of people compared with natural deaths during

the period, and those due to the influenza epidemic which followed it.

"Of course we know there are indeed good reasons to believe that a future world war will be much more destructive, and might indeed kill off the entire human race. However, there are many other possible factors—serious food shortages, disease, perhaps artificially induced as a war weapon, perhaps arising in some overcrowded cities of the Third World. The one certain thing is that the growth will come to a halt, and the longer it continues, the more likely is the process to be a disastrous one.

"Does this mean necessarily the elimination of the human race, or perhaps a very grave setback, from which it will only slowly and painfully recover over a period of centuries? No, not necessarily. The thing could even be beneficial in the end.

"The possibility may just be mentioned in passing that Man will not kill himself off, but be killed off by a minor disaster from space—minor on the cosmic scale, that is. Those who think scientists are always sensible should see what astronomers were saying in the 18th century, when they were quite sure that no objects fell from space, and that people who had actually seen them fall were deluded fools.

"We now know that lots of objects fall from space, and that some are quite large ones. One probably fell only 65 million years ago, and that may be why we are all here now, discussing whether we are going to be here a few million years in the future. In fact, that object may have come close to destroying life on Earth, and another one might destroy us just as easily as the first one created us.

"Smaller, but still quite nasty objects probably fall quite frequently. One fell in Tunguska in Northern Siberia in 1908, and laid waste several thousand square miles of fortunately almost uninhabited woodland. Suppose such an object were to fall on a major city? This could kill off most of the inhabitants—nasty for them, but not a major disaster on a world scale.

"But it carries with it the danger that, given our present trigger-happy nuclear defence set-up, such a disaster might be misinterpreted, and lead to an escalating exchange of nuclear warheads. It would be ironical in the extreme if a disastrous nuclear war were triggered off by an accidental intruder from space".

Dr MacEwan declared that he could see no future for mankind so long as nuclear weapons remained stockpiled.

"Sooner or later they are going to be used—perhaps by accident, perhaps because a near-psychopath gets control of some important country, a happening for which there are precedents".