

The Freethinker

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NAZI-HUNTER'S EVIDENCE OF PAPAL SILENCE ON FRENCH JEWS' PLIGHT

Serge Klarsfeld, the Nazi-hunter and chairman of the Sons and Daughters of French Jews, has uncovered evidence which strongly indicates that Pope Pius XII ignored appeals to help Jews during the Nazi occupation of France. Catholic and Protestant clergy supported a campaign to stop the round-up of Jews in southern France. Pierre Laval, the Prime Minister, told a Cardinal that the Pope should intervene if the arrests were to be stopped. But Cardinal Valeri, the Papal Nuncio at Vichy, said that Pius XII had decided on "a prudent wait". South American diplomats at the time accused the Vatican of "enclosing itself in silence" in the face of inhumane persecution.

Klarsfeld has compiled detailed information on the fate of over 70,000 French Jews. It is clear that the Nazis had the full support of the Vichy Government and the French police who helped them to hound down the fugitives.

The new disclosures will add to the controversy that has continued for many years over Pius XII's attitude to German persecution of the Jews. He has been described as the "German Pope". As Cardinal Pacelli, he spent 12 years of his political life in Germany. He moved in the highest diplomatic and political circles, and spoke the language fluently. The German clergy and laity did not conceal their malevolent hatred of Jews.

In 1933, when Pacelli was Secretary of State, Hitler proposed a concordat with the Vatican. Shortly before, the Catholic Centre Party supported an enabling act which gave Hitler unlimited powers. (The Party disbanded in July of that year, most of its supporters transferring their allegiance to the Nazis.) The German bishops stated clearly that Catholics could co-operate with the Nazi regime. Hitler, in turn, met all the Vatican's demands,

including the continuation of Catholic schools, during the concordat negotiations.

It has been argued in Pacelli's defence that he agreed to the concordat in order to strengthen the Church's hand should she have to intercede on behalf of anti-Nazi Catholics. But in view of his profound knowledge of German affairs, and the attitude of the Church in Germany to the Hitler regime, he must have known this was unlikely to happen. The few disagreements they had, occurred when Rome thought her interests were being threatened.

Defenders of Pius XII claim that he held his tongue about German treatment of the Jews because he feared that any statement by him would provoke the Nazis into committing even greater atrocities. He was not so reticent about provoking Communist authorities, who were constantly accused of persecution and extermination of Christians. It is now admitted even by Catholic sources that Pius XII regarded the Nazi system as being preferable to Communist Bolshevism.

"The Pope of Peace"

The French Ambassador to the Vatican said the Pope knew perfectly well of the crimes that were being perpetrated by the Nazis all over Europe. And a *New York Times* correspondent later declared: "The Vatican was remarkably well informed of the internal situation prevailing in various parts of Europe. . . The periodical reports the priests sent to the bishops of their diocese . . . always got to Rome somehow or other".

When it became evident that Germany would lose the war, Pius XII became concerned about ques-

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

"OPERATION WHITEWASH"

The 150th anniversary of William Wilberforce's death was an occasion for Christian opportunities to eulogise him as a social reformer of the first rank. He has been elevated almost to the point of sainthood by Christian socialists despite the fact that he was an indefatigable opponent of reform. His chief objectives were always the advancement of evangelical Protestantism and maintenance of the *status quo*.

One of the few progressive causes Wilberforce supported was the abolition of slavery. He did not stand alone in the anti-slavery fight. But other abolitionists like Thomas Clarkson, a Christian, and those who were castigated as "infidels", are forgotten or ignored. So is the appalling record of Christian justification of slavery and Christian ownership of slaves.

William Wilberforce, who is now lauded as the great campaigner against slavery in foreign plantations, opposed virtually every attempt to end slavery in the mines, mills and factories of Britain. He supported the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus*, which resulted in hundreds being held in prison without trial. It was on his and Pitt's insistence that the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800, which made workers' organisations illegal, were even more stringent than originally envisaged. He callously defended the perpetrators of the Peterloo Massacre.

What Wilberforce regarded as "the basis of all politics" is explained in his *Practical Outline of the System of Christianity*. In it he expounds the view that Christianity makes the inequalities of the social order acceptable to the poor, teaching them to be diligent, humble and patient. Christianity tells the masses how "the peace of mind that Religion offers indiscriminately to all ranks, affords true satisfaction than all the expensive pleasures that are beyond the poor man's reach . . . that having food and raiment they should therewith be content".

Wilberforce was the censorious authoritarian *par excellence*; few individuals expended more energy on making life dreary and conformist. He persuaded George III to issue a Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue and Prime Minister Spencer Perceval to assemble Parliament on Tuesday instead of Monday to save MPs from the sin of travelling on the Sabbath. He campaigned tirelessly for a more vigorous implementation of the Sunday observance laws and, with Lord Belgrave, introduced a bill to suppress Sunday newspapers. He also disapproved of mixed bathing.

Wilberforce was a founder member of the

AND NOTES

notorious Society for the Suppression of Vice, a body of pious prodnoses dedicated to the noble task of banishing "seditious and blasphemous" literature. Their chief target was the radical publishing fraternity. Wilberforce and his friends prosecuted a bookseller for selling Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. The man was in a small way of business and so impoverished that even the prosecuting counsel appealed for mercy. But Wilberforce recorded in his diary how he and his fellow-Christians stood firm and brought about the bookseller's ruination.

Christian whitewashers are adept at covering historical truth. But now they are finding it difficult to conceal the fact that, even for his time, William Wilberforce stood out as an arch-reactionary and intolerant religious bigot.

• Three of Wilberforce's sons converted to Roman Catholicism. A fourth, "Soapy Sam", was Bishop of Oxford, and came a cropper when he challenged T. H. Huxley and the Darwinians.

SPANNER IN THE WORKS

Anthony Bush, a lay reader and organiser of Mission England in the South West region, believes that Satan is trying to sabotage the Lord's work in that area. Certainly Old Nick has been making his presence felt among the godly.

For instance, Mr Bush and a group of Christian friends had just concluded a meeting at his home in Nailsea, near Bristol, when the building was struck by lightning and the resultant fire destroyed the roof and part of the second floor. Mr Bush related how they had been discussing Billy Graham's forthcoming visit to Britain, a trip to London for an anti-abortion rally and disapproval of the Church of England's policy on marriage. The lightning strike was "as good a job as an Exocet at a quarter of a mile".

And there have been other mysterious happenings. Three of Mr Bush's Mission England colleagues were involved in separate car crashes during the course of a weekend. Curiouser and curiouser.

But why should Satan be so bothered about Mr Bush's endeavours? He explained: "I really believe Billy Graham and Mission England are going to turn England upside down spiritually and Satan knows that as well. I am sure that this is the first of many attempts by Satan to break down all that Mission England promises".

Will the satanic arsonist strike again? Will Bristol become a no-go area for The One Above? Will the Militant Tendency infiltrate Mission England? Watch out for further thrilling instalments!

Marvin Steffins is president of International Expeditions Inc, Los Angeles. He is also a Christian fundamentalist who believes that the Genesis account of creation is the true one. His company's latest venture is financing a search for Noah's Ark, somewhere near the summit of Mount Ararat. Leading American politicians and industrialists are backing, but not taking part in the expedition. It will be led by Colonel James Irwin, the astronaut. Prospects of finding the Ark cannot be regarded as rosy. Colonel Irwin has already led one expedition which came to grief when he fell off Mount Ararat. And International Expeditions Inc failed in its attempt to raise the *Titanic*.

PIOUS BODY-SNATCHERS

The *Times* correspondence page has often been the starting point of a worthy enterprise. Letters which appeared recently commenting on the neglected state of Sir Richard Burton's tomb in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Mortlake prompted a number of volunteers to clear away the weeds and undergrowth that cluttered the edifice.

The Burton mausoleum, 18 feet tall, is in the shape of an Arab tent. Agile visitors can climb a metal ladder and view the interior, which looks like a setting for a Dracula film.

Sir Richard Burton was a celebrated 19th-century explorer and linguist. His niece described him as "a sturdy Deist" whose god was "unknown and impersonal", and who did not believe in a future life. Certainly he was no Christian.

Why, then, did he finish up in a Roman Catholic cemetery? Quite simply, Burton was a notable catch for Christian body-snatchers when he died in 1890. His wife, a fanatical Catholic, had the sacraments administered when he was helpless and dying. This pious lady, according to the *Catholic Herald*, "succeeded in getting her husband anointed when he was pretty plainly dead". She then arranged an elaborate Catholic funeral for the man who once told her that he wanted his body to be thrown into the sea.

Lady Burton was a forerunner of today's purity brigade. Before she died in 1896, she and William Coote, leader of the National Vigilance Association, destroyed a number of irreplaceable manuscripts from her husband's collection of Arabic erotic folklore.

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BUZZ BOOB OVER GOD'S SERVANT

No doubt there were red faces in the New Malden, Surrey, office of *Buzz*, the oddly named evangelical magazine, last month. One of its leading articles, "God, I Give You Guatemala", was a fulsome tribute to Rios Montt, the born-again dictator of that country. More accurately—and embarrassingly for the *Buzz* team—he was the born-again ex-dictator by the time the magazine reached its readers.

Dan Wooding, who wrote the piece, was one of a group of Christian visitors to Montt's presidential palace. (Readers prone to bouts of nausea may wish to skip the remainder of this paragraph.) Wooding sets the scene: "I slipped my arm around the shoulder of the slightly-built president as our little group stood in a circle for a time of prayer. The head of state murmured 'Gloria a Dios' (praise the Lord) during this unique time of prayer and worship".

Montt told his visitors: "I am simply a servant of the Lord. He governs, he decides, he reigns". Within a short time Montt was toppled.

Rios Montt belongs to the California-based, fundamentalist Church of the Christian Word. During his presidential term he used his position to evangelise Guatemala. He distributed Gideon bibles to visitors and preached a television sermon every Sunday. Montt encouraged Christian missionaries who poured into his country from the United States. Many of his aides and advisers were Americans.

At the same time, he suppressed opposition and his regime had a grim human rights record. His critics included Amnesty International, and a commentator declared of Montt's Guatemala: "The only political party now active is evangelism".

Right-wing dictators the world over can usually depend on the support of either the Roman Catholic Church or evangelical Protestants, or both. Montt is not popular with Rome, but he has many backers among Moral Majority elements and born-again nutters. One of his most ardent admirers is the Argentinian evangelist, Luis Palau, who has been preaching in Britain. He paid tribute to Montt's "uncompromising commitment to Christian principles", and the dictator spoke at one of Palau's rallies.

Shortly before Montt's downfall, James DeGolyer, described as his assistant pastor, said: "I believe God wants to show his way through a man who is committed to him and willing to do his will". So the lads and girls at *Buzz* need not be too crestfallen. Even God can make a cock-up of things.

MEETINGS TO COMMEMORATE THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH

MONDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 11 am

Shoreditch Public Library,
Pitfield Street, London N1
(Old Street Underground)

Speakers:

Michael Foot, MP
Brian Sedgemoor, MP
Renée Short, MP
Barbara Smoker
President, National Secular Society

MONDAY 10 OCTOBER 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

**BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL
AS CRITICS OF RELIGION**

Speakers:

Jim Herrick
Nicolas Walter

Readings:

John White

Presiding:

Barbara Smoker

National Secular Society

702 Holloway Road, London N19
Telephone 01-272 1266

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Total for the period 7 July until 9 August: £88.10

"Severely Handicapped Infants" is a discussion document that considers a number of fundamental problems confronting those most closely involved in a human tragedy. Do parents have the right to choose? Does society have the resources to cope? What should the priorities be? The snooping activities of Life and other Christian groups in hospitals aggravate an already tense and distressing situation.

This eight-page pamphlet, issued by the pressure group Prospect (42 Church Road, Warringham, Surrey), comprises an offprint from the current issue of the *New Humanist*, with the addition of a paper cover. It is therefore rather expensive at £1 — especially as the same contents are available together with other interesting material for the same price, by buying the *New Humanist* itself. On the other hand, this excellent article—which includes a very useful bibliography, the text of the Abortion Act of 1967, and the draft Protection of Disabled Children Bill, drawn up by Life in 1981 — is certainly worth the measure of permanence given it by this reprinted format. Another advantage is that distribution by Prospect will put it into the hands of some people who would not have seen it in the *New Humanist*.

Madeleine Sims (an active and able polemicist for secularism as well as for abortion and euthanasia for severely handicapped fetuses and neonates) researches the relevant facts with care and relies for her effectiveness on sound argument clearly expressed, never on stridency of assertion.

Here she shows that the scope of the problem, exacerbated first by the indiscriminate application of advances in neonatal techniques and more recently by cuts in the social services, has fortunately been mitigated in the past few years by the readier provision of legal abortion on grounds of foetal abnormality and also—as the statistics of neonatal survival prove —by a more enlightened medical policy with regard to severely defective infants, in spite of the law and of the menace of Life snoopers.

Although one of these snoopers succeeded in putting Dr Leonard Arthur in the dock for the euthanasia of a handicapped mongol baby whose parents had agreed that it was the best course of action, the jury refused to convict him. As a result, Life turned its attention from the law courts to Parliament, and produced the Protection of Disabled Children Bill. If this became law it would not only make it an offence to "withhold any treatment from such a child without which it is known he or she cannot survive"; it would also destroy those

sections of the Abortion Act that permit abortion on the grounds that "there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be severely handicapped". So far, no MP has been persuaded to introduce such a Bill, though the threat of it will no doubt surface every year at Private Members' Ballot time.

It is the organisation Prospect that specifically represents the rational and compassionate opposition to this Bill. Founded by Mrs Peggy Lejeune in 1981, Prospect maintains that "decisions about severely handicapped babies should be left to parents, guided by the diagnosis and advice of doctors present at the time" and that greater priority should be given to the improvement and availability of pregnancy screening facilities aimed at preventive abortion. At the same time, Prospect campaigns for the provision of better caring services and community support for parents with severely handicapped children to look after.

A Life of Suffering

The article cites some compelling case histories. It also juxtaposes two news items about the former Director of Social Services for Hammersmith and Fulham, David Plank, who against the wishes of the parents and doctors, authorised a life-saving operation on a handicapped baby, having it moved from hospital to hospital until he found a surgeon willing to operate. A year later, after a three-year-old had been battered to death by foster parents while in the care of the same Council, Mr Plank resigned his position because there were 47 more children similarly at risk in the borough owing to lack of resources. The baby whose life he had intervened to save would always be totally dependent, thus depleting the resources still further. Apart from such practical considerations, the moral rights of the parents to decide and of the infant to be spared a life of intolerably low quality were allowed by a court to be overridden by an employee of the local borough where the baby happened to be born.

Freethinker readers are urged to get hold of the article, in one format or the other (magazine or pamphlet), and to bring it to the notice of people who may need to be jolted into thinking about the suffering caused by prolonging the lives of foetuses or newborn babies with severe congenital abnormalities—the suffering not only of the handicapped themselves but also of their families, not to mention the additional burden placed on already overstretched social services.

I am just off to post a copy of the article to my nephew physician, who specialises in neonates.

What have the Prime Minister, Eric Heffer, a contender for the leadership of the Labour Party, Shirley Williams, a founder and now President of the Social Democratic Party, and David Alton, Liberal MP for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, got in common? They are not only politicians but committed Christians who recently contributed a series of articles in a Roman Catholic newspaper, "The Universe". That front rank politicians, some of them potential or actual leaders of their parties should air their views in such a publication, is indicative of the influence that Christianity still has on British political life.

"Any politician", writes Margaret Thatcher in *The Universe*, "who thinks that his own views represent the 'voice of God' in politics is riding for a fall". These words may yet prove to be prophetic. Judging by their actions, the Tories seem to think that economic depression and mass unemployment are not the product of human error, but acts of God. If God, in the unlikely event of his existence, is a just and merciful being, he may one day correct their view!

Mrs Thatcher believes that a special relationship exists between the Tory Party and the established Church. In a speech delivered at St Lawrence Jewry, London, in 1978, she stated: "The Tory Party in its origin was the Church of England in politics, for the old concept of a partnership between Church and State lies very near the heart of traditional Tory thinking, and in that partnership Tories always believed that the Church had primacy. . ." In the event of a reconciliation between Canterbury and Rome we may well see the Tory Party becoming a Continental-style Christian Democratic Party, with dire consequences for the non-believing, or at least non-practising, majority.

The Prime Minister writes that there are two specifically Christian ideas which provide the framework of her political philosophy. First, that the individual is a moral being who must make his own choices between good and evil. Secondly, that the people are members of "the mystical body of Christ", bound together in mutual dependence which is reflected in the family, patriotism and even in the life of trade unions. She adds that the Christian vision of a society based on freedom and responsibility is stirring men's consciences again. The Pope, she adds, has presented this vision to the people of Poland.

Yes, the individual is a moral being, but Christianity is not the only source of morality. Valid moral systems can be derived from humanistic philosophies. Individuals have frequently been prevented from exercising their moral choice, because Christians have forcibly imposed their views and

ruthlessly persecuted those who did not accept them.

It is often the pressures caused by poverty, unemployment, bad housing and social isolation that wreck family life. And the Tories, as devout in the worship of Mammon as in that of Jehovah, pursue policies which have added considerably to these pressures.

Historically, it was radicals like Thomas Paine, combining opposition to kingcraft with opposition to priestcraft, who were the patriots. Love of country does not mean waging colonial wars over barren islands or threatening humanity east of the Oder with nuclear annihilation.

Mrs Thatcher writes of "his" choice and "men's consciences". Are women to have no choice? Do they lack conscience? Or are they to remain trapped within the confines of the nuclear family with an updated version of the workhouse as the penalty for refusal or failure. A return to the Prime Minister's beloved Victorian values, which were based on bastardised puritanism, bodes ill for Britain.

A Lapse of Memory

The Labour Party, Eric Heffer writes, has had a very powerful Christian input. This is one of the many things wrong with it. To prove his point, Mr Heffer trots out the time-worn myth that the early Christians were socialists without knowing it. He quotes Keir Hardie, the Christian child of freethinking parents, at some length. He also mentions other Christian socialist pioneers and welcomes the emergence of "Liberation Theology" in Latin America.

Eric Heffer's article is remarkable not for what is in it but for what has been left out. He does not tell us that Pope Pius XII declared: "No-one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a Socialist properly so-called". Nor does he state that it is only since 1921 that Catholics have been allowed by the Church to join the Labour Party. He is strangely silent about such socialist pioneers as Annie Besant, Edward Aveling, John Burns, Harry Snell and Tom Barclay who were also atheists. He does not mention Henry Hyndman's opinion that Christianity is a "queer jumble of Asiatic mysticism and supernatural juggling", or Marx's that Christian socialism is "holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat".

James Connolly, the Irish socialist leader, "remained true to his religious faith, his Socialist and Nationalist convictions", writes Eric Heffer. But there is no reference to the criticism of Connolly by De Leon, the American Marxist. And what of the view that Ireland might now be a happier place if Connolly's socialism had been anti-religious?

Liberation Theology is the ideology of those Catholics, such as the three priests in the Nicaraguan Government, in Latin America, who have sided with the poor in their fight against dictatorship. However, Archbishop Obando has excommunicated "progressive" Catholics, and Catholic mobs have rioted against the Sandinistas. While the Vatican, doubtless hedging its bets, has refused to support the hierarchy's call for the priests to quit the Government, the Latin American Episcopal Council has expressed its concern at the spread of Marxism in Nicaragua. As the pressure of events forces Nicaragua to take the Cuban road, it seems likely that the Church will eventually resume its traditionally anti-socialist role, and liberation theology will become a minor current, if not a heresy.

Eric Heffer's support for Solidarnosc is at least less hypocritical than Mrs Thatcher's. But what, one wonders, do they make of the Pope's deal with Jaruzelski at the expense of Walesa and the Polish people.

It is unlikely that Eric Heffer will lead the Labour Party. But in any event, secularists in the Labour movement have the titanic task of combating all forms of Christianity and advocating a humanistic, materialist alternative.

Conservative and Censorious

Mrs Williams sings the praises of Pope Leo XII's *Rerum Novarum*. Does she not know that the very purpose of this document was to counteract the influence of Social Democracy—which in its Continental form at least was materialist and anti-clerical—on the working class? She advocates "an open, classless and more equal society". Yet Leo XII said that society should not be classless. And how can a society be open if the Church can censor views that challenge it? What of equality when a celibate Pope proclaims that "a woman by nature is fitted for home work"?

Rerum Novarum provided an ideology for all manner of anti-democratic, anti-humanist reactionaries. It was the Slovakia of Tiso, the Croatia of Pavelic, the Vichy of Petain and the Austria of Dolfus which were the products of Leo XII's words. It was no accident that in 1938 the *Catholic Herald* could write of the British Union of Fascists: "Its policy is the nearest approach to the social theory of the encyclicals". And is it any wonder that Pope Pius XI saw Mussolini as "a man sent by Providence"?

It is the clerical, fascist corporate State, not the social democratic welfare State, that is the result of political Catholicism. Perhaps those who regard the SDP as being similar to Mosley's New Party are right after all.

Shirley Williams talks of internationalism. But as these examples show, and a glance at more recent

events in Ireland and the Lebanon confirm, Christianity can very easily provide a basis for murderous nationalism.

"Being a Christian", writes David Alton, "is far more important than being a member of a political party". He does not say that Leo XII denounced "modern Liberalism which would give freedom to all opinion, leads to irrational and harmful consequences". Nor does he inform his readers that the religious instruction manual, *Nuevo Ripalda*, says the freedoms which liberalism defends are pernicious because "they serve to teach error, propagate vice, and plot against the Church".

As a Liberal and a Christian, Mr Alton bewails the fact that 800 million people in the world face despair and starvation. But are not the problems arising from serious over-population, in no small measure the product of his Church's fanatical opposition to birth control and its desire for a large, obedient and ignorant flock?

Mr Alton should study the radical tradition of his Party, a tradition personified by Charles Bradlaugh who advocated secularism, birth control and land reform. Certainly a study of Bradlaugh's work would be more rewarding than reading the vapourings of four Christian politicians.

Many secularists hold the view that the function of the secularist movement is to attack religion, while politics is a completely different issue. Perhaps *The Universe* articles will have the unintended effect of convincing them that secularism is a political question, and it is in the political arena where the battle for a more humane and humanistic world must be fought. Political action can be a means to secularist ends.

There is already a secularist pressure group in the Labour movement, and it is to be hoped that such groups will be formed in other parties. For if the Thatchers, Heffers, Williams and Altons are not to have it all their way, and Christian ideas are not to dominate our political life, then it is within the ranks of political parties (and single-issue campaigns which seek to influence the parties) that the secularist voice must be heard loudly and clearly.

A jury in the United States has awarded one million dollars to a father of five against the Tridentine Latin Rite Church. Jerry O'Neil, who lives in Montana, accused the Church of breaking up his marriage and inflicting irreparable damage to the children. His ex-wife, Pauline, had been brainwashed and indoctrinated by Church leaders. She was persuaded that the marriage was invalid because it had not been performed by the TLRC. Bishop Edward Schuckardt is leader of the breakaway group which is also known as the Our Lady of Fatima Crusade. It rejects all Vatican II reforms as heresy and denounces all popes after Pius XII as anti-Christ.

A Plea for Atheism

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Charles Bradlaugh on 26 September is a notable one for freethinkers. We mark the occasion by publishing an extract from his "Humanity's Gain From Unbelief", an influential work he wrote two years before his death.

Let Atheism be fairly examined, and neither condemned—its defence unheard—on the *ex parte* slanders of some of the professional preachers of fashionable orthodoxy, whose courage is bold enough while the pulpit protects the sermon, but whose valour becomes tempered with discretion when a free platform is afforded and discussion claimed; nor misjudged because it has been the custom to regard Atheism as so unpopular as to render its advocacy impolitic. The best policy against all prejudice is to firmly advocate the truth.

The Atheist does not say "There is no God", but he says: "I know not what you mean by God; I am without idea of God; the word 'God' is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me. If, however, 'God' is defined to mean an existence other than the existence of which I am a mode, then I deny 'God', and affirm that it is impossible such 'God' can be. That is, I affirm one existence, and deny that there can be more than one".

When the Theist affirms that his God is an existence other than, and separate from, the so-called material universe, and when he invests this separate, hypothetical existence with the several attributes of personality, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity, infinity, immutability, and perfect goodness, then the Atheist in reply says: "I deny the existence of such a being"; and he is entitled to say this because this Theistic definition is self-contradictory, as well as contradictory of every-day experience.

If you speak to the Atheist of God as creator, he answers that the conception of creation is impossible. We are utterly unable to construe it in thought as possible that the complement of existence has been either increased or diminished, much less can we conceive an absolute origination of substance. We cannot conceive either, on the one hand, nothing becoming something, or on the other, something becoming nothing. The words "creation" and "destruction" have no value except as applied to phenomena. You may destroy a gold coin, but you have only destroyed the condition, you have not

affected the substance. "Creation" and "destruction" denote change of phenomena; they do not denote origin or cessation of substance.

The Theist who speaks of God creating the universe must either suppose that Deity evolved it out of himself, or that he produced it from nothing. But the Theist cannot regard the universe as evolution of Deity, because this would identify Universe and Deity, and be Pantheism rather than Theism. There would be no distinction of substance—no creation. Nor can the Theist regard the universe as created out of nothing, because Deity is, according to him, necessarily eternal and infinite. God's existence being eternal and infinite precludes the possibility of the conception of vacuum to be filled by the universe if created. No one can even think of any point in extent or duration and say: Here is the point of separation between the creator and the created.

It is not possible for the Theist to imagine a beginning to the universe. It is not possible to conceive either an absolute commencement, or an absolute termination of existence; that is, it is impossible to conceive beginning, before which you have a period when the universe has yet to be; or to conceive an end, after which the universe, having been, no longer exists.

The Atheist affirms that he cognizes today's effects; that these are, at the same time, causes and effects—causes to the effects they precede, effects to the causes they follow. Cause is simply everything without which the effect would not result, and with which it must result. Cause is the means to an end, consummating itself in that end. Cause is the word we use to include all that determines change.

The Problem of Evil

The Theist who argues for creation must assert a point of time—that is, of duration, when the created did not yet exist. At this point of time either something existed or nothing; but something must have existed, for out of nothing nothing can come. Something must have existed, because the point fixed upon is that of the duration of something. This something must have been either finite or infinite; if finite it could not have been God, and if the something were infinite, then creation was impossible: it is impossible to add to infinite existence.

If you leave the question of creation, and deal with the government of the universe, the difficulties of Theism are by no means lessened. The existence of evil is then a terrible stumbling-block to the Theist. Pain, misery, crime, poverty confront the advocate of eternal goodness, and challenge with unanswerable potency his declaration of Deity as all-

PUBLICATIONS

ALLEGRO John, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, £1.75 (19p).
AYER A. J. (Editor) *The Humanist Outlook*, 95p (40p).
BERRY, James (Editor), *Plan Poets*, £2 (25p).
BLACKHAM H. J., *Religion in a Modern Society*, £2 (45p).

BLANCHARD Paul (Editor) *Classics of Freethought* 2.60 (40p).

BUDD Susan, *Varieties of Unbelief*, £12.50 (95p).

COHEN Chapman, *Thomas Paine*, 25p (12½p); *God and me*, 50p (18p); *Did Jesus Christ Exist?* 15p (12½p); *Must we Have a Religion?* 15p (12½p); *Morality Without God*, 15p (12½p); *Deity and Design*, 15p (12½p); *What is the Use of Prayer?* 15p (12½p); *Christianity and Slavery*, 15p (12½p); *Woman and Christianity*, 15p (12½p); *Christianity and Ethics*, 15p (12½p); *Materialism Restated*, £1 (28p).

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KNIGHT Margaret, *Honest to Man*, £3.75 (40p); *Humanist Anthology*, 95p (25p).

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SMOKER Barbara, *Humanism*, 90p (22p); *Good God (Satirical Verse)*, 95p (18p).

TRIBE David, *100 Years of Freethought*, £2 (£1); *President Charles Bradlaugh, MP*, £4 (£1.20); *The Cost of Church Schools*, 25p (12½p); *Broadcasting, Brainwashing, Conditioning*, 15p (12½p).

WELLS G. A., *Did Jesus Exist?* £6.95 (£1).
The Freethinker, Centenary Issue (May 1981), 40p (12½p).

The Freethinker, Bound Volumes 1978 and 1979, £6.50 each (75p).

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good, all-wise, and all-powerful.

Evil is either caused by God or exists independently; but it cannot be caused by God, as in that case he would not be all-good; nor can it exist hostilely, as in that case he would not be all-powerful. If all-good, he would desire to annihilate evil, and continued evil contradicts either God's desire, or God's ability, to prevent it.

Evil must either have had a beginning or it must have been eternal; but, according to the Theist, it cannot be eternal, because God alone is eternal. Nor can it have had a beginning, for if it had it must either have originated in God, or outside God; but, according to the Theist, it cannot have originated in God, for he is all-good, and out of all goodness evil cannot originate; nor can evil have originated outside God, for, according to the Theist, God is infinite, and it is impossible to go outside of or beyond infinity.

To the Atheist this question of evil assumes an entirely different aspect. He declares that each evil is a result, but not a result from God nor Devil. He affirms that conduct founded on knowledge of the laws of existence may ameliorate each present form of evil, and, as our knowledge increases, prevent its future recurrence.

Atheism—a Positive Philosophy

While Theism, asserting God as the creator and governor of the universe, hinders and checks man's efforts by declaring God's will to be the sole directing and controlling power, Atheism, by declaring all events to be in accordance with natural laws—that is, happening in certain ascertainable sequences—stimulates man to discover the best conditions of life, and offers him the most powerful inducements to morality. While the Theist provides future happiness for a scoundrel repentant on his death-bed, Atheism affirms present and certain happiness for the man who does his best to live here so well as to have little cause for repenting hereafter.

Theism declares that God dispenses health and inflicts disease, and sickness and illness are regarded by the Theists as visitations from an angered Deity, to be borne with meekness and content.

Atheism declares that physiological knowledge may preserve us from disease by preventing us from infringing the law of health, and that sickness results not as the ordinance of offended Deity, but from ill-ventilated dwellings and workshops, bad and insufficient food, excessive toil, mental suffering, exposure to inclement weather, and the like—all these finding root in poverty, the chief source of crime and disease; that prayers and piety afford no protection against fever, and that if the human being be kept without food he will starve as quickly whether he be Theist or Atheist, theology being no substitute for bread.

PEOPLE AGAINST THE PRESS: AN ENQUIRY INTO THE PRESS COUNCIL, by Geoffrey Robertson. Quartet Books, £7.95

Last month the *Sun* newspaper was severely scolded by the Press Council, who found that an "interview" which the paper claimed to have had with Mrs Marica McKay, widow of a Falklands VC, never actually took place. Described by the *Sun* as a "world exclusive", the report, according to the Council, was a "cobbling-together of material previously published elsewhere". And it went on: "The newspaper practised a deplorable and, in these circumstances, insensitive deception on the public".

The reaction of the *Sun* to this verdict was an interesting one. In the first place, it published, as it is required to do, a factual news report on the Council's findings. To this it added an editorial comment — under the heading "We're Sorry" — offering an apology to Mrs McKay, and explaining how, when their "keen desire to interview her was frustrated", they wrote an article based mainly on comments she had already made to the Press and TV. In bold type at the end of the comment they say: "We got it wrong. We are sorry".

But they don't say they won't do the same sort of thing again.

At least this reaction was rather better than that of Sir John Junor, editor of the *Sunday Express* who, when his paper was censured by the Press Council a few years ago for a racial slur, repeated the offensive comment in the next edition, adding for good measure a reference to "the po-faced, pompous, pinstriped, humourless twits who sit on the Press Council". Such is the nature of what we are pleased to call in this country the national Press.

So what kind of body is the Press Council? Geoffrey Robertson, the author of this well-researched and readable book, doesn't think much of it. "Today", he writes, "the Council enjoys little respect, no fear and widespread disobedience". Some leading Fleet Street editors refused to co-operate in its enquiry into the "Yorkshire Ripper" case. Even in less sensational cases, editors have reacted with indifference or hostility to adverse judgments.

Published to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the setting up of the Council, *People Against the Press* points out that the purpose of the Council is to protect the newspaper industry from legislation which would curb its freedom and its powers. As Geoffrey Robertson shrewdly points out: "Press proprietors do not pay several thousand pounds each year just for the pleasure of having their newspapers publicly castigated; they invest in an organisation whose existence offers a form of insurance against the advent of laws which would otherwise be

designed, for example, to safeguard personal privacy, to prohibit cheque-book journalism, or to guarantee a right of reply."

Manifestly, the Press Council achieves none of these objectives. Newspapers' cheque-books continue to be waved temptingly—and with marked success—in the faces of quite senior retired police officers, the prying lenses of long-distance cameras continue to capture deliciously illicit moments for the delectation of millions; and the right of reply is freely and generously given in several lines of six-point type on page 24 several days after grossly inaccurate slurs have been accorded front-page lead treatment.

No wonder that the National Union of Journalists, in 1980, withdrew all support from the Council, declaring it "wholly ineffective" and "incapable of reform". But the question of reform, as Geoffrey Robertson points out, must be examined with care, since the choice lies between either that or a set of legal controls which would seriously undermine Press freedom, and which would serve the interests neither of the Press nor the public. What Geoffrey Robertson argues for is a new settlement between public and Press based on three elements:

First, law reform aimed at securing greater freedom for investigative reporting through specific legislation, which would include a Freedom of Information Act and relaxations of the laws of libel, contempt and breach of confidence.

Secondly, he suggests the appointment of a Press Ombudsman, empowered to direct the publication of corrections and replies in newspapers which have failed to put right demonstrable errors of fact. The Ombudsman would in most cases replace both the law of libel and the Press Council as the method of redress for this problem.

Thirdly, a reformed Press Council, which would be representative of both public and Press. It would support its adjudications by contractual powers to direct prominent publication in offending newspapers, together with the long-term influence which would come from published codes of conduct, monitoring and auditing, reporting to the Monopolies Commission, and responsibility for compulsory professional conduct courses in training schemes for journalists.

When, in 1978, the *Sun* was again enjoying the attentions of the Press Council for its treatment of the Royal Court Young People's Theatre Scheme, *Gay News* reported the Council's finding in favour of the *Sun* under the headline: "Press Council Shows its Gums". Nothing much has changed since 1978; Geoffrey Robertson's book is a lucid and persuasive case for long-overdue reform.

TED McFADYEN

REVIEWS

JEAN-JACQUES: THE EARLY LIFE AND WORK OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU 1712-1754, by Maurice Cranston. Allen Lane, £14.95

Of the three great writers of the French Enlightenment, Rousseau might well be said to be the most original, in his life as in his writings. Where Voltaire and Diderot, for all their adventures, remained solidly attached to the social world of which they formed a part, Rousseau began as a marginal figure, a poor boy from Geneva, and remained so throughout his life. His youth spent wandering across Italy and Savoy, followed by an uneasy and ephemeral *entrée* into Paris society, paved the way for the moment of self-discovery when, in his late thirties, he began to see himself as chastiser of the polite world and all its false values. When we take leave of him at the end of this volume, the first of two to be devoted by Maurice Cranston to Rousseau's life, he is coming to realise that henceforth he must live in exile in Paris, where "he could enact the part of Savonarola". His pleasures and his pains were to be associated with his rôle as rootless alien, a melancholy existence but the only one that could fulfil his fierce love of total liberty and independence.

It is the author's task to show how such a complex personality came to develop as he did, and Professor Cranston meets this challenge with supreme mastery. Deeply informed about the world in which the young Jean-Jacques moved (one regrets however that there is not a fuller acknowledgment of the debt he owes to the superb Leigh edition than the passing reference in the Introduction), meticulous in unravelling the detail of many an imbroglio or ambivalence in his subject's life, objectively detached while yet being totally fair to the paradoxical genius, he has written the first half of what must surely be the Rousseau biography of our age. From it emerges the portrait of a man often unattractive and sometimes positively dislikable, yet one who can arouse sympathy and admiration in situations bordering on total misery.

If one is to write a Rousseau biography of this length (a debatable decision), then the early years before he became famous in 1750 with his first *Discours* are inevitably going to be more about the man than the thinker. There is none of the pattern of Voltaire's life, where the writer looms large from his early twenties. Rousseau's original work appears almost unheralded, after a long apprenticeship of writing that never rises above the brightly second-rate. So the reader of this volume is forced back upon considering in detail this enigmatic individual: his arrogance ("I had received from nature a sense of discrimination which is impervious to prejudice");

his hypocrisy, as seen most notoriously when this arbiter of morality sends his five illegitimate children to the founding hospital, with the high probability of their dying an early death; his *farouche* disinterestedness and indifference to material matters. Professor Cranston brings out well the state of humiliation in which so much of his early life was passed. He movingly conveys the pathetic nature of Rousseau's physical condition, where a constant need to urinate, brought on by an inability to empty his bladder, made of itself a social life impossible, even discounting the psychological disabilities.

The author does well, too, in drawing attention to Rousseau's profoundly religious nature, so at odds with most of the thinkers of the Enlightenment who, even when like Voltaire they believed in God, did so with relative urbanity. Rousseau's faith, by contrast, springs from a deep need born of his many privations. As he put it in a marvellous *non sequitur*, "I have suffered too much in this life not to expect another". Without appreciating this religious dimension it is impossible to understand Rousseau. For many, it will always remain the supreme stumbling-block, however much one may admire his lyrical imagination or the brilliant concepts.

Towards the end of this book the first great works appear, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (a title consistently misquoted here) and the *Discours sur l'inégalité*. The author presents them with an ease and lucidity that bode well for the many masterpieces he will need to treat in the second volume. Not all, however, in this study is perfect. To start with, there are too many typographical errors and inconsistencies in names or titles. The Bibliography is very limited, omitting several works referred to in the notes—often in frustratingly imperfect form. Several recent books of importance for this work are not referred to and apparently not consulted; for instance, the Showalter study of Mme de Graffigny and Rousseau (1978) would have told the author that Rousseau did not, as he is inclined to believe, meet Voltaire in that lady's salon, and caused some modification of his simple statement that we have no information about that occasion (p 254). In 1751, Mme Denis was not the "future mistress of Voltaire" (p 255); that relationship had already existed for several years. Conversely, Mme du Châtelet was no longer Voltaire's mistress in 1749 (p 227).

On a more interesting speculative level, one may take leave to doubt the author's claim that Diderot should have realised the anti-Enlightenment views of Rousseau from the moment he saw the first *Discours* (p 229). As he himself goes on to show, Diderot went on admiring Rousseau's work for many years more, finding the second and even more radical *Discours* much to his liking. Indeed, the author

eventually admits to a greater kinship between the views of the two writers than his first discussion would suggest. It is dubious, too, whether the *Inégalité* is anti-bourgeois rather than anti-aristocratic (pp 308-9); the *Discours* is firmly hostile to privilege of whatever kind.

In matters of this sort one may take issue with the author. These differences leave the edifice quite intact. This book (pleasingly enhanced by 16 fine illustrations) will become an invaluable asset for our understanding of Jean-Jacques.

HAYDN MASON

FREETHOUGHT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE COMMONWEALTH: A DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY, by Gordon Stein. Greenwood Press, £25

Whether writing my own books or revising other people's monographs, I most dread the bibliography. It gives me the least satisfaction to do, requires a disproportionate amount of research and proofing time, attracts the greatest number of printer's errors and provokes the most censure for omissions. Identifying the true author, publisher and publication city of earlier writings is a nightmare (about which, in special cases, whole books are written), since heretical works were often published anonymously or pseudonymously and with false attributions to confound censors. Even when freed from this hazard, pamphlets often appear without title page or date and with a slightly different title on the cover and the first page. Titles and subtitles may change from edition to edition, and without the evidence of dates or prefaces it may be very difficult to decide which is the first edition. Quite stable periodicals have a disconcerting habit of frequently changing editors, printers, publishers and periodicity, while unstable ones may cease publication without warning, so that it is very difficult to decide which is the last number. They may also be like Vishnu and experience frequent reincarnations before finally vanishing. Pity the poor bibliographer.

When he tackles "freethought" there is the added problem of definition and selection according to subject-matter. When he "concentrates upon the important or 'seminal' books" he narrows the field but introduces subjective judgement. In the work reviewed, the field is narrowed further by excluding material that is primarily political or economic, even if antireligious, and by attempting "to tell the history of the freethought movement . . . largely through the publications of that movement". The main difficulty of this criterion is that "important" or "seminal" books may, in the modern age, manage to attract general publishers; while many freethinkers who have been important to the movement have not, in my view, produced important books. Is "seminal"

the same as "important", and is it to be judged in terms of originality, quality of writing, charisma of author, contemporary circulation or "impact" (which may be very different), subsequent republication or "place in history"? When, in addition to resolving these technical questions, an author essays a "descriptive" bibliography and so adds potted biographies and a story-line of philosophical and organisational development, one may indeed pity the poor bibliographer.

It need hardly be said that Gordon Stein does not emerge from this impossible exercise unscathed. What should be said is that he and Greenwood Press (both American) are to be congratulated for having undertaken it. Without them, the production of contemporary freethought bibliographies and dictionaries would be virtually nonexistent. This UK and Commonwealth volume provides a valuable check-list of almost 700 publications and some unpublished material. It will introduce most readers to authors they previously knew nothing about (in my case, Godfrey Higgins) and sharpen their overview of the subject with shrewd assessments of particular volumes. For a book primarily devoted to British freethought, its short accounts of leading Commonwealth countries are the best of their kind available. Though overlooking the main reason for the decline of deism (the deistic God is not worth either believing or disbelieving in), it brings out some interesting aspects of this corner of freethought: modern British freethinkers have largely ignored their deistic heritage, which Americans and Germans have rediscovered; the most famous deistic work — Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* — curiously appeared half a century after the decline of deism and owes its fame not to its originality but to its journalistic style and assiduous fan clubs around the world (Dr Stein does not put the proposition as crudely as this). Another interesting, if melancholy, fact that a developmental bibliography brings out clearly is how little really original freethought (or other) material has emerged in the twentieth century.

Reservations about the book will be as varied as its readers. Mostly they will involve omissions. Nicolas Walter has named 65 omitted authors (*New Humanist*, Summer 1982). About a third of these are in fact mentioned, though little or nothing is said about their writings. Of the other two-thirds, even in the light of the author's own criteria for inclusion, the most surprising omissions are Godwin, Shelley, Darwin, Sir Julian Huxley, Manhattan, Ayer, Knight, Flew, H. G. and G. A. Wells. Then there is the question of balance among inclusions. For example, from the "golden age" of secularism I should like to have seen less about Gott and more about Thomson, Ball and Heaford. Further criticism can be levied over the inclusion or exclusion of particular works on the grounds that they are, or are not, principally about freethought, over the inclusion or exclusion of

anti-freethought books, and over the very random selection of articles in periodicals.

Generally speaking, the bibliographical entries themselves are pretty accurate and commendably free of the printer's errors one has become used to, especially when foreign-language sources are cited. Errors and distortions do however arise in the potted biographies and the accounts of the freethought organisations. I should point out that these are innocent errors of fact or omission and not wilful perversions of history. As an example of how verbal shorthand can become misleading, let me mention the reference to myself. The hard facts are right and the judgements insightful. But when the entry says that I "came to England in 1955 to write and teach about vocational education" and that I "retired from the freethought movement in 1971", it implies that I was a relocating careers expert who subsequently

found God or Mammon. The truth is that I went to England in 1955 to write novels and poetry, broaden my own education and find publishers. Circumstances diverted me into writing nonfiction (and poetry), lecturing on a number of subjects at educational institutions and promoting freethought. In 1971 I retired from the presidency of the National Secular Society, but I remained as chairman of Secular Society Ltd and G. W. Foote & Co till I returned to Australia in 1972, and I continue to write regularly, and lecture and broadcast less regularly, about freethought. Incidentally, my most important book—which I think of as a freethought one—is *Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society*. This puts ethics solidly on a materialistic basis, but goes unmentioned. Yet none of my books has proved as "seminal" as my pamphlets, also unmentioned.

DAVID TRIBE

Dinosaurs on the Dole

The discovery of the giant dinosaur claw in a clay pit in Surrey by a plumber taking up geology in order to help his daughter with her Geology O-level examination, and the discovery of a perfectly preserved *Iguanodon* skull in the Isle of Wight by a biology graduate on the dole, have both contributed to the sensational revival of interest in dinosaurs. The fact that there are people on the look-out for fossils, and more importantly that they freely make their discoveries available to professional scientists and even hand them over as a gift to the National Collection, speaks volumes of the nature of our society and the deeply entrenched enthusiasm and interest in the past that the British have nurtured over generations.

The discovery of a completely new giant flesh-eating dinosaur in the depths of Surrey is in itself dramatic enough—it is a normal proportioned *Megalosaurus* with the development of an exceptionally enlarged claw, presumably as a more effective tool for despatching its victims. The scientifically more exciting new *Iguanodon* skull has thrown a new light on the way the plant-eaters actually chewed up their food. This is all great stuff for the fossilists, but the Isle of Wight discovery has highlighted a new and worrying aspect of the role of the amateur in British science.

A plumber finding fossils in his spare time is a matter for congratulation all around. Everyone from whatever part of the political spectrum can applaud. But what of the young biology graduate on the dole, making important scientific discoveries in his "spare" time? This is a facet of contemporary society about which no-one can take much pride. And it is not an isolated case. A graduate colleague of mine, cur-

rently researching on fossils, writes articles and reviews and reports on scientific meetings for the prestigious journal, *Nature*. His contributions to the evolution debate at the British Association meeting during the Darwin Centenary Year (1982) were reported extensively. Yet he is on the dole.

A graduate who is trying to find financial support to research on pterosaurs is currently doing this under extreme difficulties—again while still on the dole.

Another graduate, fortunately with some entrepreneurial skills behind him, is endeavouring to earn sufficient to support himself to study fossil reptiles. The other side of this coin of dedication to a subject for its own sake is the fact that many remain post-graduate students simply because it is one way of postponing the day when they have to go on the dole.

There is certainly a deep malaise permeating higher education which is affecting research students in Britain. The fact that there are still fanatically dedicated students struggling to keep their own research fires alight gives some small hope for the future welfare of science in this country.

JIM HERRICK

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Let's Keep Our Heads— and Our Sense of Humour

FANNY COCKERELL

Is it necessary to be sombre in order to be serious? A good laugh is an effective antidote to fanaticism and lack of judgement. The writer of this article believes that good humour helps to maintain a sense of proportion.

Many years ago a colleague of mine defined his position in the old Independent Labour Party: "We are members of the ILP because we are Socialists; we are not members of the Communist Party because we have a sense of humour". Some years later I met him again when he had in fact joined the CP and I reminded him of those words. "Do you think the Communist Party has now acquired a sense of humour?" He replied: "They've acquired me". Obviously he hadn't lost his.

Nevertheless his original judgement was, I believe, right. Extremist parties of every kind, passionate believers in whatever cause, however noble or however vicious, are all in this danger. Because they see, or think they see, their role so clearly, they ignore every other viewpoint, however sincere and relevant. Carried away by their enthusiasm they lose their sense of humour, which means, ultimately, their sense of proportion.

Admittedly, it is often the fanatics who get things done and produce changes which may be desperately needed. They are the leaven, the yeast that we all need in our daily lives. But no one can live on yeast alone.

We see examples of it daily—in the wild outpourings of religious fanatics be they Muslims, or Israelis, or Palestinians, or the gutter Press going into transports of jingoistic hysteria at the mention of the Falklands, or the Rev Ian Paisley foaming at the mouth at the mention of the Pope, or Mary Whitehouse foaming at the mouth at the drop of a hat. We even see it in the pages of *The Freethinker*.

It is seldom effectual, often self-defeating and sometimes reaches the depth of absurdity.

Some months ago, after a bombing incident which left most people in this country incensed, there was an anti-Irish cartoon by Jak in London's *The Standard*. It was of more than usual crudity, implying that all the Irish are terrorists — which they obviously are not. Not surprisingly, MPs with many Irish constituents reacted strongly against it. So, even less surprisingly, did the GLC.

The Standard newspaper was threatened with dire penalties. But that wasn't all. Every Woolworth store showed their indignation by removing their Irish joke

books — without a thought for all the poor Irish comedians whose life is quite hard enough anyway! Dare we suggest that someone had over-reacted — just a tiny bit?

Being a political cartoonist must be almost as hard as being an Irish comedian. To be consistently witty, pungent and topical, without malice or offence, demands something akin to genius. What is required to deal a knock-out blow without any injury to the opponent? Perhaps a golden fist in a foam rubber glove; in other words — the magic touch.

Low, the great Australian cartoonist, had it. And so did the Hungarian, Vicky. Remember the TUC carthorse? Low invented it; the country accepted it. Remember Supermac, which in a sense boomeranged? Macmillan loved it and, we are told, bought the original. Would we get the same reaction today to Supermag? I doubt it!

Low and Vicky did not pull their punches. But there was profound political insight in their cartoons and often, especially in Vicky's case, deep feeling too. He saw the evil and cruelty in the world with passion and compassion, fighting it with the most effective weapons he knew — until he could bear it no longer. But still he made us laugh.

And are we now to be so swamped with moral indignation that there must be no more laughter. Not even laughter mixed with tears? Not at the villains or the virtuous, the young or the old? No more Irish jokes, or Jewish jokes, or jokes about women, or babies, or mothers-in-law, or plumbers' mates, or politicians, or dogs, or gods, or sex — in case someone takes offence.

Must we all be forever earnest and indignant, and in our earnest indignation lose our sense of humour, our sense of proportion, and see the world entirely through blinkers?

Well, at least we can always laugh—at ourselves.

The fourth of a family's seven sons has been convicted of killing and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment at the Old Bailey. Danny O'Driscoll, 22, chased his victim through South London Streets and after cornering him in a block of flats knifed him through the heart. His brothers were jailed for life in 1981 after hacking a man to death and then jumping on his body. Another brother is in prison for possessing a gun. After the latest trial the O'Driscolls' mother said she was a Roman Catholic and went to church every Sunday. She lit candles for the man her sons killed. Her husband added: "We are a very respectable family".

LETTERS

TOO QUICK ON THE TRIGGER

I do not believe, and did not say, as Francis Bennion attributed to me (Letters, August), that negotiation can solve every problem. Having spent months trying to negotiate an acceptable level of noise for heavy pop music day and night in an adjacent terrace house, I am well aware that negotiations can fail.

However, I think that in the case of the Falklands War not enough time was given to negotiation before military exigencies took over. The world would be safer and more likely to have a future if it became the norm to negotiate before rather than after the battle in international disputes.

Incidentally, now that loans and the sale of arms have resumed from Europe to Argentina, I am more than ever convinced that this was one of those rare cases where economic pressure might have been effective: but the risks would have been to bankers' pockets rather than soldiers' lives.

JIM HERRICK

BEHIND THE LINES

Francis Bennion airily dismisses serious questions on the Falklands adventure posed by several readers (August). He appeals for "unmuddled thinking". I suspect that the one thing Mr Bennion is absolutely clear about is that he will defend the Falklands and other remnants of Empire from an armchair or a bar stool.

G. R. LAMBERT

INGERSOLL THE POET

I would like to congratulate David Tribe for his very fine article, "Honest and Thorough" (August), concerning Robert G. Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh. He has, with great skill, executed a very large and complex canvas indeed.

I would insert only one further detail. Ingersoll was essentially a poet as well as thinker, although he wrote little verse. Bradlaugh, although appreciative of poetry, lacked this particular gift of nature.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

THE HUMAN CONDITION

In her letter headed "Reality and Fantasy" (August), Elsie Karbacz seems to forget that human beings are conceptualising creatures whose fantasies and actions are often closely connected. It does not seem to occur to her that there could be a link between, for example, video nasties and horrific acts of sadistic cruelty. But an actual link of this kind has been asserted recently by the relatives of at least one perverted murderer.

Surely the possibility of such a connection should be thoroughly investigated before final judgment is made that sadistic pornography is innocuous.

RONA GERBER

CONSERVATIVES AGAINST HUNTING

It is often assumed these days that opponents of hunting are "trendy lefties". Nothing could be further from the truth. Despite extensive opinion surveys carried out scientifically by professional companies, commentators in newspapers invariably ignore the fact that 54 per cent of all Conservative voters disapprove of foxhunting, 76 per cent of Conservative voters disapprove of hunting deer with packs of dogs and 78 per cent of Conservatives disapprove of hare coursing.

For the Labour Party and the Liberal Party to cash in on these feelings of common decency is in itself an

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 2 October, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Connaire Kensit: Animals That Can Talk—a Linguistician's View on Human Nature.

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

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

Humanist Holidays. Christmas in Eastbourne and Paris. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London, SE6. 27 September, 7.45 p.m. Denis Cobell: My 25 Years of Humanism.

National Secular Society. Annual Outing, including visit to Northampton to commemorate 150th anniversary of Charles Bradlaugh's birth. Sunday, 18 September. Coach leaves central London; fare £5. Details from NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 25 September, 5.30 p.m. Public meeting.

act of gross indecency, only to be excused by the distinct lack of policy so far demonstrated by the Conservative Party on this important issue. However, something has, at last, been done about this anomaly. Leading members of the Conservative Party have formed the Conservative Anti Hunt Council and we are determined to commit the party to oppose these barbaric practices before the nation's wildlife disappears forever by these blood-soaked rituals.

It is currently an offence to set a pack of dogs on a domestic cat or livestock, such as sheep. This is because the 1911 Protection of Animals Act protects domestic and captive animals, but excludes wild animals.

Wild animals are entitled to be protected from unnecessary suffering and of course must be protected against extinction. Already we have witnessed otter hunters pursue their quarry to extinction, and the hare now looks set for the same treatment. To hunt down and kill a hare for fun, when the Game Conservancy Council readily admits that the hare is in "a state of serious decline", is unforgivable in humanitarian terms and contrary to the basic principles of conservation.

The Conservative Party is the natural party for conservation and we must succeed in this new venture, however controversial, to avoid the contempt of future generations.

CLIVE SKINNER
CONSERVATIVE ANTI HUNT COUNCIL

Readers who are Conservatives and opponents of hunting should contact Mr Skinner at 3 London Road, Luton, Bedfordshire.

Maltese Premier Defies Church Hierarchy

The Government of Malta and the Roman Catholic Church are involved in a bitter dispute over ownership of a considerable amount of property, including St John's Cathedral, Valetta. The conflict between the Church, led by Archbishop Joseph Mercieca, and the Labour Party, led by Dom Mintoff, has been going on for several years. Matters came to a head with the passing of the Devolution of Certain Church Property Act three months ago.

The law now says that the Church must hand over property for which it cannot produce documentary proof of ownership. It has been estimated that the Church could lose up to 80 per cent of its holdings. Church archivists are trying to collect evidence to prove ownership, but one of them said there was enough work to occupy a generation of researchers.

Dom Mintoff believes that the influence of the Church has not been beneficial to Malta. When the legislature voted on the Act, 34 members of the Labour Party were in favour and the 31 members of the Nationalist Party did not vote in protest.

Education is a key issue in the Church-State conflict. The Maltese hierarchy defends the Church's right to own and run schools as it likes. It asserts that fees are low and that poor children, in practice, do not pay. Mr Mintoff said that it is a question of

"whether the Church in Malta provides education for those who can pay for it while at the same time expecting the State to be an accomplice in such un-Christian discrimination by granting her monies collected from the people as a whole. . . The dispute concerns the very roots of social justice".

Roman Catholicism is named as the religion of Malta in the island's constitution. Most of the inhabitants, including Labour voters, are practising Catholics.

But Dom Mintoff is not without support outside his own party. Cartoons in the Press have taken on an anti-clerical tone; one depicted senior clergy kneeling before a money chest, while another had a priest soliciting donations for the Church from a woman on her deathbed.

GHG GOES INTERNATIONAL

At its AGM in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, the Gay Humanist Group decided to accept an invitation received earlier this year to become an associate member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

IHEU, which has its headquarters in Holland, is a federation of Humanist associations in many countries including the US and has consultative status with UNESCO.

A resolution carried at the GHG meeting welcomed the statement issued by IHEU at its conference in Hanover which urged all its member organisations "to advance the possibilities for homosexual men and women to develop themselves fully with regard to their sexual life-style; to combat legal and social discrimination against homosexuals; to use their influence with national sections of Amnesty International to persuade it to work for those people who are persecuted because of their homosexuality, since freedom to shape one's own existence with regard to sexuality is one of the fundamental human rights".

A second resolution deplored the homophobic report which was accepted unequivocally by the Church of Scotland at its Annual Assembly this year, particularly its disparaging remarks concerning non-religious gay organisations which have done so much to support gay people in the face of hostility from religious quarters.

Newspaper reports are always required by "The Freethinker". The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent to the Editor at 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex.

Papal Silence

tions of peace and justice. He intervened on behalf of Nazi war criminals, and his close friend and top Nazi, von Papen, escaped with his life.

During the post-war years the Vatican was a valued ally in the United States' campaign against Communism and the grubby political record of Pius XII was glossed over. He had used his authority to influence election results in countries where the Communist Party had a large following. Catholics who supported the Communists were threatened with excommunication. That threat was never used against the Nazi leaders, most of whom were Catholics, or their collaborators in occupied countries.

Pius XII, the friend of dictators, was hailed as "the Pope of peace" when he died in 1958. The mildest criticism of his reactionary political outlook, and in particular his attitude to the Jews during the Nazi extermination campaign, caused a storm of protest by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

But it will be difficult to dismiss the findings of a formidable investigator like Serge Klarsfeld, with his international reputation for thoroughness and persistence. It was Klarsfeld who tracked down Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo "butcher of Lyons" who, with American help, escaped to Bolivia after the war.