



The Leicester Secularist

Journal of Leicester Secular Society

September 2010

No. 21



Protest the Pope March and Rally Join the 'Protest the Pope' Campaign in this large-scale march against the State Visit of Pope Ratzinger in the UK.

The protest march will assemble from 1.30pm at the top of Piccadilly (Hyde Park Corner).

It will then proceed through central London via Piccadilly, Piccadilly Circus, Haymarket, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall.

At the arrival point, opposite Downing Street, on Richmond Terrace, there will be the final Rally with speeches.

Please put this date in your diary and make every effort to be there.

Spread the news of this event as far as you can. Local groups might consider getting a coach party to come and if you're coming from outside London and could offer a lift to someone in your area, please let us know and we'll put you in touch.

The final Rally will be held close to the heart of government, opposite Downing Street, to highlight our opposition to the State Visit as opposed to a Pastoral Visit like the one of the previous Pope.

1.30pm – Assembly at Hyde Park Corner (top of Piccadilly)

2.30pm – 3.30pm – March: Piccadilly, Piccadilly Circus, Haymarket, Trafalgar Square, Whitehall

3.30pm – Rally opposite Downing Street



Speakers:

- Andrew Copson, British Humanist Association
- Richard Dawkins
- Ben Goldacre
- Maryam Namazie, One Law for All
- Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters
- Terry Sanderson, National Secular Society
- Peter Tatchell
- TBC, Women Against Fundamentalism

(with thanks to the PTP website:
<http://tinyurl.com/38wmz2l>)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sunday 12th September, 11am - 6pm, Secular Hall: English Heritage Open Day. Displays of the Society's history and recent activities. Tours of the Hall. Refreshments. Free.

Sunday 12th September, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Secularism - The Way Ahead. Allan Hayes. LSS President gives his views on the way secularism should evolve in the future.

Saturday 18th September, 1.30pm, Hyde Park Corner, London. Protest at the visit of the Pope being a state visit funded by the taxpayer. Say no to homophobia and yes to prosecution of Catholic priests for child abuse.

Sunday 19th September, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: An Evening With(out) Pat Condell. Ted Hankin will introduce extracts from a DVD of the 'militant agnostic' Pat Condell, the outspoken YouTube critic of religion.

Tuesday 21st September, 7.30pm, Square Bar, Hotel Street: Skeptics in the Pub. **The Things That Don't Make Sense** with Michael Brooks, author, journalist and broadcaster. What to do with anomalous scientific results?

Sunday 26th September, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: An Evening With the Lord Mayor. Colin Hall will leave aside the official expectations of the mayoral role and discuss matters informally with the audience.

Sunday 3rd October, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: An Expectation of God. Pennie Blatchford will introduce her thesis that humans are predisposed to display a belief in supernatural super-beings through evolved expectations.

Wednesday 6th October, 7.30pm, Swan and Rushes, Oxford Street: Philosophy in Pubs.

Sunday 10th October, 6.30pm, Secular Hall: Marx and Morris - Why We Need Them More Than Ever. This presentation from the Marxist David Grove will argue that the analysis of capitalism offered by Karl Marx and William Morris is as relevant today as it was in the nineteenth century.

Thursday 14th October, 7pm, Secular Hall: The War on Terror - Nine Years On. Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, will review the Bush strategy and its consequences for future international security. (Preceded at 7pm by a short performance by the Red Leicester Choir.)

Beit Zechariah – A Palestinian Village Under Threat

Beit Zechariah is a Palestinian village south of Bethlehem. It is home to 28 families. At 103 years old, Abu Khader is the oldest man in the village. In 1948 Zionists took over his land and forced him to leave his home. He subsequently risked his life by deciding to return to live in his village. His village is now completely surrounded by Israeli settlements and most of its homes are threatened with demolition.



Abu Khader (aged 103). Two of his buildings have been demolished.

Most of the people in Beit Zechariah work in agriculture, rearing livestock or harvesting grapes and plums. During the 1967 war, Israel tried to prevent the villagers from accessing their farmland. Despite notifications to leave, the villagers decided to continue farming. Since this time, the Israeli authorities have confiscated over 700 acres of farm land for the development of surrounding settlements, such as Bat Ayin. The loss of farm land has made the villagers' lives extremely difficult and has forced many of them into poverty.

Everything in Beit Zechariah is now threatened with demolition: homes, farms and even municipal buildings like the school, clinic and mosque. One villager built a simple house made out of corrugated iron when he got married. Once it was built, he received notification that his house would be demolished. The demolition order was subsequently enforced. Stories run wild about the threat of future house demolitions.

There is a small primary school in the village, which is housed in a temporary structure. The management of the school want to make improvements but building restrictions imposed by Israel hamper its redevelopment. The same kind of building restrictions don't appear to apply to the settlements which surround the village. The school of a nearby settlement is extensive and even has a swimming pool.



In the background, the school buildings of a nearby settlement viewed from Beit Zachariah

Beit Zachariah is just one example of the confiscation of Palestinian land in the West Bank. In 2007 an assessment by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs found that approximately 40% of the West Bank is now taken up by Israeli infrastructure. The settler population has tripled since 1993, increasing from 110,000 to 301,200 (not including east Jerusalem), a growth helped by generous incentives offered to settlers, including financial grants and subsidised mortgages. The development of settlements on occupied land is considered illegal under international law and has been condemned by numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions. However, it is hard to see how Israel's policy of occupation and colonisation will be changed unless tougher international pressure is applied.

Robin (identity hidden to avoid problems on future visits to Israel/Palestine)



Huge Book Donation

As trailed last month, the Society's library has just benefited from a huge donation of books from Linnea Glynn-Rule of the Cornwall Humanist Book Service.

Linnea, who has been running the service for about 17 years has, at 73, decided to retire but nobody else has come forward with the space for all the books or the willingness to maintain the service.

So we have benefited to the tune of 25 boxes of various genres, though generally related to secularism and Humanism. Our librarian, Gillian Lighton, is sifting the contents and will be reporting in due course on the additions to the library.

Linnea decided to donate the books to the Society not only because it is an active organisation with a national reputation but also because she had a connection with Leicester in her younger days.

Born Linnea Simpson on 27th December 1936 ('not a good day for a birthday', she says - only one present for both Christmas and birthday), she first came to Leicester in 1955 to undertake a social science diploma at what was then University College. It got its charter while she was there and she remembers the ball held to celebrate this, at which the Squadronaires provided the entertainment!



Linnea proudly shows off her Cornish CND T-shirt.

(Old'uns go here to be reminded of the sound: <http://tinyurl.com/32seg12>)

Her name changed to Timson with her first marriage and, back in Leicester, she worked as a PA at the Metal Box Company and then qualified as a teacher at the School of Education in 1962.

She recalls being interested in books from an early age and remembers one Christmas very well as she received 12 books as presents (but they were for both Christmas and birthday!).

After Leicester she moved to Manchester where she maintained her interest in

books by haunting second-hand bookshops.

As a, by then, single mum with two daughters she met Laurence, her present husband, in East London in 1978 (continues on page 5)

Picassoed Love Sonnet

And you, when passing time's inevitable
Progress washes on and leaves all after
Dead, with your beauty gone inimitable,
Lost forever, never more your laughter
To excite men's passions on to dreaming
Reveries of lusting tenderness and
Hoped for consummation's true love, sealing
Life's purpose, by an omnipotence planned
(Fate anteriorly ordained);
Shall we then discover your immortal
Essence all these states delineated:
Came they with you, through eternal portal?
If I hereafter go on seeking you,
Will this incarnation be sufficient clue?

Futility (in the style of Boethius)

And when all order's broke and set to flight
By force schismatic, bent on plundering
Earth's benefaction, snuffing out the light,
Possessing all, no redress offering;
Who then should feel inclined to animate
Anew detritus' lost fecundity:
When well aware success will motivate
Predation, making all futility?
Too avaricious greed quickly abates
True donors' kind participation,
While the environment degenerates
To cause communal alienation.
To covet more than you are truly worth,
When carried through, is someone else's dearth.

Boethius (520s CE) with Shakespeare Reconciled

If plenty from her horn the earth bestrewed
With gifts as numerous as grains of sand
That from the storm-tossed seas on shore are spewed,
Or stars which in our universe expand,
Humanity'd still peevishly complain.
Though God with golden gifts all praying bought,
Allowing greed with pride of rank to reign,
Still all that God gave would be set at naught.
Greed swallows all, and yet still gapes its mouth,
For nothing gluts rapacious appetite,
Nor can with ease the flames of lust put out,
Once such largesse possessive passions light.
No man is rich who permanently groans
That he needs more than he already owns.

Love Idealised

A woman loved, as is the case with you,
Has to have properties chameleon
If she is to make others' dreams come true
And lead them through fields that are Elysian.
Loved one's idealised meanderings,
Fulfilled by your confirming fantasies,
Leave little time for selfish pandering:
To make your own ideals realities.
Is there a yearning you within that shell
Which seeks to set free its own expression,
Or is your inner bliss truly to dwell
In others' joy, through your own repression?
Is the you, forever idealised,
Worth the dreams which you've never realised?

Wilf Gaunt

Evolution and the Evangelist

7 Son of God (Conclusion)

I recently heard a man give his testimony. 'Last week I gave my heart to the Lord Jesus, so now I believe in the seven days of creation.' This illustrates something very important about the system of religion that I have designated under 'The Evangelist'. There is a subtle, powerful and almost universal assumption that to believe one facet of the Christian religion is to believe what Pope John Paul II once described as 'the whole caché of faith'. That is why, for example, creationists assume that once they can convince you that there is a Creator God then you will accept that the Bible is the Word of God and everything else that the Church proclaims. Accept Jesus and you enter the household of faith, your sins are forgiven, you and fellow believers are a special people on the way to heaven. On earth the Church should be a foretaste of heaven, of peace, love and goodness but also a community which essentially rests on revealed truth rather than scientific discovery. Of course, if these happen to coincide so much the better, but if there is disparity faith must come first.

Church leaders are fully aware that not everyone is going to accept everything that the Church teaches just like that. There will be arguments and debate over many issues but the end in sight is to form a community which believes the basic doctrines as I have outlined them. Yet a dispute over homosexuality has driven the Church almost to schism. Because the contestants see faith as based on revealed truth rather than reason and science, fragmentation of this sort is almost inevitable. To draw together means compromise and an acceptance that we must learn together because our knowledge is imperfect. Some members of the Church community already know this. They will resist any attempt to question scientific hypotheses. Many too reject the idea of hell and seek to build a church on love rather than fear. Then there are scholars who push biblical criticism to the point where the Bible is evaluated like any other book. To all these church membership is mainly an opportunity for fellowship. They will also enter public debate on the secular premises of public welfare and consensus.

Seeing this, organisations like Evangelical Mainstream often regard it as their first task to reclaim the liberals in the Church for the traditional faith.

There is something for humanists in all of this too. The Church is an evolving organisation, the Bible is a collection of books to be interpreted for what they are worth, Jesus can be seen as a human teacher and every believer is someone on pilgrimage who may have secret (and perhaps not so secret) questions and misgivings. Church people are all members of the human race and we can relate to them in an evolutionary process that encompasses us all.

John Edmondson



New Events Programme

All members should by now have received their copy(ies) of the autumn Events Programme. Members in the Leicester area, who have received five extra copies, are asked to make every effort to distribute these to friends, neighbours and relatives or to seek to place them in public places where they can be seen and picked up by interested individuals. Many thanks. Mike Burden

The Sciences and Radiation Risks

While admitting that he does not have a science degree, and declaring himself to be an amateur, Richard Johnson's brilliant presentation on Sunday 27th June evoked the old definition of amateur, as one who is involved and gifted: the sort that give the professionals a run for their money.

Although pro-science, Richard indicated that blind faith in scientists as experts is not helpful and that critique is necessary from a sceptical point of view. However, if the ordinary citizen wishes to be taken seriously such dialogue must be based on reason and knowledge. CND, he pointed out, is mainly concerned with weapons, whilst this talk concentrated on the ecological and social consequences of nuclear development, both benign and threatening, providing realistic assessments of the risks involved.

We were introduced to the idea of hierarchies of knowledge: from 'urban myths' expressing anxiety, through anecdotal evidence, to survey research: emphasising the fact that statistics hide individual suffering. Properly conducted surveys allow those working in the industry to know the risks they are running, though secrecy about weapons restricts proper investigation of the problems involved. The priorities of science are directed by social and political goals as well as by curiosity. Historically both military and nuclear industries have a big influence on the agenda for scientific research in their associated areas: the questions asked and not asked.

The Germans conducted a large-scale epidemiological study of the incidence of childhood leukaemia in the vicinity of nuclear power stations. There were control populations, different areas and confounders: other possible causes being sought and not found. A requirement for 95% certainty was established. The study produced statistics indicating a 120% to 160% increase in risk within the proximity of nuclear installations. The figures are quite small even though the study was extensive and met all the criteria of hard science. This study was one of the reasons why the Germans ceased building new nuclear power stations. The UK government has ignored the study and Labour went ahead with new nuclear power stations despite other pending studies of health effects.

Science requires agreement through peer review: different specialists look at the subject from many points of view, all, hopefully, rational. Campaigners, for their part, study workers and background radiation, forcing scientists to justify their statements. Matters such as economics, politics, academic intellectual reputation and market value (privatisation) are all factors which enter the arguments over the applications of nuclear science. There are also international bodies and regulatory authorities taking an interest, with neo-liberals playing down the risks, all complicated by a regulatory-lag, squeezed by a massive funding shortfall.

The CERRIE report, set up by Michael Meacher when he was Minister of the Environment, found that there was no safe level for internal emitters, when radioactive particles – e.g. of plutonium or caesium – are lodged in internal organs, because the damage caused by radiation, however local, may be incremental and intense. Some forms of radiation – e.g. alpha radiation – though relatively

harmless outside the body, are very destructive inside it.

Cellular and micro-biologists see these dangers in the form of mutations in cells and DNA. There is tendency for a radical split in the public psyche – which includes scientists – between a view of radiation as fundamentally good – the good atom – and as horror: represented by nuclear weapons, and the health effects of long-term radiation exposure. If you want to know the bad effects, don't ask a medical physicist. Actually, you can't have the good effects without the bad. In Richard's view we are in the middle of a paradigm shift in radiation science, sparked off by interest in internal emitters, which has important consequences for the criteria of acceptable risk, and puts question marks against such categories as low-level radiation or low-level waste.

The subject of Chernobyl couldn't be avoided, although Richard Johnson hadn't wanted to discuss disasters: wishing rather to stress the dangers arising from routine aspects of the nuclear cycle. He informed us that the dust debris climbed 11 kilometres high on the convection currents; he quantified the measured spread of some dangerous radionuclides, mentioned the expulsion zone of 40 to 60 kilometres, projected a map of the affected area on the world scale, in red – ranging from the eastern seaboard of the North American continent, across the Atlantic, through Europe and Northern Asia to the Russian Pacific rim; and from well north of the Arctic Circle, stretching south to the tropic of Cancer (northern Sahara) – while pointing up the increase in certain diseases, and the huge hike in the costs to national budgets in the countries most exposed, especially Ukraine and Belarus over many decades. Chernobyl was a major nuclear disaster, as important for our thinking about radiation dangers as Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

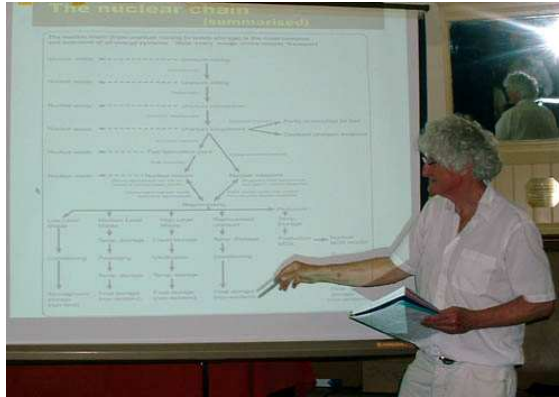
What was missing from all this were such matters as the Swedish nuclear power stations being closed down because all the alarms started to ring, it being some time before they realised that the increased radioactivity was external: a new background; or that Gorbachev, after seeing the well-stocked supermarket stores on his foreign visits, Chernobyl in 1986, and the humiliation of the forced withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, consequently realised that Communism just didn't work; and started the process which led to the end of the Cold War in 1990, and the demise of the Soviet regime in Russia.

What this lecture highlighted was the great, and probably unbridgeable, dichotomy that exists between the cold, reasoned and unbiased attitudes needed to establish true, effective, scientific knowledge; and the consequences of its applications.

By the nature of the subject this lecture was densely packed with detail, yet it was nevertheless riveting: not only because of Richard's excellent presentation, but also in that it dealt with matters that have profound consequences for us all, both as individuals, and in the worldwide political, power-struggle sense.

Wilf Gaunt

(With thanks to Richard Johnson for his editing of this script and filling in the blanks left by my weak note taking)



A Working-Class Hero's Finest Speech

Jimmy Reid, Communist and trade union shop steward, died a few weeks ago. It was he, along with other trade unionists, who organised and led the 'work-in' at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders when the yards were threatened with closure in 1972. They told the owners (partly the Government) that if you can't run the firm then we will. They did and won and it is still working to this day (although a shadow of its former self). Jimmy was a great and inspiring orator, as I know from personal experience of him when he arrived as an 18-year old on the Young Communist League National Committee having led the Glasgow engineering apprentices' strike in 1951.



Jimmy Reid with worker comrades at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 1971-72
Photo: Scottish Daily Record obituary: <http://tinyurl.com/3xudedh>

After the work-in Jimmy was elected as Rector of Glasgow University. His inaugural address was printed in the New York Times the following day with an editorial note calling it the most important speech since the Gettysburg Address! I certainly believe it is one of the finest statements of humanist morality and philosophy that I know of. There is only room here for a few extracts but I hope that they give the flavour of it. The full version can probably be found on the *Independent* website. It was printed as a double-page spread in the issue of 13th August.

* * *

'Alienation is the precise and correctly applied word for describing the major social problems of Britain today. People feel alienated by society. In some intellectual circles it is treated as a new phenomenon. It has, however, been with us for years. ... Let me, at the outset, define what I mean by alienation. It is the cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind economic forces beyond their control. It's the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the process of decision-making. The feeling of despair and hopelessness that pervades people who feel with justification that they have no real say in shaping or determining their own destinies. ...

'Society, and its prevailing sense of values, leads to [several forms] of alienation. It partially de-humanises some people, makes them insensitive, ruthless in their handling of fellow human beings, self-centred and grasping. ...

'It is easy and tempting to hate such people. However it is wrong. They are as much products of society, of human alienation, as the poor drop-out. They are losers. They have lost the essential elements of our common humanity. Man is a social being. Real fulfilment for any person lies in service to his fellow men and women. The challenge we

face is that of rooting out anything that distorts and devalues human relations. Let me give [an] example ... That is the widespread, implicit acceptance of "the rat race". Friendly advice can often take the form of ... "Listen, you look after number one".

'To the students of Glasgow University I address this appeal: Reject these attitudes. Reject the values and false morality that underlie these attitudes. A

rat race is for rats. We're not rats. We're human beings. Reject the insidious pressures in society that would blunt your critical faculties to all that is happening around you, that would caution silence in the face of injustice lest it jeopardise your chance of self-advancement. This is how it starts and before you know it you are a fully paid-up member of the rat-pack. The price is too high. It entails the loss of your dignity and human spirit. ...

'My conclusion is to re-affirm what I hope and certainly intend to be the spirit of this address. It's an affirmation of faith in humanity. [It] involves recognition of our common humanity, an unashamed acknowledgement that man is good by nature. Burns expressed this in a poem that is not technically his best but captures the spirit.

"The golden age we'll then revive,
each man shall be a brother,
In harmony we all shall live and till the
earth together.
And time shall surely prove the truth
that man is good by nature"

'I would like to think that our generation took mankind some way along the road towards this goal. It's a goal worth fighting for.'

* * *

Peter Thompson



(continued from page 2)

and they later moved to Cornwall, where she became a founder member of Cornwall Humanists in 1991 and bought the book service stock from Kit Muat a couple of years later. In its heyday she issued catalogues and bought and sold books from her home. Eventually hard-copy catalogues were no longer worthwhile and the list was added instead to the Cornwall Humanist website (<http://www.cornwallhumanists.org.uk/>).

Cornwall Humanists meet monthly, getting about half their 33 members coming along to meetings.

Apart from books Linnea also became a Humanist Celebrant about 30 years ago and is a member of the Independent Association of Humanist Celebrants. She recommends the book *Seasons of Life Prose and Poetry*



for *Secular Ceremonies and Private Reflection*, by Nigel Collins.

We thank her for her generosity and wish her and Laurence a restful 'retirement' - though that seems unlikely as she is still giving talks to Cornwall Humanist meetings!

Harry Perry

Part of Linnea's own book collection is housed in a magnificent bookcase made by her great grandfather Thomas Rogers, a nineteenth-century cabinet maker, with his hand-cut inscription 'Secular Education' at its head.

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Keyholders: Allan, Michael G, Mike B and Wilf are all keyholders for Secular Hall.

Audio-visual kit: This is normally held by Michael Gerard or Mike Burden.

All can be reached by post via the Hall address.

The Leicester Secularist Copy Deadline

The copy deadline for the next edition is **12 noon on Thursday 7th October 2010.**

Articles, letters, jokes, poems, news, announcements, book reviews, adverts are all welcome. Please send via the Hall or email to me at the address in the box adjacent. **When emailing copy please compose in Arial with single line spacing, 3pt paragraph breaks and single quotes.** Include photos or illustrations where you have them.

The copy deadline for the subsequent edition currently looks like being Thursday 11th November.

Thanks

Harry Perry, Editor

Jill Perry, Subeditor

Report of Board Meeting of 23rd August 2010

- Options are being considered for the provision of accessible toilets in the Secular Hall. The local authority is to be contacted to enquire about funding.
- The Society is likely to make a small financial surplus next year, however, any additional maintenance costs from running the Hall could easily derail these financial projections.
- New people are needed to fill roles on the Board.
- Options for improving the society's working arrangements with the Rationalist Trust (who own the Hall) are to be explored in order to better facilitate the ongoing modernisation project.
- The Lord Mayor's Appeal will be promoted at the Hall Open Day. A questionnaire regarding the council prayers and Civic Service issues is to be produced for this event.
- The Board wish to thank Harry Perry for picking up the books from the former Cornwall Humanist Book Service. Gillian Lighton is sorting out the books.
- There was some disagreement over whether the Atheist Bus Campaign should be directly promoted by the Society.

Richard Hopper



Joey Ratzinger Warns Squealers

Vatican crime boss Joey (aka 'the Pope') Ratzinger has warned gang members that anyone squealing to the cops about child sex abuse will answer to Him.

Don't even think about it punk, my god is bigger than yours.

The Pope's Visit

Those muddled folk at Ekklesia are at it again! Their Simon Barrow seems to think that the only reason for opposing the state visit of the Pope to the UK is because of the Pope's medieval social views.

It is true that these views are more than enough for civilised people to disagree with the Pope, but that the British government should be so backward as to spend at least £12 million pounds of tax money on hosting the Pope, who is the bogus head of a bogus

state, is more than enough to justify public protests.

Add to all this such idiotic beliefs as a virgin birth, wine literally turning into blood, wafers into human flesh and a resurrected human being actually lifted up to heaven to return at any time after nearly two thousand years, would be laughable if it did not get the Church huge wealth and political power. The tax concessions and media rights granted as well prove we do not live in a sensible country - just consider so-called 'faith' schools.

Roy Saich

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