

national  
**secular**  
society

annual report  
**2006**

challenging religious privilege

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## FROM DENIS COBELL, PRESIDENT

Until about five years ago the concept of secularism was not widely understood, and it was barely mentioned in the media. Yet, today, it has almost become an everyday term. Religious leaders are queuing up to denounce secularism as the primary "evil" of our time. In doing so, they are really bemoaning the decline of their influence over the population at large, or venting their frustration at secularists' attempts to constrain increasingly strident religious power-seeking.

Religion is important to many people, indeed for some it is the driving force of their lives. There are now so many different cultures and creeds in Britain that serious thought has to be given to how we can live together in peace, united despite our differences. Yet when Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly called for an "open and honest" debate on community cohesion, she predictably ruled off limits perhaps the most crucial single theme in relation to cohesion: the issue of "faith schools". The Government seems to be so wedded to these institutions that, in order to open more of them, it is even prepared to embark on an apartheid education system. There are signs of a dawning realisation by the public, and a growing number of politicians, of just how calamitous this policy will turn out to be in decades to come.

Religion has become increasingly politicised in this country over the past few years, in no small measure as a result of Government encouragement. This politicisation presents a more immediate threat to community relations. The Government has increasingly addressed people in minority ethnic groups by their religion, whether or not they wished to be identified in that way. Religious organisations, including the smallest minority ones, have been singled out by the Government and their views on all aspects of public policy have been canvassed, for reasons that had never satisfactorily been made clear. This deference also served to make the non-religious feel yet further alienated, especially as they number at the very least three times the total of all the minority religious groups put together. We have quizzed officials for years as to how emphasising this divisive factor aids cohesion, as the Government has claimed until now.

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly signalled a sea change when she told a meeting of Muslims in October 2006 that it was time for a "fundamental rebalancing of our relations with Muslim organisations", which would now be funded only if they fought extremism and defended "our shared values." We can only hope that she will see similar sense and reverse the next self-imposed policy disaster: faith-based welfare. It will inevitably enrich some religious groups from public funds. Far worse, it will force those in minority communities, whether

religious or not, back under the thumbs of their (unelected, male and hyper-conservative) religious leaders.

Religious voices are increasingly stifling freedom of expression, through both Parliament and direct action. Christian bodies are learning to play hardball from their minority faith brethren. Meanwhile, the Government has stood by passively, or even acquiesced. It has given the clear signal that the erosion of our basic freedoms is a price well worth paying if the alternative is to incur the displeasure of any section of the religious.

Some religious groups demand privileged participation in the process of governance, by-passing the democratic checks and balances. The government is starting to realise that their continuing to favour some religions with privileges means others will become resentful. The eventual – and inevitable – outcome will be inter-religious conflict. There is even a battle within the Church of England about the extent to which it should concede its unique privileges to other faiths, for example in a coronation.

The mood has changed in recent months and Secularism is heading for centre stage. As religious voices continue to become more strident, they provoke an increasingly strong reaction in people in Britain. A growing number now realise that the only hope we have of living together as a cohesive society is to become more secular. A secular democracy is of course the primary objective of the NSS.

Although I am stepping down as President, my commitment to the aims and objectives of the NSS are as firm as ever, and I am putting myself forward to be a member of Council. I hope that we can all continue to work together to make the NSS stronger, so that it is equipped to face the challenges that face us.



President



# RELIGIOUS HATRED BILL

The NSS's most notable victory this year, and indeed for many years, was to emasculate the Government's draconian religious hatred laws. In the House of Lords the Government was forced by 149 votes to concede amendments introducing significant safeguards to free speech and dramatically raising the threshold of prosecution. Senior figures from all parties thanked us for our pivotal role in this.

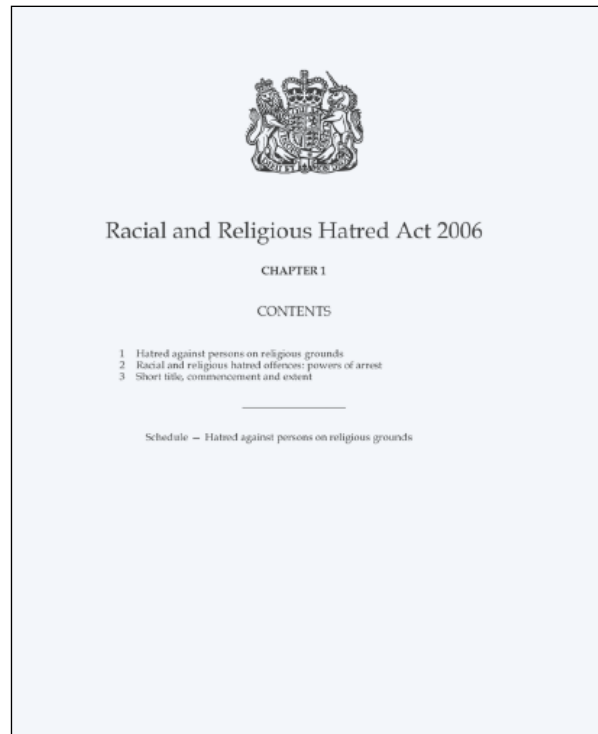
These changes would not become law, however, until also passed by the Commons, where the Government holds much more sway. Even some of our most enthusiastic supporters were convinced this would be impossible. Undeterred, Honorary Associate Dr Evan Harris MP and Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood worked, often into the small hours, to drum up support – because they realised that every single vote would count. Honorary Associate Baroness Turner of Camden helped greatly by kindly writing a persuasive letter to Labour colleagues in the Commons.

## The denouement

The Government was equally determined to reverse these amendments in the House of Commons, so the debate was highly charged. But it but failed to do so by *just one vote*. There was uproar in the Chamber as the vote was announced and our version became law. The Home Secretary was furious when he was forced to concede defeat. The uproar reached a new crescendo when, minutes later, it emerged that the one missing vote had been that of the Prime Minister himself. (It is thought that the chief whip had told him that the vote would almost certainly be lost and there was no need for him to stay in the House.)

Evan Harris sprinted from the Chamber to the TV cameras in front of Big Ben to tell of our historic victory. It was one of the very few Commons defeats suffered by the Government. We thank Evan warmly for his decisive role.

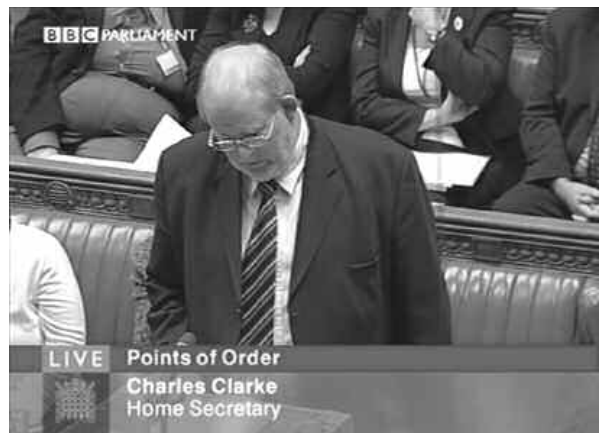
The Government has made repeated attempts over the last five years to introduce this legislation, which would have seriously eroded freedom of expression. Other opponents withdrew from the fight, equivocated, or were prepared to accept inadequate safeguards. The NSS was the only campaigning group to remain steadfast in its opposition over the five years. We led opposition to the Bill because the 'unholy' alliance we drew together recognised the strength of our strategy for success, and our ingenuity in employing every possible tactic to win.



Dr Evan Harris MP played a pivotal role



Baroness Turner of Camden: wrote persuasive letter



BBC Parliament showed Charles Clarke furious at the defeat

## SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE IN EU

NSS Honorary Associate Sophie in 't Veld is chair of the Separation of Religion and State Working Party at the European Parliament, on which the NSS sits. Honorary Associate Michael Cashman is a key member.



Sophie in 't Veld MEP

A primary function of the Working Party is to monitor, and to the extent possible, limit the religious influence on the European Commission (the European Union's Civil Service). The Vatican is of course the greatest single influence, and we believe that the Commission listens to it sympathetically in view of the fact that the majority of the EU population is Catholic, nominally at least. What happens in Brussels increasingly influences UK laws and regulations, such as the anti-discrimination Employment Regulations.



Michael Cashman MEP

One of the Working Party's most effective projects recently was to initiate the commissioning of an independent group of lawyers to examine a draft concordat between the Slovak government and Vatican which allowed "conscience clauses" which only applied to priests and religious people. They excused military service for example or covered medical matters such as the performance of abortions. The lawyers concluded the draft concordat violated women's rights to proper health care and was discriminatory against the non-religious. The ensuing row precipitated the fall of the Slovakian government and the Concordat has still not been ratified. The NSS has called for the lawyers to be commissioned to also examine the large number of extant concordats with other member states.

Several sessions were devoted to this project. Others concentrated on matters such as Turkey's possible succession to the EU and the role of religion in restricting sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Keith Porteous Wood plays a prominent role in the Working Party which includes the provision of research and information to the secretariat. Council member Dr Anna Behan frequently alternates with Keith in their one-day visits to the Parliament in Brussels.

## RALLY FOR FREE EXPRESSION

The NSS was prominent in a rally for free expression in Trafalgar Square in March. The rally was organised to counter the demonstrations that had taken place over the Danish cartoons. Calls for restrictions on freedom of expression were opposed by speakers at the rally, who included our own Keith Porteous Wood and Honorary Associates Evan Harris and Maryam Namazie.



Maryam Namazie makes an impassioned speech at the rally



Our presence was immediately apparent



Evan Harris MP and Keith Porteous Wood address the rally

## COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The Government has accepted that it potentially breaches the human rights of young people at school who are 16 and over by forcing them to attend Collective Worship (CW). After pressure from the NSS, education minister Lord Adonis announced in the House of Lords that he would seek to introduce an amendment to the Education and Inspections Bill to remedy this.

The NSS's campaign was prompted by a demand from the Joint Churches Education Committee that the Government crack down on those schools failing to carry out their statutory obligation to provide a daily act of worship of a mainly Christian character.

Our case was bolstered by drawing public attention to events at a Catholic Sixth Form College in Sidcup, Kent. Pupils there had been forced to attend gruesome lectures by anti-abortion extremists and compelled to process around the school playing field, while carrying aloft a statue of the Virgin Mary. It also emerged that some pupils at the school were excluded from classes just days before important examinations, simply for refusing to attend mass. The more determined of them had even jumped over a wall to escape attendance. Students felt so strongly they drew up a petition to complain about the amount of religion in the school and the way it was eating into education time.

At present, only parents can opt their children out of Collective Worship or Religious Education, whatever their age.

The NSS wrote to Education Secretary Alan Johnson to assert that forcing pupils of sixteen or over to attend collective worship breached their human rights. The Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP had originally turned down our request out of hand, but probably under religious pressure.

### No luck with the Executive, so try Parliament

We copied our letter to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights. The Committee agreed it would breach Human Rights for those pupils who were competent enough to make such decisions (probably 14 or 15+) to be compelled to attend collective worship – or even to attend religious education lessons.

The Executive Director then asked LibDem Education spokesperson Baroness Walmsley to introduce in the House of Lords an amendment we had drafted along these lines to the Education and Inspections Bill. She did this so convincingly that the moment she sat down, peers were demanding the minister's response. Education Minister Lord Adonis conceded in principle our proposal for pupils aged 16 and over



to be able to withdraw themselves from Collective Worship. He said he did so "after much ministerial deliberation and reflection".

Mr Johnson then set in train a hastily arranged consultation with what he called "our partners in the faith community". This appeared to ask religious groups for their opinion on whether something should be retained in law that was, in all probability, a violation of Human Rights. We complained about the failure to even to mention Human Rights in the consultation, let alone to spell out the implications. It has been quite shocking that, even after the publication of the JCHR report, neither the Government nor the churches have specifically acknowledged the human rights of older pupils. Both the Roman Catholics and the R.E. Council implied strongly that pupils' very attendance at a religious school obliges them to attend collective worship as some sort of a package. This "package" is one that expects them to leave their Human Rights behind at the school gate. Those senior figures seeking to impose such obligations have conveniently forgotten (or simply don't care) that some pupils attend at their parents' behest, may have changed their mind about whether they wish to attend, or may even simply have enrolled because there was no other suitable school.

Whatever the government proposes, the NSS will endeavour to maximise the scope for older pupils to follow their own consciences in these areas.

## SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE CONFERENCE



The NSS presented a comprehensive paper on Separation of Church and State at a high-level meeting under the aegis of the University College London's prestigious Constitution Unit. Most of the participants represented a religious perspective, so our well-argued case for disestablishment caused a flurry among those with a vested interest in maintaining the Anglican church's favoured position. Leading academics, Lord Hurd and a representative of Number 10 also attended.

We argued that Establishment – and the power, influence and privileges that come with it – is undemocratic and unjustifiable. The Church of England was dying on its feet, and projected to become much weaker still in coming decades. It could no longer regard itself as “the national church”, and seemed to be being controlled by events abroad.

We recommended a speedy start to disestablishment while acknowledging that it would be a major undertaking, perhaps taking decades to complete. The Government has said that it will not even consider the prospect unless the CofE initiates it, which it is unlikely to do. In a country with adherents of so many religions, it is iniquitous for a single denomination of one of those religions to have such a status. Such iniquity will eventually and inevitably lead to resentment and conflict.

We argued strongly against a “multi-faith establishment”, which would involve bringing other religions into the political sphere rather than pushing the CofE out. Such an arrangement would be uncontrollable and would inevitably lead to religious conflicts being played out in a parliamentary setting. It would also further alienate the non-religious.

The whole 60 page report with 20 recommendations is available for a donation of £25, which would help fund the considerable resources that went into producing it. (Please send a cheque to “NSS” at the office in an envelope marked “Church and State”.) Alternatively it can be downloaded from <http://tinyurl.com/r9ukp> – and any donation would be appreciated.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Keith Porteous Wood gave evidence to a hearing by a Council of Europe committee which was examining whether further laws were needed to ensure respect for religion. The hearing came hot on the heels of riots over the publication of supposedly anti-Islamic cartoons in a Danish paper. At the hearing, held in the French Senate in Paris, Keith presented our argument and led a session making the case against further laws on the grounds of freedom of expression. Other sessions gave the floor to those espousing the opposite view.

When the Council's ministers eventually published their findings, it was clear that the NSS's evidence had been influential. The report recommended that free speech should be protected and no further restrictions should be introduced that would curtail it in any way.



Keith Porteous Wood presents our argument to the Council of Europe at the French Senate in Paris (shown below)



## NEW DISCRIMINATION LAW

The Equality Act will soon outlaw discrimination in respect of goods, services and facilities on the grounds of Religion and Belief (as well as Sexual Orientation). Keith Porteous Wood led a full scale damage limitation exercise to curb the many excessive religious exemptions in these provisions. Dr Evan Harris was by far our most effective proponent in the Commons, while Lord Lester of Herne Hill and Baroness Turner of Camden did sterling work in the Lords. We thank them all for this demanding work, carried out in the face of a very determined and well-organised religious lobby.

The Government has granted massive exemptions on all recent anti-discrimination legislation to the religious, the very people most likely to discriminate, to the point that it is arguable whether such legislation serves any purpose.

The detailed anti-discrimination regulations on Sexual Orientation are being introduced by Statutory Instrument, for technical reasons. Statutory Instruments cannot be amended, so are not subject to the same rigours of Parliamentary scrutiny as is primary legislation. The Society expressed deep concerns to Parliamentarians about the regulations being introduced in this way. This is because their being drafted by the Government behind closed doors makes them even more susceptible to undue religious influence. Our fears grew when the regulations were delayed, at least until April 2007, because of the sheer volume of religious lobbying. The LibDems and a gay rights group even called for the resignation of Communities Minister Ruth Kelly because they thought her close connections with the Roman Catholic Church had clouded her judgment and led to the delay.



## RELIGION AND BELIEF CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Council member Anna Behan has been working on the Religion and Belief Consultative Group. This has liaised with the transition team for the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights on the implementation of the religion and belief strand in the new body. Our religious counterparts will confirm, perhaps wearily, that the NSS has made a unique contribution in forcing the religious to work hard to justify their stances objectively. This time-consuming, demanding and important work has been led by Anna Behan, aided by Keith Porteous Wood and Peter Vlachos.



Anna Behan: leading our work on Religion and Belief Consultative Group

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The National Secular Society was represented at a major conference at Windsor Castle with the theme Religious Education in a Multi-faith Society.

The conference was addressed by David Bell, the new permanent secretary — or chief civil servant — at the Department for Education and Skills, and also by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord (George) Carey. A very high proportion of the participants were religious. The NSS was invited to provide a contrary stance, and did not disappoint. The NSS delegation had the highest profile, partly because it was the most controversial. NSS council member Dr Anna Behan and Director Keith Porteous Wood volunteered to put themselves in the firing line. George Carey's final salvo was lobbed in the direction of NSS when he blamed the chronic decline in religious observance on secularism.

Keith complained to David Bell, formerly Chief Inspector of Schools, about the latest framework for R.E. He maintained it gave only passing mention to the needs of the non-religious, despite them probably constituting the majority of secondary pupils. Another concern was the framework's distorted "all things bright and beautiful" take on religion, ignoring religion's darker sides and the many disagreements within and between religions.

Many of the delegates also accepted that these negative aspects could no longer be ducked if R.E. was to play the role they thought it should in the fight against terrorism, or indeed if it wished to lay any claim to be a credible academic discipline. They also railed against the thinly veiled call for proselytising behind Carey's plea for pupils to get a grounding in their "own religion" before being exposed to the teachings of other faiths. Oddly, he claimed he didn't want faith schools to be too religious — but maybe this was an oblique reference to Islamic schools.

Anna Behan had practically the final word at the conference's closing plenary session when she called for a much greater awareness of the non-religious and their needs. As well as challenging delegates and opening them up to a greater awareness of the non-religious, our attendance at the conference also provided some useful contacts and alerted us to some potentially fruitful lines of action for campaigning.

## SECULARIST OF THE YEAR

The Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year 2006 was won by Professor Steve Jones. The £5,000 prize is kindly donated annually by Dr Michael Irwin. We are most grateful for his continuing generosity.

Steve Jones is a professor of genetics at University College London and has spent a great deal of time in the past year opposing the incursion of creationism – and its deceitful variation, “intelligent design” – into British schools. The audience were stunned when he told them that a third of university students accepted “intelligent design”. Steve Jones was a popular winner and those who attended the event were unanimous in their praise for his work in biology and in the promotion of science in the media.

The prize was presented at a glittering lunch in London, by Lord Dick Taverne, who has recently written a book, *The March of Unreason*, dealing with the threats irrationalism poses to evidence-based science. This year’s entertainer was the fabulous stand-up comedian Nick Doody, who had the assembled multitude in stitches with his politically incorrect attack on religion and its banalities. Nick is now a member of the NSS.

The prize’s prestige was recognised by television coverage. The winner was whisked off to a television interview, cheque in hand. Earlier, Keith Porteous Wood had talked about the prize and the importance of secularism. At the same function a trophy for Lifetime Achievement was awarded to George Broadhead, Honorary Secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association for over 25 years, and a long time NSS member.



Lunch was eagerly awaited



Volunteers Robert Stovold and Tim Boyce



Nick Doody entertains



Bill McLroy



Roy Saich



A word from our sponsor: Michael Irwin

## CONSULTATIONS



Diane Murray



Renata Anderson and vice-President Jim Herrick



Dick Taverne presents Steve Jones with the prize



Professor Steve Jones delivers his acceptance speech

An unglamorous aspect of our work is responding to Government consultations. Completing them well requires considerable knowledge and skill; it is painstaking and time-consuming work. We think on balance they are worth the effort. They stop civil servants being able to say that policies are unopposed, and part of our reputation has been built on the quality of the documents we produce. On the other hand, it is tempting to think they are not worth the effort because there is rarely any immediate payback in terms of causing an identifiable change in the Government's approach.

Yet we know our submissions are read. A senior civil servant contacted us over our Paper challenging the "72% Christian" finding in the 2001 Census, and proposing alternative questions for 2011. He complained about one sentence that implied a rather unflattering motive on the part of the Government which we could not actually prove. We were happy to rephrase it, and can only assume that he could not fault the logic of the remaining ten pages of the Paper, which laid bare the misleading nature of the 2001 figures.

Anna Behan has particular cause to be pleased with the response to a consultation she had compiled on the draft guidance for schools on the Religion and Belief discrimination provisions in the Equality Act. Our objections were far-reaching. The Ministry agreed to make substantial changes and even justified in detail why it had decided not to take on board some of the few remaining points. One change the Government made was to remove an unhelpful, and indeed legally questionable, example in the guidance on religious school uniforms. This issue is becoming increasingly sensitive one, so it was especially gratifying to have prevented this being included.

The consultation work is shared between Anna Behan and Keith Porteous Wood. Here are examples of areas where we have responded: Equalities Review Interim Report <http://tinyurl.com/kyhn4>; Equality Act – Sexual Orientation Regulations <http://tinyurl.com/hhsjo>; Equalities Review Call for Evidence <http://tinyurl.com/94ver>. More details are available in the Bulletins over the last year, and members without computer access seeking copies should call the office.

## MEDIA

We have had a truly astonishing year in terms of media coverage for our campaigns. We are now recognised as the first stop for journalists looking for informed comment on matters to do with religious conflict and secular alternatives.

As well as literally hundreds of radio and TV appearances, NSS spokespeople have helped journalists with background information for all kinds of projects. Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson – who do most of our media work – are on duty 24/7. There are now, on average, three or four journalistic enquiries per day: when there's controversy raging that can increase to dozens. Our spokespeople have been interviewed by journalists from all over the world, and have taken part in debates (and sometimes confrontations) with religious representatives. Details of these appear in Newsline and are summarised in our quarterly Bulletins.



Terry Sanderson

The prominence of issues concerning secularists has ensured we always have something to contribute. This year our high profile work has been prompted by issues such as the continuing protests around *Jerry Springer the Opera*, the Danish cartoon saga and other areas of freedom of expression. We have been much in demand for comment on the fault lines that have developed in our culture over "faith schools". Other popular topics have included Muslim veils and special privileges for religious believers – including opt-outs from equality legislation. As the one organisation prepared to stand up and be counted, we are often at the forefront of debate. When Leader of the Commons Jack Straw announced that he invited women



Professor Steve Jones spoke live on Sky News after winning the Secularist of the Year Award

visiting his constituency office to remove their veils, we were the only organisation to support him publicly, yet 19 out of 20 of the public did so too.

In addition to our day-to-day dealings with the media, some of our supporters and honorary associates have been given opportunities to put the secularist cause in a way that would not have been imagined a few years ago.

Richard Dawkins, for instance, created waves with his two-part Channel Four series *The Root of All Evil?* (followed up with his equally controversial book *The God Delusion*). Jonathan Miller presented an erudite three part series on Atheism for BBC4 (which, after much promoting from the NSS and its members, was repeated on BBC2). Stewart Lee did an excellent Channel Five documentary about the furore surrounding *Jerry Springer the Opera* and the subsequent calls for a new blasphemy law (Evan Harris took part too). Rod Liddle produced *The New Fundamentalists* and will shortly present another programme about atheism.

The liveliness and timeliness of this media exposure has contributed to an increase in our influence and in NSS membership.



Keith Porteous Wood interviewed on Sky News

**Forced religion is abuse, say MPs**

Making headlines...



Stewart Lee

## SCOTLAND

Alistair McBay, our Scottish representative, has been extremely active over the year, with frequent witty and telling letters in the main Scottish national papers as well as regional ones (not to mention his forays into the correspondence columns of the London national papers). Alistair has taken part in radio and TV programmes, given talks and taken part in debates and has proved to be an extremely well-informed and articulate spokesman for the Society north of the border.



Alistair McBay

## DEBATES AND LECTURES etc

The President and Council members – especially Norman Bacrac, Nick Pullar and Dan Bye – have taken part in debates and given talks, for example to local groups. Among these engagements, Norman has debated at the Cambridge Union and Birkbeck College Philosophy Society; and Nick at a meeting in the House of Commons. Some debates have been with our religious opponents. Some of these have been quite demanding, especially when we have been heavily outnumbered by opponents in the audience. Keith and Honorary Associate Polly Toynbee also did battle with the “TV vicar” Steve Chalke and theologian Elaine Storkey.



Dan Bye

Terry Sanderson and Keith Porteous Wood took part in a Fabian Society conference on “Britishness”. Our stall there was well patronised.

## PARIS DEMO

We were proud to be invited to march in November 2005 in the vanguard of the French Freethinkers’ contingent in their commemoration of the centenary of the separation of church and state in 1905.



Top of the news – “Secularism remains a sacred value” (we agree with the sentiment if not the phraseology!)

## TRANSPORT SUBSIDIES

Following years of pressure by the NSS, the Government has agreed in principle that the children of non-believers seeking school transport to a more distant community school should be treated in the same way as children of believers seeking transport to a more distant religious school. We have also now seen the first practical example of this policy working in practice.



We will fight to stop all bus discrimination

## NEWSLINE

One of the major contributions to the NSS's success in keeping in touch with its members is our weekly Newsline e-zine. It lets you know about the NSS's activities as they happen and also brings secularists news from around the world. Newsline is also a platform for activism – letting you know how you can get involved and help progress our campaigns. It also provides a fascinating platform for members to exchange ideas and opinions. If you aren't getting Newsline, and would like to, please send a blank email with "Subscribe to Newsline" on the subject line to [enquiries@secularism.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@secularism.org.uk)

If you haven't got a computer, you can still receive the printed version by sending a supply of A5 stamped addressed envelopes to NSS Newsline, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL. We'll let you know when they are running out and you can decide whether to replace them. (This service is for members only).

## WEBSITE

Our [website](#) is our shop window for the world, and it certainly attracts plenty of visitors. In the last year it scored almost five million hits – many from return visitors who like to keep up with the news on our "What the Papers Say" feature and to check out what's new in the shop. The new look we instituted last year has made the site much more attractive, and the interesting content keeps the visitors coming back. Make sure you get the most from it. The searchable archive is comprehensive.



## THE NSS SHOP

Another very popular feature of our website is the [NSS shop](#), where you can buy a wide range of books, gifts and souvenirs and help the NSS's funds at the same time. We're always looking for new merchandise of interest to members, and our unique seasonal (secular) greetings cards, imported from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are perennially popular. If you're looking for something new and different to give as a gift this year, have a look at what we're offering online at [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk). There will be a merchandise stall for members only at the AGM.



Just some of our fantastic merchandise

## AND FINALLY...

Who are you calling old? Creationists believe the world was created only 6,000 years ago. Rob Blackhurst meets the man who believes he can out-argue science – and change the face of education.

Mackay has been visiting Britain almost every year for two decades, speaking in schools around the country without a scrap of press coverage or controversy. But this year his 40-stop tour – from Edinburgh to the Isle of Wight – hit a very contemporary nerve. Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, describes the teaching of creationism as "intellectual child abuse". He was enraged by Mackay's planned visit to a Lancashire comprehensive. "Why is a man whose background has not been checked being given three-day access to a secondary school?" he asked. Eventually, media pressure prevailed and the visit was cancelled. ("The school panicked," Mackay tells me later.)

*Financial Times*  
14 October 2006

# YOUR COUNCIL AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2006

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### President:

Denis Cobell

### Vice Presidents:

Terry Sanderson

Jim Herrick

### Treasurer:

Afonso Reis e Sousa

## Council Members:

Norman Bacrac

Malcolm Trahearn

Jennifer Jeynes

Anna Behan

Nick Pullar

Surendra Lal

Ian Andrews

A.E.L. Davies

Dan Bye

Peter Vlachos

## Executive Director:

Keith Porteous Wood, FCCA

## Office administration:

Stewart Ware



Colin Challen MP



Baroness Flather



Kelvin Hopkins MP



Maryam Namazie



Lord Taverne



Sophie in 't Veld

## Honorary Associates:

Graham Allen MP

Prof. Peter Atkins

Iain Banks

Lorraine Barrett AM

Edward Bond

Michael Cashman MEP

Colin Challen MP\*

Nick Cohen

Prof. Richard Dawkins

Lord Desai

Baroness Flather\*

Rt. Hon. Michael Foot

Prof. A. C. Grayling

Dr. Evan Harris MP

Patrick Harvie MSP

Christopher Hitchens

Paul Holmes MP

Prof. Ted Honderich

Kelvin Hopkins MP\*

Sir Ludovic Kennedy

Graham Linehan

Robert Marshall-Andrews QC, MP

Baroness Massey of Darwen

Lord McIntosh of Haringey

Jonathan Meades

George Melly

Maryam Namazie\*

Sir Jonathan Miller

Taslima Nasrin

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan

Lord Peston

Harold Pinter

Philip Pullman

Lord Raglan

Claire Rayner OBE

Martin Rowson

Joan Ruddock MP

Joan Smith

Dr. David Starkey

Lord Taverne QC\*

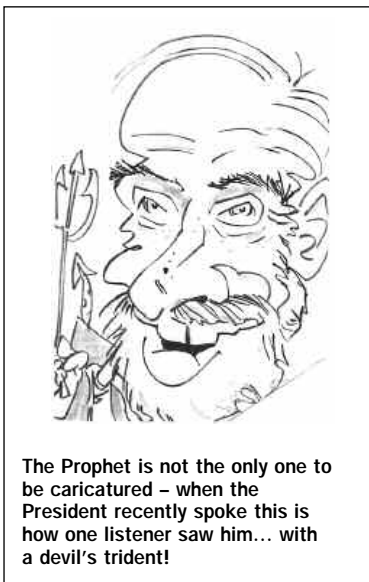
Polly Toynbee

Baroness Turner of Camden

Sophie in 't Veld MEP\*

Gore Vidal

Prof. Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC



\* These six Honorary Associates were appointed during the last year. All are active parliamentarians, except for human rights campaigner and television journalist Maryam Namazie. Fuller details were shown in the Bulletins during 2006.

## AFFILIATED LOCAL GROUPS

Birmingham Humanists; Blackpool & Fylde Humanists; Brighton & Hove Humanist Society; Bristol Humanists; Bromley Humanist Group; Chiltern Humanists; Cornwall Humanists; Cotswold Humanists; Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists; Croydon Humanists; Devon Humanists; Ealing Humanist Group; East Kent Humanists; Essex Humanists; Farnham Humanists; Greater Manchester Humanist Group; Hampstead Humanist Society; Havering & District Humanist Society; Humanist Society of West Yorkshire; Leicester Secular Society; Lewisham Humanist Group; Liberal Democrat Humanist & Secularist Group; Norfolk Humanists; North East Humanists; North London Humanist Group; Scans Humanists; Sheffield Humanist Society; South Hampshire Humanists; Suffolk Humanists; Sutton Humanist Group; Welsh Marches Humanist Group; West Glamorgan Humanist Group.

## ORGANISATIONS TO WHICH THE NSS IS AFFILIATED

Abortion rights, Amnesty International, European Humanist Federation; International Humanist and Ethical Union; European Women's Lobby and Liberty. We also support the Humanist Peace Forum and Dignity in Dying (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society).

## VOLUNTEERS

On behalf of the members, the Council and Executive Director thank every one of our growing body of volunteers. Their efforts on research, administrative matters or using other special skills contribute substantially to our ability to challenge religious privilege.

LARGE PRINT AND AUDIO VERSIONS OF THIS REPORT ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.



## **WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY AND IN DOING SO SUPPORT OUR WORK**

The NSS is certainly vigorous in its opposition to the forces of superstition, obscurantism, and illiberalism; but that is merely another way of looking at its support for liberal causes. When it campaigns against censorship, it is campaigning for freedom of expression; when it campaigns against faith schools, it is campaigning for educational impartiality; and when it campaigns against any of the social and fiscal survivals of religious privilege, it is campaigning for equality in a pluralist society.

By signing up overleaf, or on line, you will be applying to join the National Secular Society and accepting the aims and objectives of the Society shown in this booklet and acknowledging that your membership application is subject to ratification by the NSS Council of Management.

### **Subscription details**

UK membership is £22 per annum (£13 unwaged).

Joint UK membership (two people living at the same address) is £34.

Associate membership for those living outside the UK is £39 and for UK residents under 18 years of age it is £13.

(All payments must be in £ sterling drawn on UK banks and payable to NSS).

Membership is renewable every 1st January, but those joining between September – December do not have to renew until the next following 1st January.

It is easy to join securely on line at [www.secularism.org.uk/join.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/join.html) or by sending in the application form that follows.

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Address:

Post Code

Telephone number:

Email (if applicable):

Occupation:

(Optional but appreciated)

***I accept the principles and objects shown in this booklet and apply for membership.***

Signature:

Date:

I enclose my cheque/postal order for:

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plus

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Total enclosed:

£

Please return completed form to:  
**National Secular Society,  
25 Red Lion Square,  
London WC1R 4RL**

## THE SOCIETY'S PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS:

1. Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge and human effort should be directed wholly towards its improvement.
2. It asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.
3. Secularism affirms that progress is possible only on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised state.
4. Affirming that morality is social in origin and application, Secularism aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.
5. Secularism demands the complete separation of Church and State and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.
6. It seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind.

The NSS is certainly vigorous in its opposition to the forces of superstition, obscurantism, and illiberalism; but that is merely another way of looking at its support for liberal causes. When it campaigns against censorship, it is campaigning for freedom of expression; when it campaigns against faith schools, it is campaigning for educational impartiality; and when it campaigns against any of the social and fiscal survivals of religious privilege, it is campaigning for equality in a pluralist society.

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