

The Freethinker

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JEWISH AND MUSLIM METHODS OF RITUAL SLAUGHTER CONDEMNED

In its Report on the Welfare of Livestock When Slaughtered by Religious Methods, the Farm Animal Welfare Council has recommended an end to legal exemptions which allow ritual slaughter without first stunning the animal. The report was compiled by a Council working group and is the outcome of a three-year investigation. Group members visited slaughterhouses in Britain and Northern Ireland in order to observe religious slaughter. FAWC chairman, Sir Richard Harrison, stated: "During our review we found a widespread lack of understanding of why religious slaughter is considered necessary and how it is carried out — even among some members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths".

The report shows that a considerable amount of meat slaughtered by religious methods ends up on the open market. For instance, the hindquarters of a carcass are not consumed by Jews unless they have been "porged" (a process which removes veins, lymphatics and the sciatic nerve and its branches). All hindquarters and any carcasses not accepted for Kosher purposes are sold into alternative markets.

According to the FAWC report: "This means that no more than an estimated third of the weight of all animals slaughtered according to Jewish methods finds its way into Kosher shops, and a high proportion of Shechita meat which has been rejected by the Jewish Inspector as being non-Kosher is therefore distributed to the open market. In addition, a considerable quantity of meat produced from animals slaughtered by the Muslim method is sold in non-Halal outlets".

The FAWC expresses concern that "there is no indication to the consumer that such meat has been obtained by religious methods of slaughter so that people who object to eating meat from animals slaughtered by religious methods can choose not to buy it . . .

"We understand that these existing practices are within the framework of the present legislation in that it is not a contravention of the law to sell to others meat from animals slaughtered for the food of Jews and Muslims provided that *at the time of slaughter* it was the intention that it should be for the food of Jews and Muslims".

Those who slaughter animals for consumption by Jews must be highly trained and qualified. They are also subjected to re-examination at frequent intervals. No such restrictions apply to Muslims. Slaughter can be performed by any Muslim and no special training is demanded. The incision is made "in the name of Allah".

Muslims and Jews claim that the welfare and humane treatment of animals is a matter of considerable importance to them. The latter assert that Shechita is the most humane form of slaughter. The FAWC comments: "This is the nub of the argument relating to religious slaughter which brings into question such matters as the time elapsing before loss of consciousness and the disadvantage or otherwise of stunning. What we have seen shows that current practice often falls far short of the ideal".

The working group concluded that the rotary-type casting pen which was introduced for the purpose of contributing to the welfare of animals "seems in the light of experience and subsequent knowledge to be having quite the contrary effect". They are "acutely aware of the terror and discomfort which ensue from the inversion of cattle followed by forcible extension of the neck, often resulting in the animal banging its head on the floor. When the pen is in position, the animal's head is usually restrained by the foot of an operator or by a rope halter . . . On some occasions we witnessed animals being held in this position for longer than we

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

THIS CENSORED ISLE

The BBC overlords and ladies have demonstrated their inability to face the fact that censorship is invariably self-defeating. By banning the *Real Lives* documentary from our television screens, the Corporation's Governors, far from withholding "the oxygen of publicity" from Martin McGuinness and Sinn Fein, presented them with an international publicity coup. They also infuriated broadcasting journalists to the point of striking and tarnished the Corporation's image. The Governors themselves, previously accepted as men and women of firmness and integrity, are now widely regarded as Margaret Thatcher's trustees.

The *Real Lives* saga is by no means a one-off exercise in suppressing debate on the Northern Ireland question; it is just the latest of around fifty BBC and ITV programmes that have been banned, discontinued or editorially castrated. Such action has not been taken for reasons of national security but in the political interests of Government ministers. Sometimes the pressure for censorship has come from Unionist politicians like the unspeakable Lord Brookeborough, under whose premiership institutionalised terrorism in Northern Ireland was operated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (whose members mounted the brutal and unprovoked attack on a civil rights march that triggered off the present violence) and the "B" Specials force (which Britain was later shamed into disbanding).

The Times expressed the view that "the spectacle of Mr McGuinness explaining himself on television may be shocking to English viewers". The newspaper's concern is commendable but misplaced. English viewers do not exist in the rarified atmosphere of Printing House Square and are accustomed to the street violence, political demagoguery and religious fanaticism of the Northern Ireland scene. They are more likely to be shocked by the intransigence and bellicose rantings of "loyalists" like the Rev Ian Paisley than anything that Mr McGuinness may have to say.

Few of the BBC governors are anything other than "safe" in Establishment terms. Ten of them have been appointed during the Thatcherite era and their political commitment may be assessed by the fact that Sir John Boyd, Salvation Army bandsman and a former Right-wing trade union boss, is about the most radical of the lot. He was not present when the decision to ban *Real Lives* was taken.

In a newspaper article, Aubrey Singer, Managing Director, BBC Television 1982-84, posed the question

S AND NOTES

why the Governors failed their staff and the public on this occasion. He wrote: "During the Thatcher years, the Board has gradually been packed with pro-Establishment Government supporters". He alleged that it was Sir William Rees-Mogg, Vice-Chairman, who led the hue and cry against the programme.

"Whatever arguments swayed the Governors", Mr Singer declared, "the collective decision smacks of pusillanimous sycophancy. By any standards, an error of the first magnitude has been committed. It took twenty years to expiate *The War Game* and seven hours to divest the BBC of its independence".

* * *

London Transport Advertising has banned posters of *The Metropolitan Mikado* from underground stations on the grounds that they are "too political". Margaret Thatcher, Neil Kinnock and GLC leader Ken Livingstone are caricatured.

The Metropolitan Mikado, presented by the GLC at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, follows last year's highly successful *The Ratepayers' Iolanthe*. Writers Ned Sherrin and Alastair Beaton have brought the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta up to date, with characters such as Katisha, Countess of Grantham, and a wandering minstrel named Boy Ken.

Posters for the 1984 production were accepted by London Transport but banned by British Rail. Mr Livingstone described the censorious antics of the transport authorities as being "in true Gilbert and Sullivan style".

* * *

Piers Merchant, Conservative MP for Newcastle Central, has described as "silly" the decision to withdraw advertisements for striptease dancers at Jobcentres. The instruction to discontinue displaying advertisements for the Tyneside-based Anne Robertson Agency was given by Peter Morrison, the Employment Minister. He had received a complaint from an unnamed MP acting on behalf of constituents.

The Agency had found jobs for fourteen girls and two men after placing advertisements at Jobcentres in Newcastle, Gateshead and Wallsend. Mrs Robertson, who runs the Agency, will now advertise in newspapers.

She said: "It is a very Victorian attitude to take in this day and age. When the Jobcentre accepted the adverts I was very happy because I felt, after 21 years in the business, it was a breakthrough in getting exotic dancing accepted as a proper job. Most of

those who applied were married women with children and unemployed husbands.

"It is better to be doing a job and earning money than relying only on State aid".

Mr Merchant commented: "It seems to me silly that when there are genuine jobs on offer a Government department should be standing in the way of advertising".

* * *

Dr John Garrow, the head of a team which wrote the first Government-sponsored guide to healthy eating, has threatened to resign because he says the Department of Health has censored their report. Dr Garrow, an expert on obesity and a senior official at the Medical Research Council's clinical research centre, described the Department's demand for change as insulting.

It is widely believed that the dairy and meat industries were so alarmed by the guide's recommendations that pressure was exerted on the Government to delete or change parts of it. Dr Garrow declared: "I can see no point in continuing, unless we can be assured that this censorship will now cease".

* * *

The Clerkenwell magistrate has committed eight directors and a member of staff at London's Gay's the Word Bookshop for trial at the Old Bailey. They will face eighteen charges of conspiring to evade the importation of indecent or obscene material. The titles seized include works by Gore Vidal, Allen Ginsberg and Jean Genet.

Sarah Spencer, general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, says that it "will prove to be one of the most important censorship test cases of the century".

* * *

The Roman Catholic Church has banned performances of two plays which were to have been staged during the Edinburgh Festival in a hall next to St Mary's Cathedral.

Lady Chatterley's Lover (a production to mark the centenary of D. H. Lawrence's birth) was said to contain scenes and language "that might be considered unsuitable for children". The company had performed it at Cardiff to audiences totalling nearly ten thousand. There had been no complaints.

The second production to which the holy Joes objected was *The Venice Quartet*. Written and performed by Richard Edmonds, it is based on the life of the self-styled Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe). The play had already been previewed and well received in Birmingham.

Mr Edmonds said: "To the Catholic priests of Edinburgh I would say that my play represents a

challenge to the intellect of the discerning playgoer and nothing more.

"Their attitude twenty years ago would have been reprehensible, but in 1985 it is faintly ludicrous".

* * *

Barnet Council in north London recently banned the showing of a film, *The Hiding Place*, at one of its libraries. The Council's action resulted from pressure by an ultra-orthodox Jewish group, Lubavitch, whose members picketed the building. A petition against allowing the film to be shown was signed by two hundred Jewish residents. The objectors claimed that the aim of the film, sponsored by a fundamentalist Protestant group, was to convert Jews to Christianity. The show was transferred at short notice to Hendon Baptist Church.

There are 47 Conservative and 13 Labour members on Barnet Council.

PRACTICAL HUMANISM IN INDIA

During her recent visit to Britain, Dr Indumati Parekh of the Bombay Women's Welfare Organisation was the guest of the National Secular Society at Conway Hall, London. During the evening she spoke about the radical humanist social work that is being carried out in working-class areas of Bombay.

The island city of Bombay is about eleven miles long and varies from a half to three miles wide. Joined to the mainland by two causeways, it is probably the most congested urban area in the world. Bombay is prosperous and sophisticated, but it has a chronic housing problem. In the warm, equable climate, life survives in shacks erected on footpaths and public land. It is no exaggeration to say that the nightmare results of the population explosion predicted for the end of the century can be experienced in Bombay today.

Dr Parekh's work is carried out in a predominantly working-class area in North-West Bombay. Started in 1964 as a clinic for women and children, Dr Parekh has built up the Women's Welfare Organisation to the extent that it is now run by 125 active members and a small group of full-time workers.

Family planning is part of an integrated educational programme. There are clinics where dental, gynaecological, infertility and sterilisation problems are dealt with. There is also an "alcoholics anonymous" group. Close attention is paid to immunisation and nutritional care of children.

Sewing and silk screen printing classes have been started to enable women to earn money for themselves. A small savings campaign has resulted in the WWO holding 2,700 accounts.

Family planning has reached a figure of 70 per cent

acceptance in marked contrast to the figure of around 35 per cent in other areas. The WWO's general policy is to support women who seek contraception and not to allow husbands to dictate on this question.

If only there were a few hundred women doctors with Dr Parekh's energy and imagination, the result would be a much improved situation in the cities of India.

• The address of the Women's Welfare Organisation is Lokmanya Nagar Compound, Cadgill Road, Dadar, Bombay, 400-025, India.

BUZZ QUIZ

The fundamentalist glossy monthly, *Buzz*, having asked "leading churchmen, politicians, theologians and media personalities" for their definition of a Christian, reported the results of this survey in an illustrated double spread.

Beside the main heading, "I believe a Christian is . . .", was a sub-heading, "If a professing atheist has a clearer idea of what a Christian is than an Archbishop, what chance is there for Christianity?" And the first paragraph, in large bold type, read "Professing atheist Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has a clearer picture of what a Christian is than the Archbishop of York."

Here are extracts from the report: -

"The findings are absorbing and disquieting.

"Barbara Smoker, for example, told *Buzz*: 'A Christian is someone who believes Jesus was both god and man, and who believes literally in the virgin birth, resurrection and other gospel myths.'

"Exceeding her allotted 25 words, she added: 'On no account should the word be used for one who has merely been baptised as a Christian . . . still less should it be used for one who leads a decent life!'

"The Archbishop of York, the Rt Rev Dr John Habgood, on the other hand, replied: 'I am afraid there is no way of defining what a Christian is in 25 words. In common with other religions, Christianity has six major dimensions — doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, social and experimental . . .'

"Clive Calver, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, reacted with dismay to the Archbishop's comments.

"'If major Church leaders are not in a position to simply explain the character of the Christian faith, then what hope is there?' he told *Buzz*.

"'If a humanist, Barbara Smoker, understands Christianity better than its own leaders, what chance is there for Christianity?' "

There followed definitions (with passport-size photographs) from two dozen people questioned, ranging from Cardinal Hume to Cliff Richard, from Norman St-John Stevas to David Steel and David Owen, and from Mgr Bruce Kent to Gerald Priestland.

Kuwait's highest religious lawmaking authority has decreed that Muslim women be denied the right to vote or stand for parliament. "The nature of election processes befits men, who are endowed with ability and expertise", the decree said. It added that Islam did not permit women to forfeit their basic commitments which were bearing and raising children.

DIVIDED BY RELIGION

The Education for Democracy programme in Israel's schools, aimed at bringing Jewish and Arab children together, has been denounced by the rabbis. They fear that if Jewish children visit Arab homes they might be encouraged to eat non-Kosher food.

Yabcov Hadani, head of the Ministry of Education religious section, has also issued a directive condemning the joint meetings of young Jews and Arabs. He is afraid that such meetings "could lead to intermarriage between the two populations", and claims that his fears are shared by Arab religious leaders.

Mr Tewfik Toubi, a leading member of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, sent a message of protest to the Minister of Education. He described the religious leader's directive as "a grave racist move which is designed to torpedo efforts to achieve understanding and peaceful co-existence between the two peoples".

• A story put out in Britain by the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry alleging Jewish pupils are being forced to sit on "Jews Only" chairs has been exposed as highly dubious. It was questioned in the Jewish Chronicle by Ze'ev Ben-Shlome, an expert on Soviet Jewry, after being broadcast on Channel 4 Television. When the Jewish Chronicle contacted the WCSJ, a representative admitted they had no evidence to confirm the story.

DESTROYED BY RELIGION

Rodrigo Maneja, a 33-year-old preacher and leader of the Kahal ha Masiyac sect, burned himself to death at Cebu, in the Philippines, last month. He did so to prove that he would come back from the dead. His followers believed that he would return to life after four hours.

Hundreds of spectators watched as Maneja's brother-in-law and other sect members poured petrol over him. He was ignited and soon the flames engulfed his body.

After the funeral, Maneja's mother reaffirmed her faith in God. She said: "Some members of the family may not follow me, but I will continue to worship the God who asked my son to sacrifice his life".

The Kahal ha Masiyac sect has about a hundred members who believe they will survive a nuclear war.

STATE DEFIES CHURCH

The Government of the Republic of Ireland has defied the Roman Catholic hierarchy and will continue allowing women to be sterilised in public hospitals. The bishops have advised Catholic gynaecologists that the operation is "repugnant to Christian teaching".

Dr Eamon Casey, Bishop of Galway, circularised doctors in his area pointing out that the Church condemns sterilisation as a method of birth control. The Galway regional hospital has a three-month waiting list for the operation. Dr Michael Moylett, a Catholic gynaecologist at the hospital, said he would continue to provide sterilisation for women with medical and social problems. He believed that many priests would take issue with the hierarchy on this question and that the Church would have to change its attitude.

Other gynaecologists have warned that if the bishops had their way over sterilisation it would result in even more women travelling from the Republic to Britain for an abortion.

Freethinker Fund

Once again the Fund total has been boosted by anonymous donations. A reader who prefers to be listed as "Iconoclast" has sent another gift of £100. Large or small, your donations help to keep *The Freethinker* in the black.

Another list of contributors is given below with our thanks.

S. Page, £1; J. Lavety, £1.50; F. Walker, £1.95; J. M. Cardy, H. G. Downham, A. E. Garrison, D. J. George, L. Goldman, G. Hibbert, H. Jack, D. A. Langdown, J. G. Peace, D. B. Ratcliffe, K. C. Rudd, R. W. Simmonds, D. Swan and J. W. White, £1.40 each; M. G. Clarke, J. McCorrisken and J. Simpson, £2 each; D. Clamp, P. Foss and G. Newlove, £2.40 each; J. G. Reece, £2.80; M. F. T. Cockeram and J. L. Lewin, £3 each; L. B. Halstead, £3.40; W. Scott, £3.45; R. Humphries, £4.40; L. Lewis, £4.60; K. M. Barralet, J. Blundell, P. P. Crommelin and C. Kensit, £6.40 each; S. G. Dunnett, £16.40; Anonymous, £30; Iconoclast, £100.

Total for the period 10 July until 9 August: £233.90.

A weekly bulletin issued by St Mary's Church, Apsley, Hertfordshire, recently offered this helpful advice to parishioners: "If anyone would like to bring up the bread and wine during the Offertory Hymn, please sign the list on the notice-board".

"Family Concern" and Britain's Moral Majority

JOHN CAMPBELL

Britain has not yet got its Moral Majority but a plethora of puritanical religious groups are working towards that end. By the concealment of their real aims and the deceptive use of words and phrases — usually associated with family welfare and the protection of children — they have succeeded in hoodwinking the public and pressurising politicians into supporting further repressive legislation.

In 1978 O. R. Johnson, the theoretician of Care Trust (formerly the Nationwide Festival of Light), gave a series of lectures on the theme of the family, at All Souls, Langham Place, London. His thesis was a simple one: the family is the present battleground on which the forces of God and the Devil are fighting over this nation's future. In one way or another, all the modern social ills we face, from disrespect for authority to pornography, could be traced to the decline of that God-given institution. On the other hand, Johnson reasoned, the defence of the family and the values it fostered could provide Christians with a strategy for regeneration. By appealing to family sentiment and the "protection of children" on issues like abortion, censorship, contraception and education, the Christians could win back the ground lost to the "new moralists" of the 1960s. This call to arms would also separate real Christians from those compromising with secularism over pre-marital sex, homosexuality and other such "problems".

If you had heard about it you would have treated it as a bad joke; it even sounds too far-fetched to be true. But what Johnson was actually doing was announcing the existence of and strategy for Britain's Moral Majority. They have been growing steadily for the last decade, and although they themselves cannot yet elect a Government, their appeal to "Victorian values" has. They have also been successful in changing laws; influencing what we can and cannot see on television, video and in the cinema; controlling sex shops and shaping local council licensing policy.

In part, this success is due to public concern about their targets. Playing upon people's fears is a deliberate move; it masks the origin of many campaigns, disarms opponents and spreads the very confusion they hope to profit by. Another reason for their progress is the failure of freethinkers to take them seriously. The fundamentalists from whom they draw support are the fastest growing section of the Christian community. And these people mean business.

The first major step by the fundamentalists was,

of course, the creation of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. Its forerunner — the Clean Up TV Campaign — though openly Christian, was a defensive measure, opposing secular influences in broadcasting. The NVALA tended to play down the Christian connection at the very time it moved into other areas like porn, film censorship, contraception and sex education. Blasphemy only raised its head when they could play on homophobia or when a Swedish director, Jens Thorsen, attempted to make a "porn" film about Jesus. But Christians know the real aim of the organisation. Its background and mission can be seen in the careful choice of title. They call it National VALA — pronounced Valour. For them it is the first battalion in the army of Christ. The problem is that the NVALA can be frustrated at national level by the courts or the libertarians in the Home Office. And this is where Family Concern comes in.

This movement began in Cornwall in 1974 under the name of the Community Standards Associations. One or two groups have kept that name, but most are changing. They have a symbiotic relationship with the NVALA, Care Trust and the Responsible Society. The local groups provide the signatures for petitions, raise funds, act as monitors and disseminate literature. In return they receive information, speakers, a door to Parliament and national co-ordination. By examining their activities in some detail we can see the real force behind several supposedly disinterested campaigns in recent years, follow the logic behind them, and see the targets that will inevitably follow their victory over the more "unacceptable face of permissiveness".

Their allegiance is to God, Nation and Family — in that order. Their task is to usher in the Kingdom of God — in reverse order. To do this Johnson drew up a "hit list": sociologists, humanists, homosexuals, feminists, family planners all had to go. Individual groups argue over the precise order but all were agreed the weakest targets were the "sexual commercial interests". By attacking these, exploiting fears of rape and teenage pregnancy, Johnson believed Christians would not only make the environment pollution free for the rising generation but would also mobilise thousands to the cause making them amenable to the next set of targets. It is no accident that the word of God only appears in local groups like Cornwall where Christian influence in local government is strong. The others tend to limit themselves to the secular language of "protecting the family", borrow the phrases of other movements (the feminists in the case of porn) and promote themselves simply as local citizens. Supporters also use their secular "authority" as

councillors, teachers and youth workers, rather than the Bible, in public. For "housewife and mother" read "committed fundamentalist Christian".

Two methods are employed in the move from an attack on porn to Christendom: writing letters and mobilising the influence of individual Christians in positions of power. Members and supporters are asked to devote at least two hours a week to the task of letter writing. The ones you see in your local paper were inevitably written by someone in the movement. Meanwhile other letters will be arriving on the desks of MPs, local councillors, Chambers of Commerce, head teachers, college governors, chaplains, mayors, women's organisations, etc — anyone and everyone who will take notice of or utilise this "public opinion". Contacts with local notaries are carefully cultivated. Apart from the inevitable housewives and old age pensioners, in the Merseyside group we find MPs, councillors, lawyers, magistrates, teachers, lecturers and social workers.

If a local councillor wants to raise and pursue an issue, group members will supply the letters of complaint and support from "the public". Once a headmistress has been provoked into complaining about the local sex shop by a parent who just happens to be in Family Concern, other members will write to her and the newspapers praising her action.

The influence of these groups is staggering and enables a comparison with America's Moral Majority. When the NVALA launched its StoPorn Now campaign in 1981, CSA-FC moved into action. In addition to the usual churches, youth groups and women's organisations, the Cornish group managed to cover almost every hotel and guest house during the summer season. Up and down the country, complaints by members have led to police raids on newsagents and video shops which cut their supplies of "nasties" long before national legislation. The reason why we do not associate these events with groups like the Community Standards Association is that they work so hard at maintaining the myth that they are simply members of the public. Despite being her major supporters, Mary Whitehouse has never publicly acknowledged their role.

To date the fight against the sexual commercial interest has been very successful. The Cornish group convinced local councillors to utilise their powers to censor films. As a result cinema managers refused to run several films including *The Exorcist*, *Caligula* and *The Life of Brian*. A report justifying the banning of films, *Film Censorship in Cornwall*, was sent to every single local authority in England and Wales.

On Merseyside, the group blocked six sex shops and a cinema club. Newsagents carry a Family Shop Seal of approval if they do not stock any magazine or periodical the Christians disapprove of.

Having closed five sex shops and two cinemas, the Portsmouth group's activities have led to a ban on

Go-Go dancing as well as strip-tease in city pubs and clubs. Several films have failed to run and even pop groups deemed too suggestive have been barred from the local Guildhall.

Fifty thousand homes were leafleted during one campaign in Worthing to raise the question of the town's "declining moral standards".

Following an initial meeting in Salisbury to discuss the formation of a group, Christians entered a local newsagent and then complained to the police. As a result all the newsagents in the city were raided.

This list is endless and their activities extend beyond the twenty or so official groups. You will not find an address on the Family Concern mailing list for Lincoln, but it has its activists. Many local evangelical churches will also function as a group. The more fundamentalist the church, the more likely they are to be involved in the network. In any event, the groups provided Mary Whitehouse with the support she needed to gain the sex shop and video legislation of recent years.

Once FCs began to see results in this area they proceeded to other targets. Pop records have been under attack in Worthing and the movement wants the music industry brought under the influence of the Obscene Publications Act. A homosexual club was an early target for the Harrow group. As Christians, they take witchcraft seriously: the police "visited" the popular Boscastle museum following complaints by the local CSA which wants the 1951 Act replaced by a new law outlawing the practice. Occult centres and bookshops — particularly when they open next to churches as in Canterbury, or on Christmas day — have been subject to petitions, pickets and protests. At one point an attempt was made to add these to the 1982 Act which licensed sex shops. The CSA-FC groups did not hide the fact that once licences were needed, they would press local councils to refuse them. Mystics, clairvoyants and spiritualists would also be put out of business. Attempts have already been made to ban the game *Dungeons and Dragons* from schools.

It is to schools that the movement has been turning its attention in the last five years. Apart from the board game, film club programmes have been reported to the local education authority and in Cornwall a production of the play *Kes* was censored. Teachers' activities and the content of lessons is being monitored. The movement believes at least ten per cent of the staff in state schools need to be removed for preaching "subversion". Sex education and the material aids used are a constant concern. Although the results of complaints have not always been in their favour, Family Concern have forced material to be withdrawn in some areas, organised children's withdrawal from classes and have had literature or talks by the local family planning clinics cancelled.

A "hit list" of O level English texts drawn up by

FORGOTTEN FREETHINKERS (I)

“Old Chat”

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

Victorian freethought was, on the whole, well served by its leaders, but the eminence of Bradlaugh, Besant and Foote has overshadowed the endeavours of those in the second rank. Many of them, it must be admitted, were worthy but dull. In this article, the first of a series on the movement's lesser figures, Andrew Whitehead examines the career of Dan Chatterton, who was quite the most remarkable, outlandish and after a fashion heroic, atheist publisher in Victorian London.

the groups appeared in a *Freethinker* article (June 1980). But censorship would go further than that. Even images of tramps, dead soldiers, starving people, incendiary suicides by Buddhists and hydrogen bombs would be excluded because they imply the world is “a dreadful place, in which man behaved brutishly, and in which there was little hope”. Images such as these are seen as too perplexing for the simply minds of those still at school.

The concerns of these groups cannot be taken lightly. Who would have thought five years ago that they would be able to promote national legislation on sex shops and videos? But they have. As the economic and social climate changes they will find other grounds on which they can intervene. Their dedication to lobbying will force politicians into supporting yet more repressive legislation.

A Cornish headmaster has suggested taking up school governorship as a way to combat “libertarians, freethinkers and communists” in the teaching profession. Mrs Victoria Gillick's legal action against the DHSS over its guidelines to doctors when advising young people on contraception followed five years of CSA-FC campaigning in that area. The broadcasting authorities and the British Board of Film Censors take CSA-FC opinions into account when banning or cutting films. A CSA-FC campaign helped to ensure that there would be no “special” channel on British cable TV.

The latest newsletter from the Cornwall group suggests utilisation of phone-in programmes to encourage discussions on morality. True to form, it also reminds readers to keep up the pressure on newspaper correspondence columns: “The truth has an authority of its own and does not need to be pre-faced, in this context, with biblical references — so important in other situations”. The subjects included were Obscenity Laws, teenage pregnancy, sex education in schools, parents' rights, VD and the physical dangers of contraception — everything likely to increase fear and anxiety.

Freethinkers should watch out for groups claiming to have the family's and children's interests at heart, and expose them for what they are. They are a threat that must be taken seriously. Failure to do so in the past has increased their power; failure to do so in future will ensure their predominance.

ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

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“The irrepressible Dan Chatterton”, the *Clerkenwell Chronicle* proclaimed. Other opinions were not quite so positive: “a blatant idiot” was the phrase chosen by *Justice*, journal of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation, while *The Observer* described him as “an itinerant spouter of blasphemy”. He was certainly a figure of note, being depicted in at least two novels and several reminiscences. Chatterton himself once listed with pride twenty papers and periodicals which had referred to him, “some adverse — some kindly”, as he put it. He came late to propagandism, and was in his fifties when his first pamphlet appeared, but over the last twenty-five years of his life he produced a stream of titles, always well-graced with invective and often printed in such a rudimentary fashion that they are barely legible. He chose the title of “Atheist and Communist”, and preached his philosophy at open-air pitches and anywhere else he could find an audience. Historians have tended to dismiss him as a nutcase or relegate him to a footnote, and indeed he did not represent anyone but himself, but his life and labours are worthy of greater regard.

Chatterton was born in Clerkenwell in 1820 — the house still stands on Mount Pleasant, close to the postal sorting office. His father was a japanner, or furniture lacquerer, and the family must have been quite well off for they were able to send Dan out of London for much of his early education. There was a clash of wills between mother and father, one a Christian and the other an atheist, but the latter triumphed, and Chatterton recalled that as a young boy he accompanied his father to freethought meetings at the Rotunda in Blackfriars Road.

A number of misfortunes befell the Chatterton family which may well have had something to do with Dan's political development into not merely another artisan radical and atheist but the most out-and-out denouncer of peers, princes and priests. When Chatterton was about twelve, his father had a serious accident which apparently prevented him working as a japanner, and the family had to rely

on what must have been a much more precarious income from selling coal. Dan was apprenticed as a bootmaker, but his attempts to set up on his own account were unsuccessful and he was forced to work as a journeyman to earn "a precarious crust".

In 1848, Chatterton's first recorded political endeavour ended in disaster. He was badly injured in a police attack on a Chartist meeting at Clerkenwell Green — hence the description of him as "Old 48" in Richard Whiteing's novel *No. 5 John Street*. His exact means of livelihood at this time is uncertain, and it may have been impecuniousness which prompted him to enlist in 1855. He was discharged from the army because of ill health at the end of the Crimean War and returned to London to marry. Again little is known of the circumstances of the marriage, though they cannot have been happy for Emma Chatterton died, aged thirty-two, an inmate of St Pancras Workhouse. Of the three children, only one outlived his father and he was not capable of living alone.

Dan was involved in the franchise reform campaign of the mid-1860s and first achieved political prominence in the Republican and extreme radical organisations of the early 1870s. His first pamphlet was occasioned by the disciplining of members of the Metropolitan Police who had been agitating with some success for more pay. It advocated disaffection in both the police and the armed forces, looking forward to a revolution "in fact, an entire smashing-up of kings, queens, princes, priests, and policemen. Land and money mongers, and rascality of all sizes and degrees".

The subject and tone of his next pamphlet is amply illustrated by the full title: *Hell, Devils and Damnation or the deeds of a blood-stained God and his pioneer of priggery, Jesus Christ, if true*. It concluded with the hope that "freethought fostered by a sound secular education will prove a cure for all the evils engendered in the past and present by king-craft and priest-craft".

Chatterton's political programme is most charitably described as ill-defined. He advocated that Queen Victoria be found a job as a washerwoman, the Prince of Wales as a laundryman and Gladstone as an omnibus conductor. He was every bit as contemptuous of public authorities and radical reformers. One of his penny pamphlets ended with the slogan, in block capitals, "Revolt, Workers, Revolt. Heads Off!", while another advised readers "there is nothing left for you today but to steel your nerves, dry your powder, sharpen your weapons, tighten your grasp, and drive the bright, flashing steel clear through the quivering heart of your Blood Stained Foe".

Other tracts dealt with more immediate issues, like the problems of slum housing and the inadequacy of slum clearance schemes. Chatterton's advocacy of contraception was not simply on the

standard neo-Malthusian grounds of enhancing living standards, but so that "you may gratify, to your heart's desire, all the sexual pleasures of love, of life, of all desire, without having the bitter reflection that by your reckless act of reproduction of a greater number than your two selves, you have doomed all to the penalty of death by starvation".

Chatterton was involved in a host of campaigns — on housing, against the game laws, in favour of secular education and land nationalisation — but the target most regularly in his sights was organised religion and the doctrines it taught. He was roughed up more than once by crowds of believers as he peddled his pamphlets or addressed street corner crowds. He loved to be a thorn in the flesh of clerics, and was delighted when an exchange of letters with the Archbishop of Canterbury was published in *The Times*.

His own life, however, was one of hardship. He lived in slums around Kings Cross, and then, for the last ten years of his life, in the Drury Lane area. When Charles Booth launched his great social survey of London in the late 1880s, one of his house-by-house informants, a City Missionary, encountered Dan in his room. He reported: "The man is a notorious Atheist, one who holds forth on behalf of his creed under railway arches, saying that if there be a God he must be a monster to permit such misery as exists. This man suffers from heart disease, and the doctor tells him that some day in his excitement he will drop down dead". Chatterton earned a very modest income as a bill-sticker and a vendor of freethought and Left-wing papers — supplemented, it would seem, by grants from a benevolent fund of the National Secular Society.

His poverty was reflected in his publications which, from the mid-1880s, are fragile items, published on thin yellow tissue with irregular type and with little regard to grammar or syntax. Chatterton acted as compositor and printer. He had no printing machine, so each impression was made by hand. Failing health and eyesight made the process a laborious one. Nothing daunted, it was only in 1884 that he started his most remarkable publishing venture, *Chatterton's Commune: the atheistic communistic scorcher*, which appeared more-or-less quarterly until his death on 7 July 1895. It had a print run of about a hundred. There's a complete set in the British Library which makes a curious and fascinating afternoon's reading — though unless it is rebound, the run will not be complete for much longer.

Two photographs of Chatterton survive in the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. He sold copies at a shilling each in an attempt to finance his own cremation. One shows Old Chat — a frail figure with sunken eyes and a well-developed

(continued on page 140)

THE PROBABILITY OF GOD, by Hugh Montefiore.
SCM Press, £6.95

The Bishop of Birmingham is open-eyed and honest enough to have written a book worthy of close reading and detailed consideration. Although not a man of science, and it might not be a great advantage if he were, he examines the claim of the sciences to give a rational account of the universe, and finds it insufficiently grounded. He has been at great pains to study and present the findings of the empirical sciences in their contemporary state relevant to an understanding of the existence of our planet and life on earth. He is aware that "natural theology" was deemed to have come to an end definitively with the abortive attempt started in the seventeenth century to follow science as another road to God through the exploration of his works, rather than the reading of his Word; an attempt sentenced in principle to philosophic extermination by Hume and Kant. He pointedly reopens the chapter, on the ground of empirical inadequacy, and indeed introduces a Dialogue of his own in the manner of Hume as a postscript to Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Here, then, is an informed attempt to rehabilitate "Natural Theology". Does it succeed?

Hugh Montefiore presents in some detail the state of the sciences on the physical cosmos, the development of conditions on earth favourable to the emergence of organic life, the evolution of species, and especially the development and nature of the human species. Step by step, he finds on balance (and it is always on balance) a persisting inadequacy of explanation. There are too many coincidences, too much favourable contingency, too high an improbability that chance and necessity could balance the books. The strength of his argument is in the cumulative series of improbables, on empirical assumptions. Particularly, the long and varied sequences in the evolution of species are inadequately accounted for *solely* on the principle of natural selection. And human consciousness cannot plausibly be simply identified with brain functions; nor human nature with biological adaptations. The way things have turned out to be, with all the blind alleys and false starts, in view of its outcome and the fortunate conditions which prevailed and are maintained (take the precarious composition of the atmosphere, for example), seems to him more adequately accounted for if thought of as governed by a divine plan creatively sustained and directed, than as determined piecemeal by what befalls. This is not a "God of the gaps", but divine immanence in the processes of the cosmos, physical and biological. With this re-reading of events goes a restoration of the human species to a privileged place, the principal object of the

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exercise, not merely the end product of one parallel line.

Although the argument in this form seems to imply an intrusion into the field of explanatory hypotheses of empirical science, it properly belongs to a different universe of discourse, and is a philosophical thesis. Scientific hypotheses are piecemeal, limited in scale, reach, and reference, spinning the web of description summarised in tested generalisations. "Natural selection" is generally recognised as not a scientific hypothesis in this sense of detail. Dr Montefiore seems not to appreciate the immense subtlety of "matter", as revealed in micro-biology and electronics. The crude mechanics of cranks and levers misrepresents "mechanistic" descriptions and explanations. More astonishing is Dr Montefiore's total omission of the social and cultural conditions on which and by which species became human and self-conscious and responsive, conditions still necessary to the humanisation of every infant.

There are two ways in which the author is prejudiced, and to that extent not able to understand the position he confronts. The alternative he rejects as unreasonable is thought of in terms of "brute" matter and a meaningless universe. He is looking for "a simple and complete explanation of the laws of the universe". "Brute matter" is simply the "given", the way things are, in terms of which any explanation is grounded. Long, long ago the Epicureans recognised this in two dicta: "Nature is its own standard, one thing throws light on another"; "Nothing exists in order that we may use it, but what exists has its uses". These properly disposed once for all of "brute" matter and cosmic meaninglessness. The assumption that reason can give a simple and complete explanation of all that is misapplies the Occam dictum of economy. It really begs the question, assuming a coherent whole to be explained, a plan. If the reality is piecemeal open-ended development in multiple directions, the notion is misconceived.

If the Bishop fails to meet the case he confronts, the "probability" he proposes is itself a liability. God in the role assigned is unintelligible. He quotes two theologians, one the present Archbishop of York, who are content to recognise the combination of chance and selection as the method of creativity. He says these views are not godless, but are hard to reconcile with the Christian revelation of God in Christ. Chance and necessity "cannot produce purpose". But are not the habiliments he provides for renewal of the argument from design once again the emperor's new clothes? He tries to unite the God of Christian mythology with a speculative theism

REVIEWS

inferred on grounds of probability from a consideration of sampled science. Tillich, commenting on an address by Einstein on "Science and Religion", wrote: "The concept of a 'Personal God' interfering with natural events, or being 'an independent cause of natural events' makes God a natural object beside others. . . This, indeed, is the destruction not only of the physical system, but even more the destruction of any meaningful idea of God. It is the impure mixture of mythological elements . . . and of rational elements. . . No criticism of this distorted idea of God can be sharp enough". "If Satan casteth out Satan. . .?"

Doubt may be permitted on whether "any meaningful idea of God" can be sustained, since it lies outside the possibilities of thought, and is historically derived from a tradition. Or, as a speculative notion, an omniscient and omnipotent Being is the Great Solipsist. Endeavours to get him out of that predicament have multiplied problems. He certainly cannot provide "a simple and complete explanation of the laws of the universe". Dr Montefiore has tried to bring together two incompatible systems of explanation — ignoring the general characteristics of existence. His fundamental purpose in writing the book, to restore prior conviction about the reality of God, ought not to succeed on the ground he has chosen, for it is not intellectually sound, in spite of his honesty and painstaking labour. The cover bears a computer graphic of the double helix of DNA. It ought to have been Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam".

H. J. BLACKHAM

SECRET CULT, by Peter Hounam and Andrew Hogg.
Lion Publishing, £1.95

During April in recent years public libraries have displayed many expensively produced posters advertising evening classes in "Practical Philosophy", sponsored by the School of Economic Science (SES). There are also supplies of leaflets inviting readers to a dozen sessions, promising that they will learn to "understand the meaning of human existence, the aims of life and the art of knowing oneself" — all for £15, with reductions for senior citizens.

Most of those who enrolled did so in the belief that they would study the ideas of Plato, Kant, Nietzsche and Sartre. Only long after paying their course fees would they have realised that they had joined a scheme organised by a religious cult.

Indeed SES members are deliberately vague, deceptive and secretive about their beliefs until the

recruit is "hooked". One of their basic rules is that they never discuss their "teachings" outside meetings. Another is that they never communicate with defectors from their organisation. Now, however, the history and activities of this covert community are accessible to us in the recently published *Secret Cult*, written by two journalists from the *London Standard*, who interviewed more than fifty former members.

The "philosophy" that SES promulgates is a development of the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky system of "search for the inner self", which was modified by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (of Beatles fame) who claimed that his "transcendental meditation" could eliminate disease and violence from the world. SES insists our true purpose on earth is to serve "the Absolute" (God, in other words). This can be done through eliminating evil and ignorance by disciplining ourselves in esoteric procedures.

There are strict rules about clothing, diet and sex. Birth control and modern medicine are condemned. Many of their ideas are culled from a recently forged "gospel" claimed to be "the secret teachings of Jesus".

If the student successfully completes the introductory stage he is encouraged to register for "in depth" Hindu-style meditation, a privilege that will cost a week's salary. Week-long residential retreats follow, with successive courses becoming more intense. Increasingly students are denied any time to themselves.

Sects and cults are rapidly proliferating, and the School of Economic Science is no exception. Between 1970 and 1982 its income exceeded £2 million and fixed assets increased fivefold.

The full extent of SES influence in politics is difficult to establish. The authors interviewed Roger Pincham, chairman of the Liberal Party, who admitted to being a senior member. Pincham, a wealthy stockbroker, was also chairman of four independent SES schools in London. (Many parents were unaware that their offspring were being taught the rudiments of SES philosophy.) Several Liberal candidates in the last General Election were also members.

SES successes are not confined to the United Kingdom. The authors point out: "In only thirty years the cult has become an international movement as strong as many of the better known new religions such as the Moonies and the Scientologists". One of the reasons why their progress is not better known is that the organisation's name varies from country to country, even from town to town. "The School of Philosophy" in one locality is "The Society of Practical Philosophy" elsewhere. But the world-wide network is controlled from Queen's Gate, Kensington, in West London.

Several months ago I requested a Brighton news-

paper to carry an appeal for ex-students of "Practical Philosophy" to contact me for research purposes. (The paper had previously co-operated with my investigations into local religious cults.) After three unsuccessful attempts I realised that for some reason my request would not be granted. I discovered why on 27 April when the paper carried a display advertisement for a course in "Practical Philosophy"!

Humanists and others seeking enlightenment in this fascinating area will find it much cheaper and certainly more informative if, instead of enrolling with the School of Economic Science, they invest in this well-researched and well-written paperback.

BOB POTTER

"Old Chat"

moustache — with bill posting equipment standing by sheets advertising *The Freethinker*, the *National Reformer* and a programme of lectures at the Hall of Science. It gives credence to the description by the anarchist David Nicoll: "He looked as he stood in the gaslight, with his ghastly face and flashing eyes, clad in an old grey overcoat and black slouched hat, a red woollen scarf knotted round his neck, like some grim spectre evolved from the misery and crime of the London slums, and middle-class men who had entered the meeting from curiosity shuddered as they murmured to themselves 'Marat'".

Chatterton was not cremated, but buried in a common grave in St Pancras cemetery, Finchley, after a secular service. He merited obituaries in the anarchist journals of the time, and an affectionate piece in the London evening newspaper, *The Star*. Joseph Wheeler wrote a fond few words in *The Freethinker*: "violent in invective against princes, peers, priests, and other parasites, he would not hurt a fly, and he was the soul of integrity". It hardly need be said that Chatterton had many failings, yet it is difficult but to agree with the words of the obituarist in a revolutionary journal, *The Torch*. "Many were the blackguardly attacks on him by the lying mercenaries of the Christian party. . . But old Dan's life gave the lie to these calumnies. One cannot fail to admire an old man who, though living in a slum of Drury Lane in the greatest poverty, supported a grown-up son who was physically unfit to work, and who put the Cause first and foremost before all things. Old Chat died as he had lived, a firm and consistent Atheist".

Members of a Spanish medical team who performed an abortion on a 20-year-old girl have been excommunicated, according to the Roman Catholic Bishop of Jaen. So has their patient, who decided to have an abortion because of the likelihood of her child's malformation as a result of German measles contracted during pregnancy.

Mary Haywood is honorary secretary of the Campaign Against Censorship, but in this article she is expressing a personal opinion.

The one-day strike at the BBC World Service will have been puzzling to many of its listeners. They live in countries where the national broadcasting service is a government department and its voice is the voice of the party in power. It follows that they expect broadcasters to lie or at least conceal the truth and so therefore treat the official news with apathy and disbelief. When new rulers come to power they at once set the media to putting out their version of events, personalities and motives. The national radio and television stations are always early targets in a coup.

For many reasons, the BBC is different. However shaky its independence may be in fact, it is expected to tell the truth, and some of this credibility has rubbed off on the IBA as well. But credibility can go too far. The old reverence for the printed word: "It must be true, I read it in a book", has been replaced by: "It must be real, I saw it on television". It is a new superstition, and the present Government has succumbed to it. They appear to believe that a television interview, regardless of content or context, confers increased strength on the person who gives it. More, media exposure is equated with life itself. A movement deprived of "the oxygen of publicity" is supposed to curl up and die — of suffocation one presumes. The fact that political movements and leaders survived and succeeded without benefit of television for thousands of years until this century has been forgotten. And if appearing on television confers reality, strength or even life, no wonder a government in power fights, and sometimes fights dirty, to keep its opponents off the TV screen.

Therefore the *Real Lives* programme was withdrawn, under pressure. All the Government statements focussed on the IRA spokesman, not because he is more extreme or more violent or more bigoted than the "loyalist", but because he is a political enemy and the almost supernatural influence bestowed by television must be denied him. Belief in this influence is the most widespread superstition of our time and it does more, because more insidious, damage to society than straightforward government censorship to which people can adjust. It is preached by media workers themselves because it makes them feel powerful. It is actually very gratifying to believe that what you have created has changed people's minds to the point where they go out and riot, burn, rape or kill. Quite a number of people are fully and sometimes gainfully occupied studying, researching, analysing, writing and speaking about "the

Television, Reality and Censorship

MARY HAYWOOD

influence of television". If that influence were presumed not to exist, they would be probably unemployed and certainly unheard of.

What they thrive on is fear, and fear in this situation is unjustified and childish. Television is a painted devil. The bogeyman, usually known as "Violence", cannot come out of the box in the corner and get little children, though little children might sometimes believe that it can. The threat of "the influence of television" appeals to the frightened child in everyone. Any government which can successfully pose as the caring parent keeping away the bogeyman can then impose the most stringent control on what does appear on the screen.

However, there is a sense in which fear of what shows on the screen is reasonable. Television conveys information in the form of images. A person does not need to be literate or even very intelligent to learn something from it. For those in power that is a threat. Rulers at all times and at all levels, from parents to super-powers, keep their authority by controlling what the ruled are allowed to know. The ignorant are powerless. What is being done is quite obvious to outsiders but within a family it only becomes clear at adolescence, when the youngster starts to move outside the family group. Within a country it only becomes obvious when the government is more heavy-handed than usual. Then the public may cease to be a frightened child and become a disgruntled teenager, suddenly aware that there are things that "they" don't want "us" to find

out, and quite determined to know them.

By one of those ironies which life produces but fiction would never dare, a week before the television audience could not see *Real Lives* they could see *The War Game*. Twenty years ago *The War Game* was the victim of a campaign of political censorship masquerading as moral panic. Governments have learned nothing since. Because it was banned, *The War Game* acquired a powerful reputation. It was shown regularly up and down the country for years, reaching far more people than it ever would have in one television showing. Notoriety worked entirely in its favour. The powers that were, whoever they were, would have done much better to let it be shown. *The Day After*, which was supposed to be equally terrifying, appears to have sunk without trace. So Martin McGuinness got his publicity — not from yet another documentary about Ulster, but from Leon Brittan. If the interview is ever shown far more people will watch it than would have done without the row.

The staff at the BBC were right to be angry. Overt government control would destroy the credibility of their work. They and their critics both exaggerate the influence of television, but television provides information in its most easily assimilated form. And information is the key to power, which is why those who have power want to control it. To ban a television programme insults its audience by treating them like children. It is also futile and even counter-productive; not only wrong, but stupid.

LETTERS

SHOP WORKERS AND SUNDAY TRADING

For The Freethinker to describe itself as a secular humanist monthly, whilst at the same time join with the advocates of Sunday and 24-hour trading, is a contradiction in terms.

The fact that a law is frequently flouted by the cowboys of distribution is no case for the abolition of the 1950 Shops Act. Most motorists break the speed regulations every day but no sensible person would use this as an argument for dispensing with speed limits. Shops that boast of large takings by opening on Sundays can only do so because their law-abiding competitors close. If everyone opened, nobody would make a profit.

How on earth intelligent people can honestly believe that shop assistants' "quality of life" can be protected and at the same time abolish the Act, which affords them all the protection they have, is incomprehensible.

The abuse thrown at those who oppose abolition can best be answered with the observation that "abuse is often the last resort of the unintelligent when confronted with defeat in debate".

When Thatcher made the debate on Tory proposals to abolish the 1950 Shops Act a subject for a three-

line whip, she conceded that she may well be beaten in a free vote. The fact that she denied MPs the freedom to vote in accordance with conscience and religious conviction is evidence that she realised that 24-hour and Sunday trading — a measure for which no party has any mandate whatsoever — will not be brought about in a free and democratic manner. It is interesting to note that when this dictatorial woman cracks her three-line whip, many religious convictions go through the window.

Professionals in the field of distribution and we on the trade union side are agreed that to dispense with the 1950 Shops Act would lead to: (a) retailers being obliged to open for longer hours in defence of market share, thereby increasing costs without any increase in trade; (b) overtime rates for Sunday working creating increased prices; (c) family life of an overwhelmingly female workforce being disrupted; (d) smaller shops with less ability to absorb increased costs disappearing at an even faster rate, thus increasing the difficulties of the elderly and disabled shoppers.

Like all sensible people USDAW would support "tidying up" legislation but to simply abolish the Act with no provision for the welfare of shop-workers, no protection from the ruthless employers is totally irresponsible, and to make parliamentary time available for such a reprehensible measure when the Government really ought to be devoting its attention to much more

serious matters, is to reveal a callous indifference to human difficulties which is almost beyond belief.

We in the USDAW take very careful note that Tory proposals to dispense with the Shops Act are coupled with their intentions to abolish the Wages Council machinery on the pretext that this will make the low paid lower paid thereby creating jobs. What nonsense this is. Workers being paid less will only result in higher profits and the Tory Party is very well aware of it. Wages Council inspectors found that 40 per cent of all employers examined were short changing their staff in the wage packet and one wonders what the figures would have been if the Wages Council Inspectorate was adequately manned.

Under the present Government, shopworkers have only USDAW standing between them and a life of seven days, 24-hour trading for peanuts as wages.

A. HAMILTON
Deputy Divisional Officer
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

JAMES CAMERON, ZIONIST?

Peter Cotes' eulogy on James Cameron (July) was disgusting.

Great journalist? Perhaps. "Never-ending struggle against injustice"? Maybe. But this was the man who helped create a major injustice. In his last year he was still boasting of how he had helped to create the State of Israel.

Justice for the Palestinians? He couldn't see the point, and remarked callously that he thought Arafat was the brand name of some kind of lard.

I didn't expect to see this fulsome tribute to a Zionist in *The Freethinker*.

MARGARET MOULTON

CHURCH TITLES

John L. Broom (Letters, July) corrects T. K. Evans by pointing out that the Monarch is not the Head of the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, because that position is deemed to be held by Jesus Christ. It should also be pointed out exactly the same is true of the (Anglican) Church of England, for exactly the same reason.

Henry VIII did adopt the title of Supreme Head of the Church of England in the 1530s, but Elizabeth replaced it with the title of Supreme Governor in the Act of Supremacy in 1559, and so it has been ever since.

NICOLAS WALTER

BLACK SECTIONS

I sometimes think that the editor of *The Freethinker* is intentionally obtuse simply to provoke correspondence.

On this occasion he has misunderstood the current move within the Labour Party towards the formation of black sections as "political apartheid" (News and Notes, July). Having been present at every one of the East Lewisham Labour Party's General Council meetings during 1984-85 where this issue was introduced and finally adopted as policy, I can vouch for the fact that it was the West Indian, African, Asian and other (literally) black members who argued vociferously for black sections. They wanted a political forum where they were not a patronised minority, where their just grievances about racist practices were understood, strategies formulated and personal confidence could flourish.

The analogy is with the development of women's sections in the Labour Party, and in fact East Lewisham's Women's Section proposed what will become the constituency party's Conference resolution this

year: "This conference recognises that the racism that black people have to confront daily in society is also found within our own Party, and that this is manifested in the under-representation of black people at all levels in the party. Conference therefore, as part of the fight against racism and as part of the principle of positive action, welcomes the establishment of black sections in over 30 local Parties, and the increased involvement of black people that has resulted from this".

The resolution goes on to call for the necessary Rule changes and in fact it was only the current un-constitutionality of black sections that inhibited some Labour Party members from voting for it, not the principle of positive discrimination itself.

The move towards Black Sections isn't a way of disassociating black people from the mainstream of politics — as with women's sections, any Labour Party member is eligible to be part of both the main Party and the specialist section. But it is a place to feel more comfortable with others who share your particular ethnic viewpoint.

Would the editor similarly rail against humanist groups on the grounds that this is a broadly tolerant society and the views of atheists and agnostics are naturally understood in a land of free speech?

RITA CRAFT

WRONG NAME, BY GOD

Your July report on David Yallop's sensational book, "In God's Name," states that Bishop Marcinkus (now, surely, Archbishop?) is known as "God's Banker". But that was the nickname of the late Roberto Calvi, found hanging under Blackfriars Bridge three years ago. The name by which Marcinkus is generally known is "the gorilla" — simply because that is what he looks like. (His physique got him the job of bodyguard to Pope Paul VI.)

Incidentally, in several articles from 1978 onwards, I pointed out the suspicious circumstances of discrepancies in the accounts of John Paul I's sudden death and the refusal of the Curia to permit an autopsy, and so alerted *Freethinker* readers long ago to the possibility of his having been murdered — which subsequent researches make almost certain.

As for the motive for murder, may I quote from my article "God's Banker's Bubble" (*The Freethinker*, June 1983:-

"Widespread gossip about financial irregularities — even swindles involving counterfeit bonds — suggested that when Pope Paul died in 1978 Marcinkus would soon be for the chop. A new pontiff, looking at the records, could hardly fail to realise what Marcinkus had been up to."

The corollary, of course, since Marcinkus is still living it up in the Vatican, is that the present pope cannot but be an accessory after the fact, to murder as well as colossal fraud.

BARBARA SMOKER

WRONG TARGET

Your correspondent, James Blundell, who considers *The Freethinker* to be radical, vicious and rude (Letters, August), seems to be getting things out of perspective.

Of course mere words can hurt people's feelings, but compared to the physical damage and mental anguish caused by Christianity and other religions, words are not necessarily harmful. There are exceptions, such as when a person of enormous influence and power uses words to condemn those who do not conform. I suggest that James Blundell directs his anger to the Pope who condemns atheism as evil.

E. F. CROSSWELL

God's Terrorist

"I did what I felt was necessary before God", Thomas Eugene Spinks told a court in the United States before being sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for bombing abortion and family planning clinics. The attacks on ten clinics took place during 1984.

The judge told Spinks: "Whatever your religious views, you have no right to take the law into your own hands". He imposed the maximum sentence possible and ordered Spinks to pay \$54,000 damages.

Religious fanatics have been involved in similar attacks on American clinics. They have also assaulted staff and harassed patients. But unlike Spinks, perpetrators of such crimes have generally been treated leniently by the police and the courts.

Civil Marriage

Since the introduction of civil marriage by the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939 there has been a steady increase in the number of civil marriages from some 5,000 (11 per cent) in 1941 to some 14,000 (40 per cent) in 1984. This is despite a reduction in the hours during which facilities for civil marriage are available in many of the larger registration offices and the closure of many such offices on Saturdays.

Although the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 widened the range of persons who were or could be authorised to solemnise religious marriages, nothing was done to facilitate civil marriages. Indeed there is discrimination. Whereas a religious marriage by an "approved celebrant" may take place anywhere, registrars may (generally) only solemnise civil marriages in their offices. So, unlike religious marriages, civil marriages are restricted in time and place.

Recognising this discrimination, and the trend towards secular marriage, the Registrar General for Scotland has lately proposed that Justices of the Peace (of whom there are about 4,700 in Scotland) should be authorised to solemnise civil marriages (after training and certification) at any time and place. He has sought the views of various interested parties, including the Church of Scotland who, at their General Assembly in May, rejected the idea, claiming that marriage might be devalued by ceremonies without "proper solemnity". On 13 June the Edinburgh JPs voted 20-17 in favour of the principle.

It is hoped that the Registrar General persists, and that he will bring forward amending legislation to remove what is a religious monopoly. The non-religious should be as free as the religious to marry wherever and whenever they wish.

STEUART CAMPBELL

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 6 October, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Beatrice Clarke: Practical Humanism: My Experiences in Esperantoland.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

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, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 1 October, 8 pm. Speaker: An Environmental Officer from the London Borough of Havering.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Folkestone, Kent. Details obtainable from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Monday, 14 October, 7.45 pm. Harry Stopes-Roe: Humanism — the Open Society's One Foundation.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 26 September, 7.45 pm. Jim Herrick: George Eliot, Victorian Agnostic.

National Secular Society. Annual Outing, Sunday, 15 September. Chichester and West Sussex (including Fishbourne Roman Palace and the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum). Cost, including coach fare and entrance fees, £6. Telephone 01-272 1266.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 9 October, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Harold Hillman: Scientific Freedom and Heresy.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 21 October, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

Mary Holland's recent Irish Times article revealed that Irish illegitimate children are regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as being inferior to those born on the right side of the blanket. At St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, babies born out of wedlock are excluded from the Sunday group baptism ceremony. The same rule applies at St Colman's Cathedral, Cobh, where baptism of an illegitimate child is carried out privately on a day other than Sunday.

found acceptable because the slaughterman was not always ready to do the cutting”.

The handling of poultry destined for religious slaughter “leaves a great deal to be desired”, according to the working party. They visited one establishment where birds were stunned in electrically charged water before throat cutting.

“We noted that the voltage of the stunner was set very low. We were informed that this was because the Muslim slaughterman had only agreed to the use of the stunner on the understanding that the voltage used would not stun the birds to the point that they appeared to be dead and therefore by definition they remained unstunned . . .

“In both Jewish and Muslim establishments we were very concerned at the rough way in which birds were removed from the crates. Also their handling in the bleeding room left much to be desired, with birds, which had their throats cut, frequently being thrown or even rammed into the bleeding cones where these were used . . .

“The fact that we were informed during our visits that one of the advantages of religious slaughter of poultry compared to slaughter on a fast-moving shackle line was that the birds were handled individually and could therefore be treated more kindly and humanely was not borne out by what we observed”.

The working group asserts that “up-to-date scientific evidence available and our own observations leave no doubt in our minds that religious methods of slaughter, even when carried out under ideal conditions, must result in a degree of pain, suffering and distress which does not occur in the properly stunned animal . . .

“We therefore recommend that Ministers should require the Jewish and Muslim communities to review their methods of slaughter so as to develop alternatives which permit effective stunning. Their findings should be presented to Ministers so that legislation permitting slaughter without stunning of animals (including poultry) by Jews and Muslims can be repealed within the next three years”.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has welcomed the FAWC report as “a positive and constructive approach to the problem”. It will be pressing the Government to implement the recommendations in the report within the three year period it stipulates.

Alastair Mews, Assistant Chief Veterinary Officer of the RSPCA, declared: “The key to humane slaughtering is pre-stunning, so that the animal is deeply unconscious before slaughter. There is now no scientific doubt that religious methods of slaughter without pre-stunning do cause pain and suffering”.

Mr Mews said that in its campaign to eliminate the cruelty of religious slaughter, the RSPCA has

been instrumental in persuading several Muslim communities in this country to introduce the pre-stunning technique voluntarily.

He added: “These successes have been achieved by friendly discussion between animal welfarists and religious leaders of Muslim communities. There is no reason to believe that reform on a national scale could not be achieved in the same way”.

But already the Jewish and Muslim authorities are up in arms against the FAWC’s proposed reforms. Their attitude is reflected in the enthusiastic endorsement by Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, the Chief Rabbi, of a *Times* newspaper editorial: “Religious rights are real and important, and cannot simply be weighed against ‘animal rights’ ”.

It is, of course, religious rites, not rights, that are the chief concern of the rabbis and the mullahs. Those who believe that eating the meat of animals which have been slaughtered after pre-stunning violates their religious precepts can become vegetarians, of which there are now vast numbers in Britain.

Gilman and Gladys Anderson have started a legal action against Herbert W. Armstrong’s wealthy Worldwide Church of God. In 1969 the Andersons handed over their farm to the church after being told that the end of the world was imminent. Now they feel they have been conned and want their property returned to them.

“Singing Nun” Dies

Jeanine Deckers, who as the Singing Nun topped the charts twenty years ago, has committed suicide. She left a note saying, “I can no longer take the physical and mental pain of my persecution by the tax authorities”.

The Singing Nun became an international star with one song, *Dominique*. But she never received any of the \$270,000 royalties. It was all handed over to the convent. Other earnings were entrusted to a lawyer for missionary purposes. When he died most of the money was spent and the Belgian Government demanded tax payment of \$132,000.

Although Jeanine Deckers was reduced to begging on the streets, the tax authorities continued to hound her. She sold most of her furniture and the electricity supply at her flat was about to be cut off. The former Singing Nun, whose earnings went to the convent and missions, had twenty francs in her possession when the police found her body.

The local Communist Party chief of a village in eastern China has been dismissed for setting a bad example by fathering eight children. Villagers are being urged to have no more than two children.