



LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY

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The Oldest Secular Society in the World
Formed in 1851

MARCH NEWS 2008

President's Column

The great news from the Board is that, after the recent disagreements, the Society and the Rationalist Trust are working well together in a way that will, we hope, result in an enormous improvement to Secular Hall and help us in building up the Society and promoting secularism.

It is also good to be able to tell you that the repairs to the roof of the Hall will be completed this week. Unexpected problems were found and the cost went up, but I am happy to say that the City Council and English Heritage considered the work essential and met most of the extra cost. The total cost will be about £30,000, of which the Society will pay £11,000. You might be interested to know that the cost of the scaffolding alone was about £12,000.

The issues of faith schools and disestablishment are moving up the scale of public discussion and awareness.

The Blasphemy Laws are to be repealed, thanks to the efforts, sustained over many years, of the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association.

Something that will be a big help to me in working on the Leicester Agreed Syllabus Conference (for religious education) and to RE teachers is the new BHA website for religious education, www.humanismforschools.org.uk.

We are increasingly active, with members continuing to get letters in the papers and, now and then, appearing on television and radio.

A thing that I would particularly like to know about is, what for a better word, I must call the "good works" that members are involved with. Because they work with charities and organisations that are not called Humanist or Secular, the work done by our members is often overlooked. This gives a bad impression. If you do any such work, please consider letting us know and, perhaps, give a talk.

Any organisation likes to feel that it is appreciated by people who know about it so I have great pleasure in reporting


For the Attention of Members Without Email

As we can't communicate appeals for Newsletter items to you through email this appeal is just for you. Please, please, do let me have something for the Newsletter - or even offer your help in putting it together. You know what we're looking for - local secular news, poems, jokes, quotes, thoughts, articles, secular tourist spots, appeals, film reviews, argument, cartoons, puzzles, letters, gardening tips, etc.

Send items to me at the Hall, or telephone/text me on 07795 097635. Make the Newsletter your own (but forget the gardening tips). Harry

Upcoming Events

30th March - Headstrong session, 6.30pm at the Hall.

1st April - Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, explains how Satan has been misunderstood. He needs love, forgiveness and rehabilitation. 6.66pm 

6th April - Headstrong session, 6.30pm at the Hall

13th April - Helen Everett speaking on "Leicester, City of Sanctuary", 6.30pm at the Hall

17th April - IDEAS Group, 7.30pm at the Hall. George Jelliss on "The Power of Logic"

20th April - Sharia Law by Abdul Halim, a Sharia court judge. Your chance to challenge. 6.30pm at the Hall

Food Appeal for Destitute Asylum Seekers in Leicester

The Red Cross is a secular, humanitarian organisation. Its orientation project in Leicester supports destitute asylum seekers and refugees in our city. Because of their status they are ineligible for state support and rely on voluntary and charitable assistance. This is an appeal for members to assist by buying any of the following items and **dropping them off to the British Red Cross project at 244 London Road, Leicester between 09.00 and 17.00 Mon-Fri or to Helen and Ned at 16 Ashfield Road, Leicester.** Why not fill an extra carrier bag when next at the supermarket?

This is what is really badly needed:

Tinned goods: beans/ soup/ kidney beans/ tinned fruit/ tuna/ mackerel/ corned beef/ tinned veg

Dried foods: rice/ pasta/ dried fruit/ cereal/ crisps/ noodles/ cereal bars/ nuts/ Indian savoury mix/ chocolate/ sugar/ porridge/ cooking oil

Drinks: fruit juice/ tea/ coffee/ dried milk/ squash/ water

Toiletries: toothpaste/ soap/ toilet paper/ shampoo/ sanitary towels

Extras: baby milk/ baby food jars/ nappies/ baby wipes/ baby oil/ face and body creams/ baby bath liquid/ wool to knit blanket squares/ blankets/bedding/sleeping bags/ T-shirts

Monetary donations to the Red Cross via www.redcross.org.uk are also welcome. Please specify your donation is for Leicester Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Services.

The first principle of Secularism is Practical Humanity. Hands that help...etc

Helen Everett

The Jesus Restaurant Debate

Simon Perry's piece in the February Newsletter has prompted a number of replies:

I would like to comment upon Simon Perry's plea for secularists to detach themselves from socialist links. Sure, we must not slavishly be aligned to any particular brand of socialism but secularists inevitably have much in common with socialists as we all have a distrust of the Establishment of which religion is so much a part. Right-wingers naturally side with the Establishment as they have so much in common. That is why I am now both socialist and secularist having been both Christian and Tory in my youth! Maybe that is why Rowan Williams is getting so much stick just now, he is anathema to the Establishment. Liberal-Lefty, Intellectual, and Anglo Catholic! How they hate him.

Mike Clutten.



Re Simon Perry's piece in February's edition: I've been a member since 1999 and, while I recognise that a number of the more outspoken members are socialists of various types, I don't think it is true that "the group continues to strongly align itself with socialist interests". If individual members think that their particular views are not represented in the Society it is up to them to make their views known and to argue their case, as I think Simon has done on occasion. A new member last year made a similar claim but went off in a huff rather than fight his corner. From what I have learnt of the history of the Society it has always had a reputation for Freethought and no-holds-barred argument; the "Leicester Principle of Controversy" as G. J. Holyoake dubbed it. This is a tradition that I have done my best to uphold. Long may it continue.

George Jelliss



I was interested and, perhaps, a trifle worried by Simon Perry's article in the February News. Was I part of a socialist conspiracy? Were there hidden socialist messages in the talk about the Victorian Toy Theatre? Were the fauna and flora of Madagascar quietly emitting workerist slogans? Then I realised what the problem was. Simon does not tell us what he means by "socialism". Also I think he should tell us what he means by "association with socialism", and give some specifics.

Is it possible that by "socialism" he means "progressive"? A quick glance at the Society's history tells us that it has always been ready to support forward looking ideas and has broadly been interested in freedom, friendship, justice and peace.

When I look for speakers I am interested to find out if they have something to say. I certainly do not look at their political label.

Simon: Please help! If you can find some interesting speakers tell the committee (board), and we'll invite them.

By the way there actually was a restaurant in Cheapside (Leicester Market South) similar to the one imagined in your contribution. I went a couple of times but got bored by the creationists who ran it and their inability to take part in any sort of rational debate – now you cannot accuse members of LSS of that! One difference – the food was dire.

We will have a varied programme in the summer season, including (if all goes well) a couple of brilliant concerts - do come!

Michael Gerard

How interesting that Simon Perry uses the Christian parable form for his tirade against the left in the Society which I find sectarianist and unhelpful. I agree that 'our society must appeal to secularists regardless of their political or economic beliefs', but I must take issue with Simon's unfounded assertion of an alignment with 'socialist interests'. On the whole, LSS is (sadly in my view) shunned by such organisations - we simply haven't had much recently in the way of speakers (from the front or from the floor) advocating socialist objectives such as repeal of our draconian anti-trade union laws, an end to privatisation / charity-isation in health, education, housing and other services, democratic re-nationalisations of railways and Girobank, to name but a few. Indeed, many on the left who do have a vision of a socialist society as something better than the one we're part of here and now regard secularism at best as irrelevant, and at worst as a diversion and distraction from the real social, political and economic struggle. Having said that, a proportion of our members are undoubtedly of the left — one of the great things about LSS is that it provides a rare forum where people from all shades of the political spectrum can come together and attempt to learn and to influence each other. Long may that continue to be part of the reason for our recent and hopefully continuing increase in numbers, of which Simon is a welcome part, as his views often provoke a spirited response rather than a cosy if dull grumble. I say "all welcome", "no proscriptions", "no witchhunts".

Frank Friedmann



Secularism & Politics - Harry

Nobody took up my invitation in the February News to suggest how the Society should approach politics. So I raised the issue at a Board meeting and broadly we think this is the way we should do it: Where there is a secular political issue like opposing religious schools; getting bishops out of the Lords; opposing Sharia Law; opposing religious forced marriages; protecting victims of religious oppression; etc. then we campaign as a Society, but where secularists might take up different positions on the same issue (Trident, global warming, Iraq, Israel's occupation of Palestine, Cuba, etc.) we can only provide a platform and let debate commence. The Society cannot belong to any one political faction.

Challenging Creationism on our Turf

As some of you know, Ken Ham, the creationist, is giving a talk at Parklands Leisure Centre in Leicester on Thursday 3rd April at 7pm.

A leaflet has been produced which highlights the threat of creationism to science education and we are looking for volunteers to help hand it out on the evening. The leaflet has been endorsed by the British Centre for Science Education and can be seen here: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gpnow/creationistflyer.doc>

If anyone would like to help by turning up at Parklands at around 6pm on Thursday April 3rd, please contact Pennie on 0788 7865419.

The Website Matters

I'm often impressed at the variety and depth of talents represented among our members. It goes without saying that an organisation like ours will have a good proportion of campaigners for various causes, but we also have musicians, artists, writers, celebrants, people running their own businesses and so on. So my idea is to add a lively 'Members' Showcase' page.

By the time of publication you will be able to see a draft version at www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk/msc.html – so do have a look (there's no link to it from the index page yet).

If you're included, clicking your picture in the panel at the top takes you to your own section further down the page including a slightly larger picture (the same or different) and about 100 words including if you wish some links to your own website or contributions elsewhere on the web, contact details, etc.

So, if you'd like to participate, please contact me via email@leicestersecularsociety.org.uk. All pictures are square – 100 pixels at the top and 160 pixels in the individual sections – I can reduce them to this size if necessary or scan them from printed photos.

There is also Forum to which a handful of us contribute regularly, but it's open to all members (<http://groups.google.co.uk/group/leicestersecularsociety>).

As it is for members only you just need to email (same address as before – not Google) to request an invitation to join.

Finally, do keep me posted with any news for the Diary page. Thanks.

Frank Friedmann

Saving Sayed Pervez Kambaksh

Members will be pleased to hear that international pressure on Hamid Karzai has forced him to declare that Sayed will not be executed for the crime of blasphemy in Afghanistan. Sayed is still locked up, however, and awaiting the outcome of an appeal against his conviction and sentence by a religious "court". The *Independent's* petition is still running and is now close to 100,000 signatures. Add yours at: www.independent.co.uk/petition. Thanks

Secular Thought for the Day from Cee Martin
'Though nothing we do changes the past, everything we do changes the future.' Joan Chittester

This has a thread of meaning that I rather like - *things don't get done unless you do them*, and the idea of being purposeful in our lives. Cee

Teaching Humanism within RE

Getting non-belief onto the RE syllabus is only the first step - the key is what is done in the classroom. The BHA has spent a lot of time and money developing material for classroom use and a new website has just been launched:

<http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk>

I think this is a superb resource - and it will develop over time as a result of classroom experience.

Have a look at the Library/Videos. This consists of a series of short downloadable video clips that can be used to stimulate discussion. A great resource for teachers to use when kicking off a lesson - much better than having to plough through a whole DVD of material - and it is available FREE for downloading by anyone at any time!

This has come at exactly the right time for Derby. The SACRE will be revising the RE Syllabus this year and we will get humanism into the classroom - and this material makes the task so much easier. (I hope!)

Mike Lake

Derbyshire Secularists and Humanists

Air Ambulance v. Trident Replacement

A précis of a letter from member Paul Southwood to the *Loughboro Echo*:

'I feel I must write regarding the Air Ambulance "Flying Doctor Pound Account" supported by the local Labour MP, Andy Reed. He also supported Gordon Brown for the leadership of "his" party and thereby for further privatisation of the NHS.

Question: why is Andy Reed MP backing the Air Ambulance Campaign **and** supporting a Prime Minister who is intent on replacing the so-called nuclear "deterrent" – the new Trident? Which is most important to the public? Maybe Andy Reed should lead a national campaign called "the nuclear weapons replacement pound account" - all donations to your local post-office – providing you still have one!

NB – I've just celebrated becoming a G.O.A.T. – Golden Oldie Against Trident'.

Paul Southwood



Saudis Demand Human Rights for Muslims:

www.dotsub.com/films/moredemands/index.php?autostart=true&language_setting=en_1618(Pat Condell)

SUBSCRIPTIONS REMINDER

There are still a number of members who haven't paid their 2008 subscriptions. Please, the Society has been involved in a high level of activity and expenditure recently and we need to replenish the funds. Please pay your subscription as soon as possible - with an added donation if you can afford it. Individuals £10; Low waged £5; Unwaged £2; Household £15. Please make cheques payable to LSS and send them to John Catt, Treasurer, at the Secular Hall or hand the cash to a Director in a plain brown envelope. Thank you. The Board

Prize Puzzle Corner

Can you solve this simple problem? If you think you can then send your solution to me at the Hall or by email (gpjnow@ntlworld.com) by 12 noon on Monday 7th April. The winner will be drawn from among the correct answers and a fabulous prize will be awarded. The problem:

**It all adds up:
HARRY
PERRY
EDITOR**

The ten letters ADEHIOPRTY represent the digits 0123456789 in some order, and H is less than P. So put your thinking cap on and let me have your solution soonest.
George Jelliss

Here's another chance for you to win a fabulous prize - can you name every one of the 21 political leaders shown in the photos on page 2? Entries should name them in order, left to right, top row first bottom row last. Highest correct answer will win, with a draw if tied. Entries to Harry at the Hall or by email to harry.perry1@btinternet.com before 12 noon on 7th April 2008. Oh, and which ones are the socialists?

Find Patrons

The Directors think it would be a good idea in promoting the Society if we were able to point to a number of public figures as our Patrons. Such people do not have any role in governance but allow their names to be used as evidence of prominent supporters of our aims. The Board would very much like you to suggest names of well-known people with a local connection, people who you know to be of a secular way of thinking. Please contact Allan Hayes, President, with your suggestions. Tel: 0116 241 8747 or email to: allan-hayes@ntlworld.com. Please give it some thought.

The Simpsons

Homer: "I'm not a bad guy! I work hard, and I love my kids. So why should I have to spend half my Sunday hearing about how I'm going to Hell?"

A small boy desperately wanted a bicycle. So he prayed for one when his birthday came. He did not get one so he prayed for one at Christmas, but he did not get one. Then he realized that is not how things work in Christianity, so he stole one and prayed for forgiveness.


IDEAS Group Review

None of the other 11 attendees has produced a review of the IDEAS session on "Race and Intelligence" so our new correspondent, Ari Peri, has offered this, which he claims is as objective and unbiased as it is possible to be.

The strikingly handsome and exceptionally eloquent speaker presented for over an hour, using a wide variety of fascinating resources in a flawless Powerpoint presentation. His conclusion was that neither "race" nor "intelligence" can be satisfactorily defined and so the two cannot be convincingly correlated. While there is a great deal of evidence supporting the "scientific racist" view it is impossible to isolate the effects of "nurture" as opposed to "nature" and so the exercise becomes inconclusive and prone to misuse by those with a vulgarly racist agenda. Even could it be conclusively scientifically proven that due to the pressures of natural selection there are inherent differences in average mental capacities (broader than IQ) between populations with different geographical origins, it is extremely problematic what constructive use could be made of this information. It might be best, therefore, not to go there.

The presentation was followed by discussion contributions from group members and everyone said they were looking forward to the next session on 20th March.

Secular-Humanist Advancement Group (SHAG)

The current political policy of reducing local authorities' administrative roles, in favour of franchising the various functions to private organisations, enables odd-ball religious fanatics to gain control of our children's education. To campaign, by illustrating the awful danger this poses to the future of our progressive culture, a Secular-Humanist Advancement Group is being formed, with the aim of informing, mobilising and calling into action the widest possible constituency in this country. Join us now, and do something about it. First informal, drop-in meeting, with ongoing tea, coffee and biscuits, at the Secular Hall on Friday evening 28th March from 18.00 onwards. If you want to join in, but can't make it then, let us know. Wilf Gaunt 

Disclaimer and Code of Conduct

Please note that the views and proposals expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board of the Society and the Society and its officers accept no liability for views expressed. As a Freethought organisation any member's views will be published subject to the usual constraints of avoiding libel and occasional editing to fit the space available. When writing please abstain from intemperate language and avoid being unnecessarily offensive, especially to other members! Thank you.