

The Freethinker

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LORD WILLIS DENOUNCES "LOATHSOME AND REPELLENT" RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS

Guests from many parts of the country and representing a wide range of organisations attended the annual dinner of the National Secular Society in London on 23 March. Barbara Smoker, president of the Society, was in the chair. Bill Craig, president of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, proposed the toast to the guest of honour, Lord Willis (playwright and novelist Ted Willis). "I think that Ted might well consider his proudest achievement to be his creation of the first union of writers in this country a quarter of a century ago", he said. Ted Willis had pulled together "individuals who are by nature solitary and idiosyncratic in a manner which now allows them to speak with a collective voice".

In his response Lord Willis commenced by relating some of his experiences at Westminster which showed that the peers are not a dry and humourless lot.

Referring to the work and aims of the secularist movement today he said we are faced with a contradictory situation regarding religion.

He said: "On the one hand there is a general decline in support for religion in many countries. And, on the other, organised religion was never more prominent in the headlines.

"A majority of people would still loosely call themselves Christians, but they don't go to church. And the old idea of God, bearded and ancient according to Michelangelo, or God as played in Cecil B. de Mille movies by John Houston, has taken a bit of a pounding. . .

"So to show how progressive they are, they back-pedal and give him a new name, they speak of God as 'the life-force'. Or, straining for a definition, they'll say that God is simply everything—the name for that awesome infinite totality which stretches from neutron to supernova. 'We've got to call that something, so why not call it God?'

"They never can explain why. Why not call that unknown infinity 'Nothing'? Or give it a symbol like EMC2? Or an interesting name like Jerome K. Magoselthorpe? But a name like that would probably make God too specific for these pale believers. . .

"The idea of a God who is the 'life-force' makes these people feel more modern, more comfortable, more progressive. They assert proudly that they have rejected the mumbo-jumbo of religion while at the same time they cling to the fiction of God, just as children cling to the idea of the tooth-fairy or Santa Claus. Except, of course, that children do eventually grow out of these charming fictions".

Lord Willis contrasted "this growing body of half-believers" with "the strange growth of the fundamentalists.

"For them it is back to the drawing-board for the old bearded Sunday School God who is alive and well in heaven, listening to the fall of every sparrow and watching the slow starvation of children in Ethiopia. These are the flat-earthers who also believe in a flat heaven where you will spend eternity reunited with all your dead relatives.

"And because this sort of God is such a stupid thing to believe in, they have to work at it very hard indeed. That, of course, is the nature of cults from the Rev Paisley's brand of anti-Papist Christianity to the Moonies through to Muslim fundamentalists. The madder the hypothesis, the more frenzied must be the conviction. This frenzy leads them to mind-boggling and terrifying levels of dottiness and intolerance. . .

"They talk of one God but they ignore the truth that people believe in a half-hundred different Gods. They ignore the plain fact that even those people who purport to believe in the same God view him

(continued on back page)

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Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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Vol 105 No 4 CONTENTS April 1985

LORD WILLIS DENOUNCES "LOATHSOME AND REPELLENT" RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS	49
NEWS AND NOTES	50
The Powell Bill; Tricks of the Trade; A Timely Warning; Bishops' Witch-Hunt; Religion and Race; Critics' Choice	
OBITUARY	53
Mr M. Brown and Professor W. Walker	
THE CASE AGAINST EUTHANASIA LEGISLATION	54
Karl Heath	
THE AGE OF BIG BROTHER	56
Ted Goodman	
PAKISTANI WOMEN ORGANISE	57
FREETHINKER REVIEW	58
BOOK	
The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism, by Anthony Arblaster	
Reviewer: Harry Stopes-Roe	
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FUNDAMENTALISM	60
Bob Potter	
THE NATION AND THE NATIONAL	62
Fanny Cockerell	

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NEWS

THE POWELL BILL

Although Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons by a substantial majority, the SPUCites' and LIFers' jubilation may be premature. Mr Powell was hoping to get his Bill through the committee stage in time to have a full day for the report stage in the House. But he has been beaten to it by the Local Government (Access to Information) Bill. This will limit the time for discussion of Mr Powell's Bill and could have an adverse effect on its chance of success.

Mr Powell and his supporters have been dealt another blow, this time by the European Convention on Human Rights. It decided at a conference in Vienna last month not to help people who are attempting to prevent research on human embryos. This is an important decision, because the Moronic Majority of religious crusaders who have been drumming up opposition to such research may well have appealed to the Convention if Mr Powell is defeated in Parliament.

French Justice Minister Robert Badinter said that although the Convention supported the right to life, this did not extend to embryos.

Timothy Renton, Junior Foreign Minister, led the ten-member British delegation. He told the conference that 60 per cent of the organisations consulted by the Government supported embryo research supervised by a licensing authority.

The success so far of Mr Powell's Bill is a depressing example of how the public and its representatives in Parliament can be stampeded into supporting an absurd and anti-scientific measure. Knowledge of the subject seems to be based on the more hysterical newspaper reports and statements issued by the churches and their front organisations.

It is scarcely necessary to note that the Roman Catholic Church has spearheaded the Powellite campaign. Cardinal Hume wrote to all MPs urging them to support the Bill. But the true extent of the Church's involvement in the campaign was indicated in an article entitled "Praise God, First Round to Us", by Sir Hugh Rossi, Conservative MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, and a pillar of the Catholic lobby.

Sir Hugh wrote in the *Catholic Herald*: "The vote represented the culmination of weeks of intense activity by pro-life groups in parishes up and down the land. Since the autumn, petitions for the protection of the human embryo have been presented

AND NOTES

daily to the House by the dozen. The signatures have topped two million, the largest single number generated by any single issue since the Chartist involvement over one hundred years ago". It is a cast iron certainty that an overwhelming majority of these petitions were collected at Catholic churches.

The wreckers and reactionaries have been notching up notable successes for nearly a decade. The secularist-humanist movement has been virtually paralysed by lethargy for much of the same period. It is high time that the movement, at both national and local level, went on to the offensive. And perhaps at last the disgruntled but short-sighted minority of rationalists who climbed on to the Thatcherite bandwagon will realise that a large majority of Right-wing MPs in the House of Commons, backed by the worst elements in the press, are not only a barrier to social progress but a constant threat to hard-won reforms.

There is still time — but not much — to defeat the Powell Bill. *Freethinker* readers can help to defeat it by writing to Members of Parliament and the newspapers expressing opposition to the Bill. And of course there should be the widest possible distribution of Barbara Smoker's new pamphlet (details below).

An expanded and illustrated version of the article *Eggs Are Not People*, by Barbara Smoker, that appeared in the March *Freethinker*, has now been published by the National Secular Society as a pamphlet with the same title. The price is 10p, but it is free of charge to *Freethinker* readers and NSS members. Anyone able to distribute copies at meetings should obtain a bulk supply immediately, while the subject is topical. They will be sent by the NSS at 50 per cent discount if intended for sale, or free of charge if for free distribution to supporters of the Powell Bill or influential opponents of it. Postage will be welcome.

The National Secular Society
702 Holloway Road, London N19
telephone 01-272 1266

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

In ages of Christian domination to be accused of conjuring voices and sounds out of the ether almost inevitably meant ending up at the stake or the gibbet. But now it appears that even in Scotland (where the last person was legally executed for witchcraft in 1722) the clergy must resort to such trickery in order to attract hearers.

The Rev Bill Ferguson, Church of Scotland minister at Annan, near Dumfries, recently fixed up a "hot line" from his pulpit to the Eternal Throne. When the telephone rang during a service he pretended that God was on the line and told the congregation "It's for yoohoo!"

This is one of several stunts that Mr Ferguson has staged in an attempt to boost his dwindling congregation. And it has done the trick. More than 300 worshippers turn up every week. He says: "I am trying to spread the word of God in as many ways as I can".

Another of Mr Ferguson's efforts was to hold a Geiger counter over a pile of stones in the aisle. Its buzz helped him "to prove that if stones can produce sound then surely churchgoers can sing God's praises".

What God thinks about these goings-on is anybody's guess. But when his spokesman has to indulge in such tomfoolery the outlook for Christianity in Scotland is not too rosy.

The *Guardian* newspaper, reporting the funeral of three IRA members, informed its readers that "the three men shared the service at the Church of the Immediate Conception".

A TIMELY WARNING

A member of the Irish Senate spoke in London last month about the emergence of a Roman Catholic "moral majority" in the Republic. Senator Catherine McGuinness, who is also a member of the Church of Ireland Synod, was giving the annual lecture of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Senator McGuinness said that the growing integration of the Republic's Protestant minority and the prospects for a United Ireland were threatened by "sinister developments" in recent times. "The last four or five years has seen the growth of a movement which parallels the Moral Majority in the United States and other Right-wing movements elsewhere.

"It is clear that extreme Right-wing groups are gaining strength and are campaigning with frightening intensity for their views".

Senator McGuinness said that what is euphemistically called "traditional Catholicism" would be

better described as "moral McCarthyism". Its influence has been apparent on a number of recent public issues, including the family planning bill. Catholic extremists were now preparing to block the introduction of civil divorce. She believed that their ultimate aim was the setting up of "an authoritarian, specifically Roman Catholic State".

Senator McGuinness said it would be a tragedy if "Ireland turned her back on a society where Protestants had an integral place and an important contribution to make, and moved back into a moral authoritarian State closely reflecting in its social legislation the views of the most Right-wing section of the Roman Catholic Church".

● **The Irish Labour Party has called for an early referendum for the removal of the constitutional ban on divorce. The Party says that its Ministers will be pressing for a referendum to make divorce available where there has been an irretrievable breakdown of a marriage.**

BISHOPS' WITCH-HUNT

The wave of anti-Communist hysteria that swept the United States during the post-war years was triggered off by a secret report which was commissioned by the Roman Catholic bishops. Fr John Francis Cronin, an "expert" on Communism, compiled the report which was largely based on information supplied by J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation. Fr Cronin recently told an Irish newspaper of the Church's crucial role in fomenting the witch-hunt.

At one stage Fr Cronin urged that the United States should invade Eastern Europe. In 1948 he briefed an ambitious young Congressman during a congressional hearing at which a senior official in the State Department was accused of being a Communist. The Congressman was Richard M. Nixon.

In addition to the bishops, Roman Catholics like Senator Joe McCarthy and Cardinal Francis Spellman were the most active witch-hunters in the United States. Their smear campaign destroyed thousands of careers and forced many American writers, artists and film directors to seek work in other countries.

The Lutheran World Information Service has announced that Muslim extremists have burnt down 21 Christian churches in Northern Nigeria. These arson attacks are believed to be part of a campaign launched by Arab countries to promote the Islamisation of Africa. And in Nepal, where the law forbids Hindus to change their religion, eight people, including two teenagers, have been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for converting to Christianity.

RELIGION AND RACE

In its final report the Swann Committee urges a review of the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act. The committee recommends that there should be an undogmatic approach to religious education and that children should be made aware of the wide variety of religious views that are held. It recognises that the statutory requirement to start the school day with an act of worship is not being implemented, particularly in inner city schools where assemblies have become increasingly secular. In an interim report, issued four years ago, it recommended that the religious assembly as envisaged in the 1944 Act should be scrapped altogether.

The Swann Committee says that its report is concerned primarily to change behaviour and attitudes. It highlights a fundamental problem facing society today. There is a discriminatory attitude among the white majority. Eradication of discrimination and the development of an education system to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential is essential.

It is necessary to recognise that the problem facing education is not how to educate children of ethnic minorities, but how to educate all children. Education has to be something more than the reinforcement of beliefs, values and identity, which each child brings to the school.

The committee regards "the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the teaching profession as a matter of great concern, which calls for urgent attention". Ethnic minority teachers are still subject to racial prejudice and discrimination, both in getting employment and in advancing their careers.

While the committee does not support "positive discrimination" in the form of quotas, and does not want to see a diminution of standards, it urges "those involved in making appointments to devote greater efforts to identifying and overcoming racist obstacles to employing and promoting ethnic minority teachers".

Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, in order "to forestall hopes or fears" said the Government would not accept the Swann Committee's recommendation on religion in schools. "We do not intend to change the present statutory requirements for daily collective worship and for religious education in maintained schools", he told the House of Commons.

"Nor do we wish in any way to call in question the present dual system of county and voluntary schools".

Harry Greenaway, MP (Conservative, Ealing North), asked Sir Keith "to accept that there will be a warm welcome across the country for his determination that religious education will be strongly maintained".

Sir Keith accepted this assurance, although the

OBITUARY

Mr M. Brown

Malcolm Brown was killed in a road accident near his home in Milton Keynes last month. He was only 33 and leaves a wife and two young daughters.

A graduate of Loughborough University, he had a successful career as a civil engineer in Britain and Nigeria.

Mr Brown held no religious beliefs. There was a memorial meeting and a secular ceremony when burial took place.

Professor W. Walker

Nigel Bruce writes: May I add my tribute to that which appeared in *The Freethinker*?

Bill Walker was one of the original sponsors of the Scottish Humanist Council when it was formed in 1978. He told me that he had been critical of the tenets of Christianity from the age of 15 and that his interest in rationalism and humanism had never faltered. The first world war confirmed his doubts and his subsequent travels helped him to achieve a wider and more rational world-view. His wife Molly, whom he married in 1948, shared this world-view and encouraged him to pursue his humanist interests.

His strong feelings for the survival of the species and of all life, together with his realistic assessment of the nuclear peril, inspired him to be one of the founders of the Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons, in which he played an active part, especially after his retirement. He attached such weight to the part which the medical profession could play in the struggle for nuclear disarmament that in an academic lecture to the Harveian Society in Edinburgh in 1981, in which he reviewed the role of medicine in society since the days of William Harvey, he called on his colleagues not only to attack evils such as smoking, alcohol abuse and inequalities in care, but also "the preventible collective insanities of over-population and nuclear biocide".

Over the years he took part in a number of debates and discussions in Aberdeen on religious and ethical issues. In January 1984 he wrote a powerful letter to *The Scotsman*, published under the headline, "A Statement of Humanist Belief". He stated that "the humanist rejects the notion of sin and the needless guilt it brings, together with the tortuous and tortured mechanisms of propitiation and salvation. For him morality is the rational reconciliation of conflicting desires and needs".

As though writing his own last message, he went on to affirm that "the humanist does not need the pathetic illusion that his personal fate is linked with the universe, or personally cherished by its omnipotent creator. He is resigned to personal extinction, prizing this life all the more. He it is who truly respects the mystery of the world".

member for Ealing North did not produce a shred of evidence to substantiate his claim.

Indeed there are plenty of indications that the great British public, rather than being interested in the advancement of religion, is anxious to avoid religious observance and church attendance at all costs. And a recent survey revealed that the law on school assembly is being broken in about half of the nation's schools.

The Swann Committee is opposed to separate schools for ethnic minorities. It believes that such schools would fail to resolve the problems of the communities and exacerbate the feelings of rejection they are trying to overcome.

This view is likely to provoke vigorous opposition from Muslim fundamentalist groups and local ayatollahs who have been campaigning for children to be segregated along religious, racial and sexual lines.

The example of Northern Ireland, where generations have been religiously segregated from the cradle, will influence education policy makers of the future. They are more likely to follow the Swann Committee's recommendations and not submit to religious indoctrinators and segregationists.

CRITICS' CHOICE

Jean Luc Godard's new film *Hail Mary*, the preview of which was disrupted by members of the Catholic Families Association, has won an award at the Berlin Film Festival.

The film is a modern version of the Jesus story. Mary is portrayed as the basket ball-playing daughter of a petrol station manager. Joseph, her boyfriend, is a taxi driver who is addicted to science fiction novels. The Archangel Gabriel is a violent drifter who is given to coarse language.

Mary is played by Myrien Roussel, who appears in the nude. But the family doctor confirms that she is a virgin.

The film was banned by the mayor of Versailles. Two Roman Catholic organisations have been trying to get it banned throughout France.

Godard, whose 1963 film about French soldiers and the Algerian war led to demands for his deportation, commented: "I am used to being attacked. Using Ku-Klux-Klan tactics never got anyone very far".

Nearly 800 Roman Catholics in the United States have signed a statement supporting a group of religious who inserted an advertisement in the New York Times challenging the Church's teaching on abortion. The statement declares that "over the centuries there have been changes in matters once affirmed as authentic—slavery, usury, ecumenism and matters of war and peace".

The Case Against Euthanasia Legislation

KARL HEATH

Most humanists support the voluntary euthanasia movement. But there are those who do not trust the State with such power over the lives of citizens.

A few years ago I remarked that some members of the humanist movement in Britain exhibited symptoms of a "Thanatos Complex" — an obsession with death. It is ironic that people who employ jargon like "Life Stance" should be so concerned with a "Death Posture". It may be that humanists who have escaped from a religious background, their expectations of an after-life having been extinguished, find it hard to come to terms with death as total termination and eternal oblivion. So death continues to exercise an eerie fascination over them.

In support of my comment I instanced a pre-occupation with humanist funerals; enthusiastic support for abortion; advocacy of euthanasia. I support the first, although any organisation which claims that this life is the only one we've got should be more concerned with improving it than with how we should bid farewell to it. The second, abortion, is nothing to throw hats into the air for. Acknowledging an individual's right to choose abortion, it still remains a messy alternative to contraception.

The third, euthanasia, is the sinister one. The adjective "voluntary", often attached to "euthanasia", is not a valid qualification and is superfluous. If euthanasia were not voluntary it would be murder, manslaughter, capital punishment or war. So we must assume that, for the advocates of euthanasia, "voluntary" is inbuilt. The difficulty, of course, is how the act of will can be verified.

Let us first distinguish between euthanasia and suicide. Suicide, as its etymology suggests, normally involves no-one but the deceased. Euthanasia, however, appears to involve outside assistance. Furthermore, the great majority of suicides do not fit into the classical euthanasia categories. Most suicides are not sufferers from incurable, painful or terminal illnesses, or indeed any problems which are internal and unrelated to anyone else.

Most suicides arise from the failure or breakdown of relationships with family, friends or with society in general; relationships which may be economic, juridical, moral or psychological, or which arise from some form of addiction or obsession. If this is so, to regard suicide as an acceptable solution to failed relationships is to mirror the insanity of that giant brigand of Greek legend, Procrustes of Eleusis, whose idea of hospitality for the travellers he waylaid was to lop off their limbs if they were too long for his

guest bed, or to stretch the luckless guests if they were too short. Extreme Procrustean techniques were practised in the Central Hatchery in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where genetic material, embryos, babies and small children were all shaped to suit a given social environment.

Surely, Humanists believe the opposite; namely that we should change the environment to suit people, neither accepting conditioning nor surrendering by suicide — or euthanasia.

However, the gravest objection to euthanasia is the intention to involve the State by way of legislation. Here, in two important respects, the advocates of euthanasia appear to suffer from "tunnel-vision", unable to see the wider peripheral consequences of their proposals.

First, it seems incredible that people who oppose or distrust the State in so many other matters should assume that it will act with utter integrity and righteousness when it takes on terrifying new powers over the lives of its citizens. Those who advocate world Government as a panacea suffer similarly from "tunnel-vision". They assume, without the slightest evidence to support their assumption, that a World Government would have all the virtues and none of the vices of existing national governments. Why should not the opposite occur — a World Dictatorship which would outstrip in horror all previous dictatorships, with no countervailing force until a Liberation Army arrives from Alpha Centauri?

Those who oppose the Government's role in relation to nuclear weapons, a Prime Minister who would like to retain capital punishment, censorship, official secrecy, lying to Parliament, bureaucratic stupidity or indifference, delegated legislation, administrative dictatorship, prerogative courts, a prejudiced judiciary, failure to defend civil liberties, failure to support human rights, and callousness to the aged and the poor, should surely hesitate before entrusting euthanasia powers to it. They would not hand over such powers to an Idi Amin, to an Ayatollah, to a Pol Pot or to a Pinochet. But can we be sure of democratic safeguards and accountability anywhere? Recent events in Britain are not reassuring.

Furthermore, however trustworthy an existing government may be, governments are generally more transitory than is legislation; i.e. governments of a totally different character inherit legislation. They may repeal it, or they may amend it, extend it, remove its carefully worded safeguards. In short they may utterly defeat the intentions of the legislation's proponents, while using that very legislation as their starting point. It may be hard to introduce new legislation in the first place — it is much easier to distort existing legislation once the thin end of the wedge

has penetrated the Statute Book.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America was added in 1868 to guarantee the civil rights of slaves emancipated after the Civil War. Yet, ever since then, while it has afforded little protection to black Americans, it has been regularly exploited by giant monopolies (using the legal fiction that a corporation is a person) to defeat Federal Anti-Trust Laws.

In 20th-century Britain, and as recently as five years ago, several people who have committed no offence, nor have even been charged with any offence, have been sent to prison under an Act (34 Edw III, Cap 1) of 1360. This Act, passed when soldiers returning from France during the Hundred Years' War were said to be disturbing the countryside, gave justices the power to apprehend "pillars and robbers from beyond the sea" and "persons not of good fame" and demand of them that they promise to keep the peace, even if there was no evidence that they had broken it. Failure to give such an undertaking, backed by monetary recognisances, can still lead to imprisonment, as a respectable middle-class woman found to her astonishment a few years ago. She had gone to court as a prosecution witness against a huntsman who had damaged her car when she was protesting against fox-hunting; but the magistrates, by the grace of King Edward III, sent *her* to prison instead, although she was charged with no offence.

The second manifestation of "tunnel-vision" is the concentration upon the tiny minority who desire death, to the total neglect of the effects of euthanasia legislation upon the vast majority who do not desire death. Anyone who believes that euthanasia legislation would only affect those who desire death must be extraordinarily thick-skinned and lacking in feeling. There are many unfortunate elderly people who think that they are not wanted, or fear that they are a burden upon others. This does not mean that they wish to die.

For many years I was a weekly visitor to a geriatric ward. Some of its occupants were senile, some were perpetually worried, afraid or confused, some were in complete control of their mental faculties, but otherwise disabled. I could see no way of ascertaining their wishes about premature death, not least because they were all regularly dosed with depressant drugs like Largactil, as a matter of hospital routine. Yet most of them used regularly to read daily newspapers and listened to the radio. Some of them, in their helpless circumstances, could not fail to be alarmed by the news of euthanasia legislation. Others would be terrified and likely to panic. The same would be true of some elderly people supported at home by younger members of their families, especially where the relationships were under any strain.

It seems to me that the small minority of persons

idiosyncratic enough to express their desire for termination, in signed and witnessed documents, before they were overwhelmed by the circumstances they are anticipating, are also idiosyncratic enough to arrange their private suicides, informally, without involving the State. It may be argued that legislation would save doctors from prosecution; many doctors, however, might well prefer not to have the heavy burden of a euthanasia bureaucracy. For the rest, there should be more hospices and other support for terminal patients, better health care for those suffering pain and indignity. Where the desire to die arises from the faults of society or the breakdown of human relationships, the priority should be to change society or restore those relationships.

I do not trust governments, especially in socially divided societies. Their powers are already too great. To give them new powers over life itself would be to invite disaster.

Freethinker Fund

Warm appreciation is expressed to 60 readers, listed below, who sent donations during the month.

D. Goldstick and G. Jaeger, £1 each; S. W. Beer, £1.20; J. A. Stratford, £1.20; A. M. Ashton, R. Baldwin, R. C. Baxter, R. D. Birrell, R. B. Brown, G. A. Bull, V. C. Burnside, H. L. Clements, R. S. Eagle, V. Gibson, T. M. Graham, W. B. Grainger, F. C. Hagger, L. Hanger, J. L. Hope, J. M. Joseph, J. Laverty, E. Litten, J. Lloyd-Jones, C. H. Matthews, A. M. Nicholls, M. Perkins, W. H. Rogerson, K. M. Tolfree, N. Toon, J. Walsh, D. Wright and I. Young, £1.40 each; P. R. Buckland, H. G. Easton, D. A. Franklin, L. D. Griffiths, J. D. Groom, B. Humphries, T. J. Peters and D. G. Taylor, £2.40 each; A. A. Van Montague, £3; B. Everest, £3.60; E. C. Hughes, £3.90; H. F. Villiers-Stuart, £4.80; M. J. Carr, M. B. Clarke and F. C. W. Dowson, £5 each; H. K. Campbell, M. Clowes, W. Donovan, A. P. Hodges, F. W. Jones, G. Miller, C. J. Morey, G. C. Russell, D. E. Shoosmith and I. A. Williams, £6.40 each; J. W. Mooney, £6; D. Bressan £7; N. Sinnott, £10.

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The Age of Big Brother

TED GOODMAN

Restriction on space permits only a brief description of the ways in which Britain is becoming an authoritarian State. It is a pity that so many complacent media reviews of the year 1984 came to the opposite conclusion.

George Orwell's description of a future totalitarian Britain was meant as a warning about the way things were developing. That warning was unheeded. The year he chose to describe has just elapsed and during its course Britain became increasingly authoritarian.

This was both physical and mental. A few examples will illustrate. Despite its condemnation in the European Court of Human Rights, the beating of British schoolchildren, designed to induce a Pavlovian conditioned reflex of obedience to authority, continued unabated at the rate of a quarter of a million recorded beatings per year i.e. one every nineteen seconds. (The United Kingdom is the only country in the whole continent of Europe where it is lawful.) Over 80 per cent of British schools practise corporal punishment, including many administered by Labour-controlled Local Education Authorities which have decided to retain it. On the 13 November 1984, Mrs Thatcher told the House of Commons: "We do not intend to abolish corporal punishment in schools". Accordingly the Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill will not do so: it is merely a regulatory measure.

Similarly the use of plastic bullets on unarmed demonstrators continued, despite its condemnation on 11 October 1984 for the fifth time by the European Parliament. (The United Kingdom is the only country in Europe which uses this form of "crowd control".) In August 1984 the bullets took another life. An estimated 70,000 plastic bullets have been used in Northern Ireland resulting in thirteen fatalities, six of them children. The bullets were introduced by the last Labour Government. In answer to a question in Parliament on 22 February 1984, the Minister of State, Home Office, revealed that 20,000 plastic bullets have been purchased or ordered by police forces in England and Wales. So what happens in Northern Ireland today may be repeated in Britain tomorrow.

The powers of the Police were significantly increased by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. It gives them wide rights of arrest, detention and search. Persons can be kept for up to 96 hours in custody without charge (Section 44), without anyone being informed (Section 56), without access to legal advice (Section 58) and subjected to intimate body searches (Section 55). When shown the draft Bill, a professor of law at the University of London described it as "worthy of Nazi Germany". That

Bill (as only slightly amended during its passage through Parliament) is now law, though not yet fully in force.

In any event, the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 allows five days detention without charge (Section 12). The Act renews the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976, which renewed the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974. Hardly "temporary": they have been in force for over ten years.

More worrying is the Orwellian "Thought Police". National state censorship for adults was introduced by the Video Recordings Act 1984 which had all-party support. On 14 February 1984 the Greater London Council unanimously approved the Report of its Cinema Policy Working Party which supported the continuation of local authority film censorship. By virtue of the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1982 this censorship extends to cinema clubs. Meanwhile in Argentina all film censorship was abolished in 1984 at the instigation of the new civilian Government. (Even the previous military Government had not introduced video censorship.)

On the morning of 10 April 1984 Customs Officers raided Gay's the Word Bookshop in London and took away 2,000 publications. The eight Directors and one manager have since been charged with possession of imported "indecent" literature. This is a criminal offence by virtue of Section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. The literature in question includes *Gai Pied*, France's main gay newspaper. There were similar raids by HM Customs on other British booksellers such as Lavender Menace and the Adelaide Bookshop. The latter has been forced to close. In addition Customs seized consignments of American books destined for the Balham Food and Book Co-operative, Essentially Gay, Giovanni's and Housmans London Peace bookshop.

While officers of HM Customs and Excise raided some shops, the police did likewise to others, including Atomage Leather Couture and Zipper, the only licensed gay shop in Britain: unlicensed "sex establishments" are illegal in England by virtue of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. It was revealed on 21 March 1984 that the Metropolitan Police had seized over two million publications in Greater London during the previous year (*R v Snaresbrook Crown Court ex parte Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis*).

On 27 July 1984 Beth Grossmann and Donald Skirving, partners in Airlift Books, were convicted of possessing an obscene publication for gain. The book in question had no erotic nor violent content. (It was about drug-abuse.) The verdict means that the

application of the Obscene Publications Act has been widened to include descriptions of "anti-social" activity.

Orwell was also right about the Anti-Sex League. On 7 February 1985 the Metropolitan Police raided "nude encounter parlours" in London with a view to prosecutions for the old common law crime of "keeping a disorderly house". On 14 February 1985, St Valentine's Day, in an operation code-named "Sweetheart", the Obscene Publications Squad of the Metropolitan Police, in conjunction with ten other police forces, raided forty shops, offices and warehouses, seizing 500,000 items.

The Thought Police are active in other ways as well. Giving evidence to the Parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee in January 1985, John Alderson, former Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall, revealed that the Special Branch keep under surveillance individuals and groups which criticise the established order.

In August 1984 the European Court of Human Rights condemned legally unrestricted British telephone tapping (*Malone v United Kingdom*). In December 1984 the Post Office, in response to a complaint, set up an investigation regarding the tampering with mail addressed to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In January 1985, however, letters to CND had still been opened and resealed in transit. On 7 February the Home Secretary admitted to Parliament that official letter opening and telephone tapping were widespread but not more so than under the last Labour Government. He announced that a Bill would be introduced to prohibit unauthorised interception of mail and telephone calls. Official interception will thus continue as before.

And so it goes on. What is depressing for British freethinkers is the support and/or lack of opposition by non-Conservative politicians for the erosion of Britain's civil liberty. In the unlikely event of a change of Government, it is extremely doubtful whether the United Kingdom would become a more liberal country. Even the most cursory examination of the record of the last Labour Government endorses that view. It seems Orwell was right about Ingsoc (English socialism) as well.

Also depressing for British freethinkers is the fact that the trend is home-grown. Other European States are becoming more, not less, liberal. No other country in the Common Market has video censorship. Only two (Ireland and Italy) still have film censorship, and one of those, Italy, is in the process of abolishing it. The three States attempting to join the Market (Portugal, Spain and Turkey) have ended film censorship. A law is being passed by the Dutch Parliament, with all-party support, formally removing the remaining nominal legal restraints on publications about adults for adults. Similar laws have been passed by most other Western countries. Greece and Switzerland being the latest so to do (in 1983).

Pakistani Women Organise

Journalist Sue Green who recently visited Pakistan has published an horrific account of what life is like for women in an Islamic country which echoes to the prayer call from about 5 am. Few women are seen in public, "and those who venture out are often covered from head to foot in the tent-like robes of purdah with only a mesh eye-hole".

Most Pakistani women live a totally segregated life behind the high mud walls of their houses, avoiding contact with all men except close relatives. Despite the heat they wear thick black robes on the rare occasions they leave the house.

Sue Green writes about a girl whose wedding she attended: "She married a man who lived 500 yards away but she had never seen". In fact most women are married to men they have never seen. On their wedding day they are taken by his women relatives from the home they have rarely left and they may return there only as a guest. Divorce means shame and those who risk it must leave their village.

Women are property, bearers of sons, and the authority of their male relatives is all powerful. Few women can read or write—in the western province of Baluchistan their literacy rate is just two per cent.

Women's legal rights are severely restricted. Under a 1979 ordinance a woman's evidence is not valid in cases of theft or "fornication", including rape. A rape victim cannot testify against her attacker, but if she gives birth as a result of the assault she can be convicted of adultery.

Under a draft Law of Evidence an offence must be witnessed by two men or by two women and one man. The evidence of two women would not stand up in court.

But even in the Pakistan of General Zia women are organising to combat Islamic terrorism. The Women's Action Forum has about 200 members, and despite intimidation held its first demonstration in Islamabad last year.

The majority of women's rights activists are educated and affluent. Some are related to Government ministers or court officials. They have been denounced as "affluent housewives who ape Western-liberated women". In fact Pakistani campaigners for women's rights are anxious to keep their distance from Western feminists.

The Advertising Standards Authority have rejected a complaint that a poster advertisement for the Pedigree toy company's Sindy doll was sexist and sexually provocative. The poster featured a doll on the beach wearing jeans and a blouse under the caption, "Miss August—Playmate of the Month". A group of protesters filed a complaint that the poster was damaging children's morals.

BOOK

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF WESTERN LIBERALISM,
by Anthony Arblaster. Basil Blackwell, £19.50

The first and most basic thing to be said is that this book is important. It is particularly important for freethinkers, secularists, rationalists, humanists. It challenges our assumptions; and it must be admitted, it throws a powerful searchlight on our inadequacies. I suppose we would mostly call ourselves "liberal"?

Arblaster is ambivalent about liberalism. As I read the book his deepest impulses are agin it. The last sentence refers to "the historical and theoretical shipwreck of liberalism" (p349). The book presents liberalism as rooted in individualist and bourgeois beliefs and values; and its theme is their failure. The penultimate sentence reads: "I can only repeat that we do clearly need a strong and well-founded commitment to the basic rights and freedoms which have been central to liberalism, and that if they are not to be based on liberal individualism, then some other appropriately firm and defensible basis must be found" (p349). I suggest that that basis is to be found in Humanism. Arblaster finds failure because his own roots lie in Marxism.

Before looking at the book in more detail I want to reiterate and stress my opening words: this book is important. My criticisms must not be allowed to detract from that.

"The metaphysical and ontological core of liberalism is individualism". Thus starts chapter two (p15). For Arblaster, "Liberal individualism" is a metaphysical view. It "is both ontological and ethical. It involves seeing the individual as primary, as more 'real' or fundamental than human society" (p15). Separateness and autonomy are seen as "the fundamental, metaphysical human condition" (p16). The ramifications of "liberal individualism" are very wide: the world of scientific facts is morally neutral, therefore value is "attached somehow to the human will" (pp 16-17). "The isolation of the individual from nature implicit or explicit in the liberal conception of morality is compounded within liberalism by a similar isolation of each human being from his/her fellows" (p21). And so on. This gives something of the flavour of Arblaster's interpretation of "liberal individualism".

I do not say that he cannot find support for these interpretations of liberalism. But I would argue that all this is bogus; it is *bad* metaphysics. However, I cannot go into these matters here, and I will accordingly pass over the rest of chapters two and three.

I opened with a brief indication of Arblaster's metaphysics because that is how the book opens; and it is in fact the underlying theme of the book. I will return to it later. In the book as a whole, however, it is no more than an underlying theme, and one can read the book without being troubled by it.

FREETHINKER

Chapter four, "Liberal Values", opens with an impressive list of values which it goes on to discuss: freedom or liberty, tolerance, privacy, constitutionalism and the rule of law, reason or rationality, the spirit of science. Democracy is noted; but the ambiguity of liberalism's espousal of this is also noted. Other values related even more ambiguously to liberalism are capitalism, class and property. Arblaster's perceptions are very sharp. One is quickly led to appreciate the difficulties implicit in every one of these notions, not just the last few.

The major part of the book is concerned with the history of liberalism—it's gestation in the renaissance, to 1983; its rise and fall. I found this most exciting. The discussion has breadth and depth, and sweeps one on. My own concerns are not primarily historical, however, and I am not qualified to judge whether he treats the many authors fairly or not. What matters to me is the way he penetrates into the concepts and practices of liberalism, and raises issues of fundamental importance. The history as he presents it is one of high ideals and initial promise — which crumble because of the internal contradictions behind the ideals, and the prejudices of those who espoused them.

Why, then, do we have this tale of failure? Arblaster returns in his final paragraph to what clearly is his main point "liberal values are not the core of liberalism, but . . . the liberal view of human nature, i.e. individualism. . . Individualism, it was suggested, is the ontological core of liberalism; and it is in many ways a defective and inadequate way of conceiving of human beings. Many of the gravest weaknesses of liberalism are rooted in the inadequacies of individualism itself" (p349). As I have said, I am unimpressed by the "ontology"; but I certainly agree that "individualism", even taken in more down-to-earth senses, is at times a source of failure for liberalism. However I suggest that certain points that Arblaster does not notice are more fundamental.

Is "liberalism" a "radical" position? Arblaster uses this word "radical" fairly frequently, particularly at crucial points in the discussion; but its meaning is not clear. I think it has been a rallying-cry for too long. Now the concept needs examination. Out of the many senses and nuances I would like to pick three — 1: getting at the roots; 2: challenging authority; 3: extremist. Sense One by no means implies sense Three. In fact, two of the basic points of liberalism as I see it are its humanity and its realism. If one gets down to their roots, people are a mixture, and they require balance between extremes. They do *not* require extremes. It seems to

REVIEW

me that Arblaster shows little sign of understanding this.

Arblaster sees the decline of liberalism as focusing in its failure to be "radical": ". . . an almost terminal stage in the decline of Western liberalism. In this shape, liberalism ceased to retain any vestige of radicalism, ceased to pose any shadow of a challenge to the existing order of capitalist society. . . It assumed its ideals had been realised in the Western World" (pp 331- 332). Senses Two and Three seem to be in his mind. I see the present decline of liberalism as a failure to understand changing circumstances, which now demand radicalism One, *not* Three. (I agree that there has been failure of understanding by liberals. Of course there has. We must do better in future!)

He does see that questions change. In his discussion of the late 19th century he notes that the old task of liberalism had been the "freedom of the individual"; the new question was increasingly "the condition of the people" (p284). This is not to say that a Utopia of individual freedom had been reached; on the contrary, part of the point was the recognition that the freedom of the individual depends in part on her condition. Problems shift, not in the sense that old problems are entirely solved, but in the sense that complexities force themselves to attention. Old problems are set in new contexts — and increasingly one must recognise conflicts between ideals.

What is the question before us now? We recognise that the condition of the individual in our society depends in part on the political structure in which we live, and also on the system of legal constraints which limit our freedom to be rich or poor — taxation, welfare and controls on the market. The question now, therefore, is "What structure and what constraints will be satisfactory?"

If one is to solve a problem of such complexity as this, one will have to be very radical sense One; but I see no reason to expect to pursue the basic ideals of liberalism in a way which is radical Three. On the contrary, one will (surely) have to balance conflicting demands. We have got past the stage now when "Ideals" in the sense "uncompromising demands to be followed through to the end" are what we want. We do want ideals and vision, but different ideals must be taken together, providing each other with checks and balances. The "vision" is of these ideals working harmoniously together but limited, none absolute.

This is a rather fundamental divide. Arblaster sees compromise as incoherence; and he sees a failure to press an ideal to its logical conclusion because of another ideal as inconsistency. On the contrary, it

seems to me, this is fundamental to liberalism. This is one of the reasons why in the end he is disgusted by it. He is a Marxist; I am a Humanist.

The point I want to make is that the present decline of liberalism is not the result of internal incoherence, as Arblaster claims, leading to a failure to be radical sense Three. I see our failure as the failure to make the transposition from the relatively simplistic state when simple ideals can be fought for; to the more complex state which requires balance and compromise, based on an understanding of roots. In 18th-century France it was appropriate to cry "Freedom" and storm the Bastille. Now there can be no single battle-cry and there is no concrete target.

Arblaster is well aware of the need for roots, and he sees them in a life stance — though he does not use that term. He says that at the heart of every major political tradition there is a view about the world and about human nature (p6). He uses "metaphysical" language for this, and (I claim) develops bad metaphysics. This is a pity, for he thereby discredits the idea that political traditions have roots in fundamental views. Of course they do; and his is Marxism, while mine is Humanism. I by no means wish to deny that the Marxist life stance can be formulated with integrity and coherence. For myself, I do not accept that it is a true account of human nature and the world; and further, I do not think it can carry liberalism forward into the 21st century — Arblaster, one can say, has demonstrated this. And further still, as I believe in the importance of liberalism and Humanism and their values, my position is not *merely* that I reject Marxism "for myself"; I oppose Marxism, within the context of the Open Society. In this I display my liberalism, for the Open Society is at the heart of liberalism.

When one has to be "radical" and go to ones roots, it makes a lot of difference what ones roots are. Arblaster sees that the Open Society is within the liberal concept; but he does not like it and he does not understand it. For him, it links with his critical boo-words: individualism, empiricism, value-free science, piecemeal reform, the critique of Utopianism (pp 26, 325). He makes clear that it fits ill with Marxism. It also fits ill with religion. It finds its home in Humanism. The Open Society is not, of course, the only point where liberalism turns to Humanism for its rationale and its roots; but I cannot take the matter any further now.

The situation is like this. We have before us two principal families of political extremes: socialism/communism, and free-market capitalism; and we have liberalism, which is prepared to try to find and to create a mode of balance. Marxism gives the view of human nature and the world which justifies the former of the two extreme styles of politics; and we have Humanism, which justifies the quest for balance. Those of us who see the future in Humanism and

liberalism owe a great debt to Arblaster for his socialist and Marxist critique of liberalism. He is sufficiently close to us to get to grips with our values; he is sufficiently antagonistic to see our failings. He has illuminated our failings very effectively.

Finally a few words on the technicalities of the book. It has a very wide and interesting range of references. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that the publishers have adopted current-worst-

practice in their presentation of it; they give *no* page numbers to guide the reader to the reference he wants. The index is reasonable. It is interesting to note some of the heads it omits — for example Radical(ism), Socialism, Human nature. It is odd, however, that “for reasons of space and convenience” many secondary authors and “minor characters in the drama” are omitted (p390).

HARRY STOPES-ROE

The Psychology of Fundamentalism

BOB POTTER

Fundamentalist Christian groups, operating as the Moral Majority, already exercise a powerful and baneful influence on the social and political affairs of the United States. A recent survey revealed that while membership of the mainstream churches in Britain continues to decline, fanatical groups like House Churches are increasing.

If you ask a Christian fundamentalist how he or she came to believe, the reply will almost certainly be an assertion that “the truth” was mediated by a supernatural agency. A typical biblical quotation used by evangelists in support of this claim is “. . . because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians, 2, 13-14).

For several years I have been researching fundamentalist Christianity. My starting point was an intuition that religious commitment has nothing to do with supernatural powers; an understanding of people’s dedication to religious communities must be sought in the mental structure of the devotees.

In order to obtain some data on this question, I “joined” a number of Bible groups and over an 18-month period attended nearly 200 classes run by 15 different religious communities. I compiled a questionnaire consisting of 180 questions and these were distributed among representatives of four groups. These were the Jehovah’s Witnesses, as a fundamentalist group in a state of rapid expansion; the Christadelphians, who share many of the beliefs and attitudes of the Witnesses but are in a state of decline; the Methodists, representative of mainstream Christianity and in a state of rapid disintegration; the Quakers, who in many respects are outside the traditional religious spectrum and are historically more “in the world”.

My involvement with many religious groups has led me to believe that there are probably eight essential characteristics of the fundamentalist. In

general terms these are: (1) fear of uncertainty and chaos, a psychological “security” based on “positive certainty” that life has a “meaning”; (2) an obsessional sense of personal inadequacy; (3) self-centredness and selfishness; (4) a world perceived in dualistic (schizophrenic) terms; (5) exclusive possession of a restricted “truth”; (6) perceived “separation” from “worldly things”; (7) anti-intellectualism; (8) an obsessive sense of urgency.

Some may query why, in this scientific age when the majority of intelligent people reject religion, I should devote so much time and energy to such a project. The simple answer is that, contrary to popular belief, fundamentalism is a growth point on the religious front, and has been for more than half a century. *In many countries political power is increasingly getting into the hands of religious fundamentalists. This not only has far-reaching effects on the type of education tomorrow’s citizens are receiving; in a nuclear age it represents a serious threat to us all.*

In contrast to the situation in Britain a century ago, the overwhelming majority of people now show little interest in religion. At best, about nine per cent of the population ever attend a church, and that includes those who turn up for the odd wedding or funeral. Mainstream Christianity is in a state of general decline. The change in church membership during the period 1970-80 reflects this general tendency. A survey carried out by the Bible Society in 1983 revealed that Church of England membership had decreased by 16 per cent; Roman Catholic, 7 per cent; Methodist, 20 per cent; Baptist, 14 per cent; Presbyterian-Congregational, 17 per cent; while those listed as Others had increased by 16 per cent.

The most interesting category listed in this table is the one labelled Others. It consists of a large variety of religious communities, the majority of which (including Spiritualists, Christadelphians, Christian Scientists, Salvation Army and Unitarians) have *diminished* during the decade by between 8 per cent and 27 per cent. However, this category also includes a number of fundamentalist groupings that, in striking contrast to the general decline, show a

steady expansion. For instance the Seventh Day Adventists show an increase of 15 per cent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 7 per cent; Pentecostal, 6 per cent; Mormons, 14 per cent; House Churches, 300 per cent.

Indeed that difference in growth between fundamentalist and mainstream Christian groupings is much greater than the Bible Society figures suggest, for within the "established" churches it is the congregations which cater for a literal interpretation of the Bible that are thriving. If the flourishing fundamentalist groups entrenched within the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches were removed from the overall statistics, decline in membership registered by these two communities would obviously be much greater.

It seems a paradoxical state of affairs that in this "secular" age, when religion is regarded by the majority as an obsolete and inadequate attempt at explaining the world, that it is the most irrational groupings that are an impressive growth point. T. S. Eliot is credited with the remark that "Christianity is always adapting itself to something which can be believed". It is true that some apologetists for traditional Christianity attempt to rationalise their faith by advocating, in effect, atheism in the language of theology. But it is precisely the Rudolf Bultmanns and the Don Cupitts who are faced with today's collapse.

There are two dimensions to fundamentalist Christianity. First, insistence that the Bible is the literal "word of God"; secondly, the belief that mankind is living in "the last days" and that God will soon intervene to "cleanse the world". There have always been those who believe literally the words of Jesus describing the calamities accompanying his "second coming". The millenarians have always found plenty of "evidence" in the world about them to support their belief in the imminence of his return.

It could be argued that this is more true today than it has ever been. The Jehovah's Witness who appears on the doorstep talking about the impending end to civilisation as we know it is almost certainly talking to a householder who has already reached a similar conclusion from reading the daily newspaper. One can understand the strong appeal of a confident evangeliser who insists that today's crisis was all predicted by those who wrote the Bible centuries ago, while assuring the justifiably worried listener that the same book reveals God's plan for the salvation of mankind. For many individuals, living in a frightening world, religion represents a "security" far stronger than anything offered by science.

The dogmatically religious person is found to have a number of characteristics. He is resistant to change and simultaneously endorses contradictory beliefs. He views the world in simplified, black-and-white categories and sees humanity in impotent and pathetic terms. He has a paranoid outlook on life and feels it essential to convert others to his point of view —

a way of supporting his own insecure belief system. He finds the present unhappy and unimportant, concentrating on the "glorious past" or the "promised future".

The strength of any religious body is the security it offers the person feeling inadequate in a truly horrific world. During the decades following the 1939-45 war, Victor Frankl developed his theory of the central role of "purpose in life". A survivor of Auschwitz, he argued that the primary motivational force in man is the striving to give his life meaning. "There is nothing in the world . . . that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in his life", he wrote.

Frankl described his experience in a Nazi death camp, pointed out that those without "belief" in something were usually the first to succumb, and referred particularly to the resilience of the interned Jehovah's Witnesses. He insisted that his finding extended far beyond extreme situations such as Auschwitz; an enormous number of people manage to survive in the world by creating "a purpose" which acts as an "escape pattern" security.

The demise of religion will not be engendered by enlightened theological discussions. So long as people feel the need to seek the protection of a secure "fortress" where they are assured the care and wisdom of the father, leader, or priest, the existence of religious communities is assured.

The answer must be the re-building of people's self-confidence. Only when individuals confidently take control of their own lives will religion be found to be totally irrelevant.

• Readers who would like to receive further information about the survey referred to in this article should contact Bob Potter, 98 Addison Road, Hove, Sussex.

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Cuts in grants have already led to the closure or curtailment of services provided by libraries, art galleries and education centres. Now the theatre, already seriously affected by VAT charges, is under serious financial pressure.

Before the advent of television most families in Britain visited the cinema at least once a week. The cost of a cinema seat ranged from 9d to 1s 9d (about 4p to 9p in today's currency). Serials in which the heroine was left tied to a railway track with an oncoming train in the distance, or in some equally tantalising situation, kept us hooked from week to week.

Visits to the theatre were certainly much less frequent. My family, I remember, used to go three or four times a year. We went to the upper circle for 5s 9d (26p) with my parents, or to the gallery with fellow students for 1s 6d (7½p). At the Old Vic it cost only 7d, and I often sat spellbound on the hard seats and then walked all the way back to Highgate. I was studying *King Lear* and came armed with pencil and paper, but was so carried away by the performance that all thoughts of exams were swept out of my head.

There was no National Theatre in those days, and no Barbican. If you wanted to see Shakespeare you went to the Old Vic. There were occasional and often magnificent performances of his plays at various West End theatres, and after the war the Aldwych became the London home of Shakespeare's works. But the building was old and tired; the facilities were inadequate. A National Theatre in which our greatest performers could present fine classical and modern plays, and new playwrights given the opportunity to develop their talent, was desperately needed. Such a theatre was necessary for our artistic self-respect and essential if we were not to be the one civilised country without a National Theatre of which it could be proud.

A National Theatre was promised by Parliament. A site was designated, but innumerable difficulties arose. There were constant delays. But finally, some 30 years after the original promise was made, the National Theatre was built on London's South Bank.

For many years now the National has been our artistic pride and joy, and an enormous stimulus to the tourist industry. Although the cost of entertainment has vastly increased, it is still much lower than in other countries, particularly the United States, where costs are almost three times as high as ours. There have been many outstanding productions at the National Theatre. Who can forget the grandeur of *The Tempest*, the power of the *Bacchae*, or the sheer impact of Athol Fugard's *Master Harold and*

the Boys? Fugard's play was first seen at the National's little Cottesloe Theatre, the closure of which is now threatened.

The loss of the Cottesloe would be a tragedy. For the National is not just one theatre. It is the realisation of a theatrical vision. For a start there are three theatres which have one feature in common — you can see and hear perfectly from every seat in the house. The Olivier and Lyttleton are large theatres highly suitable for lavish presentations, while the much smaller Cottesloe, which holds only 400, has been invaluable for staging more intimate productions, including experimental works and plays by new authors, some of which have transferred to other theatres.

In addition to the theatres, there is a large and exciting foyer, with bars, bookstalls, exhibitions and free music on most afternoons. This is also under threat. There are conducted tours of the building, providing a fascinating picture for ordinary theatre-goers of what goes on behind the scenes. No wonder the tourists love it — and the Londoners as well.

Of course the cost of running such a theatre is stupendous. The original outlay was far in excess of all calculations. Maintenance costs are enormous, and there is the problem of inflation. The Arts Council's annual grant has barely been enough to meet rising costs, and with inflation running at five per cent the Arts Council grant has been seriously reduced. Sir Peter Hall, the National's director, replied that there was only one solution — the Cottesloe must go.

This will mean a cut of about 100 jobs in an already hopelessly overcrowded profession with the largest national share of unemployment. And what about our budding writers? Must we throw away our seed corn?

No wonder there has been a tremendous outcry. There have been letters to the press, attacking the Government for its intransigence, the Arts Council for its blindness, and Sir Peter Hall for succumbing to the commercial demands for lavish productions and letting the axe fall in the wrong place.

One argument has been raised which perhaps deserves some consideration. How many people in fact go to the theatre, National or otherwise? Why, when money is short, should so much be spent on prestigious theatres like the Coliseum, the National or Covent Garden, all of which are London based? What about ordinary people in the rest of the country?

Perhaps this approach is an acceptance of one of the things that is wrong with our society. Why don't most ordinary people go to the theatre, still less to the opera or the ballet? Largely because they are too expensive. Why does the Government not think the

arts worth subsidising?

Have our people really so much less feeling for the arts, for music, ballet, live theatre, than the Italians, the Russians, the Germans or the Israelis? Take a modern Russian school primer — more revealing than it realises. Ivan the schoolboy talks with his father about the play he had seen last week, with the same enthusiasm with which he discusses the Moscow Dynamos, and goes to the theatre just as regularly. When Israel was founded in 1948 there was a desperate need of everything from a jar of Nescafe to a reel of cotton. But they built a concert hall and established the Habima Theatre. Those who argued “necessities first — the arts can be added later”, were told “art is an essential part of a nation’s life — it can’t be added on afterwards”.

I remember many years ago, at a conference, someone remarked that they never went to the theatre. It was too expensive, too difficult to arrange, etc. I found that out of 30 people only two had been to a theatre that year. I was so shocked that I undertook to arrange monthly theatre parties. I have been doing this for over 25 years, but even with reductions for groups increase in prices has made this difficult. Nevertheless the number of groups visiting the theatre has increased enormously.

The National Theatre is the one we visited most often last year. Alas, their minimum price has gone up from £5 to £7, but it is still the best value in London. We have been asked to write to our Member of Parliament protesting against cuts in the Arts Council grant which, if implemented, will destroy not only the Cottesloe, but also the touring companies which bring the National Theatre all over England.

I began by reminding readers that before the days of TV being the chief entertainment it was the cinema. Before the cinema it was the Music Hall, a live theatre in its way. Now there are many signs that TV, which was supposed to kill music, has actually stimulated concert going and interest in the theatre.

We have many fine modern playwrights and many potential ones. We have many great classical plays. What is needed is to stimulate more public interest in them, not to annihilate them.

It took 30 years to build the National Theatre. Are we now going to let it be destroyed?

Lois O'Donoghue, Australian Woman of the Year, said that that when she was two the Church took her away from her mother “for what they called my own moral good”. She was raised at a mission and trained for domestic work. She was not allowed to train as a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, because she was an Aborigine.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 12 May, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. John White: Humanism and the Arts.

The Campaign Against Censorship. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1. Thursday, 9 May, 6.30 pm. Annual General Meeting followed at 7.30 pm by public lecture. Michael Cockerell: Politicians and the Media — the Hidden Censorship.

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. Exmouth, Devon, 20 July-3 August (either one or both weeks). Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 14 May, 8 pm. R. K. Elliott: The Resurrection.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London, SE6. Thursday, 25 April, 7.45 pm. Humanism and Ideology.

Scottish Humanist Council. The Cowen Centre, Stirling. Saturday, 20 April, 10 am to 5 pm. Annual Conference: Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, telephone 0563 26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 May, 7.45 pm. Harry Stopes-Roe: Common Bonds in an Open Society.

Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Golden Jubilee Celebration, London, 13-14 April. Details from the VES, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8, telephone 01-937 7770.

PUBLIC MEETING

FAMINE AND POPULATION

Speakers:
G. N. DEODHEKAR
(National Secular Society)
TREVENEN JAMES
(Population Concern)

Chair:
BARBARA SMOKER

Monday, 22 April, 7 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Organised by the National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL,
telephone 01- 272 1266

"Loathsome and Repellent"

from different angles. There's the Christian who sees God as the God of Judgement who will make us suffer for our sins in eternal hell-fire. And there is the Christian who sees God as a sort of all-forgiving Grandpa.

"Indeed, if all the Jesus Christs of all the cults and sects were gathered together, contrasting Passolini's with Muggeridge's, Mary Whitehouse's with Albert Schweitzer's, you'd have a cacophony of Christs, a real mess of Messiahs. . .

"There are revolutionary Christs, reactionary Christs, anti-Semitic Christs, White Christs, Black Christs and, as a product of the feminist movement, we even have Jessica Christ, who prefers to be called Ms".

Lord Willis said that he could understand and even respect the yearnings and uncertainties that produce religion or the need for it. "It is a crutch which enables some people to hobble through life, a balloon inflated by ignorance, which enables them to float over the rockier bits of existence".

But he had no respect for "loathsome and repellent people who exploit those yearnings and uncertainties for their own political or nationalist ends. . .

"I find intolerable the cynical leaders of multi-million pound sects who prey on the idealism and trust of youth and turn them into street-collectors and beggars in the name of Jesus Christ who was supposed to have driven the money-changers from the Temple. Such people would, I am sure, have paid for the Last Supper with an American Express card".

Lord Willis concluded by wishing the movement well, and urged members to concentrate all their fire on superstition, intolerance and exploitation.

"I hope that you will stick to your self-imposed task of showing religion for what it is — not a great, overwhelming idea but a small pip-squeak of an idea, a child-like bedtime story to ward off the darkness, to soothe man's irrational fear of death".

Diana Rookledge, chairman of the British Humanist Association, proposed the toast to the NSS. Referring to the organisations' different styles and tactics, she said we should not allow ourselves to be upset and divided by the few differences, but "united by the many things we have in common".

She did not go along with the argument that the organisations should amalgamate. "I see it as a great strength that we have two organisations, with different styles, different methods and slightly different things to offer. . . Let us support and cooperate with each other and let the world know what we are about. We both face outside dangers from the forces of unreason and reaction. We recognise those dangers easily and enjoy the battle".

Be properly
Diana Rookledge warned against the danger of becoming fossilised. "We must ~~be in~~ be in the process of bringing out our 'isms' and re-examining them in the light of a constantly changing society".

Jim Herrick, a former editor of *The Freethinker*, who responded on behalf of the NSS, said we now live in a society where pressure groups have great influence.

"The NSS is a pressure group, and one of its difficulties these days is competing amongst powerful and wealthy pressure groups who have learnt the art of gaining the ear of the media. The churches are such a pressure group, and competing with them has been made more difficult by the fact that it is no longer clear what they stand for. . .

"In the face of the difficulty of competing with wealthy pressure groups and of knowing what Christians now believe, the NSS has as important a task as ever in keeping its presence visible. If the humanist movement were not here, people could say 'No one opposes religion'.

"And our daily papers give us constant reason to continue to criticise religion and its influence. The Jihad or Holy War group in Lebanon, or Enoch Powell outwitting everyone in Parliament in speeding through a Bill to prevent research on the human embryo, or Sir Keith Joseph rejecting within hours of the publication of the Swann Report its proposals that traditional religious assemblies and RE based only on Christianity should go, that the recommendations would be ignored — we have no shortage of examples".

Jim Herrick said he was glad that all the humanist organisations were represented at the NSS dinner, and he supported Diana Rookledge's plea for cooperation in the movement. "Like detectives, we all share the principles of reason and a determination to base what is happening upon the facts.

"Religions delight in a realm of mystery — an undiscoverable realm. We use our magnifying glasses and telescopes to scrutinise the world around us. We will not accept the injunction: 'You cannot know this'".

However he said there is a detective we should not emulate—Truscott the detective in Joe Orton's brilliant farce, *Loot*, which is full of wonderful send-ups of religion.

"At the end of the play the most innocent character is arrested and protests: 'You can't do this. I've always been a law-abiding citizen. The police are for the protection of ordinary people'.

"The detective replies: 'I don't know where you pick up these slogans, sir. You must read them on hoardings'.

"Which reminds me of a sticker I saw on a poster in Piccadilly Circus and which could become the motto of the NSS: 'Smile, there is no God'".