

NSS meets Education Minister

Representatives of the NSS met the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, at a round-table meeting in March to discuss issues that are concerning the Society.

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood and Vice President Dr Anna Behan were our spokespeople. It was a cordial meeting and Mr Johnson mentioned his own atheism.

We expressed grave concerns about state-funded religious schools in principle, and outlined our opposition to the privileges granted to religious (or purportedly religious) families and staff in education. In addition, we set out in some detail our concerns about the discrimination against non-religious pupils and staff caused by the expansion of religious schools while religious observance declines. An even more worrying consequence of this expansion, we cautioned, was that it will be used to support the 'equity' case for an increase in the number of minority faith schools.

We warned that the major growth planned for minority faith schools, which would be almost exclusively mono-ethnic, would lead to an educational apartheid, especially in major conurbations.

Mr Johnson said he would not have chosen to start from this position but, given the high number of



**Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP,
Secretary of State for
Education**

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Council of Europe: NSS makes its mark

Richard Dawkins argues religion has been given so much unearned "respect" over the centuries that when people dare to challenge or criticise it today – even in the mildest and most reasoned terms – they are denounced as "extremists".

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood and President Terry Sanderson had a taste of this anxiety not to offend religion at a conference of the Council of Europe in San Marino on 23 and 24 April this year, when their unprecedented outspokenness was credited with "changing the course" of the debate.

There was a strong suspicion that the aim of this conference (with the theme "The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue") was to give special consultative status to religious bodies in yet another important European institution.

The Council of Europe is a body of European-wide parliamentarians concerned with conflict resolution, dialogue, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Its membership extends far beyond that of the European Union. It includes, for example, Russia and other former Soviet satellite countries.

International Humanist and Ethical Union

Keith and Terry attended as representatives of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) which has NGO (non-governmental organisation) status at the Council of Europe. The NSS is affiliated to IHEU, and it asked us to attend

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Events Diary

Sat. June 23 **The Last Priest**

At the King's Head Theatre,
Islington – see page 7

BOOK NOW!

Sat. October 20 **Secularist of the Year**

Award ceremony at new
London venue – see page 6

BOOK NOW!

Sat. November 24 **AGM**

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1

◀ (“Council of Europe” continued)

following Keith’s work with the Council of Europe in both Paris (where he chaired a session on freedom of expression) and Strasbourg (Colloquy on Questions related to State and Religion).

The first part of the conference was dominated by religious organisations patting each other on the back for their supposed invention of democracy, asserting that human rights were simply an extension of religious doctrines and suggesting religion was the only way to achieve peace and stability. One after another, each representative repeated the same mantra.

NSS director speaks

Then Keith took over the podium and contradicted nearly every point that had so far been made – and everyone sat up. He told the conference that, far from being defenders of human rights, religions were the greatest threat to Human Rights, and a growing one. He backed this up with examples –

1. *Attacks on freedom of speech.*
2. *Abuse of women’s rights.*
3. *Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.*
4. *A correlation: the more theocratic a country, the worse its human rights record tends to be.*

He pointed out that the growing number of non-religious and non-practising citizens, almost certainly the majority, were being completely ignored, and that this was not good enough.

He chose to cite the UK as the example of a failed attempt to achieve cohesion. He observed that even the government was thinking again about its policy on “multiculturalism”.

Rather than continually emphasising the religion that divides us, we should concentrate on our common humanity.

As Keith spoke there was some muttering and tutting from religious representatives in the hall, with a Catholic delegate claiming he had been “offended”. Nevertheless Keith left the rostrum to warm applause. The Ambassador for Croatia even told the conference later: “Something happened here



Keith Porteous Wood at San Marino, flanked by the Special Rapporteur and the UN representative

that has changed the course of this conference and made us look at our purpose again. I am, of course, referring to the speech of Mr Keith Porteous Wood. Although I am a Christian and I don’t agree with much of what he said, he has shattered the monochrome nature of this gathering. Until he spoke everyone had been saying the same thing. Now he has released us to have a proper debate.”

The Roman Catholic Bishop of San Marino had clearly heard Keith’s forthright contribution, because when he reached the platform the following day he let forth a fire and brimstone sermon which he delivered while thumping the podium with his fist concluding predictably that: “The Catholic Church is the natural partner for the Council of Europe.”

NSS President intervenes

It was after this that Terry Sanderson spoke, tearing up his original speech and responding directly to the Bishop’s outburst.

Terry contradicted the assertion that had been oft-repeated in the conference: that religion was re-asserting itself in Europe. The truth of the matter was that because of a few strategically-placed bombs in European and American cities, religion had been propelled to the centre of public debate and had

assumed an importance quite out of proportion to its real influence.

There was no religious revival, Terry told the conference. All the evidence showed just the opposite: people were abandoning religion in enormous numbers, and this was a trend set to continue. Who speaks for this vast swathe of the population?

He concluded by warning delegates that the Bishop’s performance had been a demonstration, if any were needed, as to why no particular religion should be permitted to dominate the Council of Europe.

A positive outcome

In the light of the interventions from Keith and Terry, the final communiqué was changed so consultation would take place not only with religious groups but also with the rest of civil society. Instead of the special consultation status that had been desired by religious groups, all they were offered was an annual conference at which religions could talk to each other. And even that would take place on an experimental basis only, with the agenda being set by the Council, rather than the religions.

Terry Sanderson commented: “We found a great deal of sympathy for our frank and honest approach among ministers, parliamentarians, ambassadors and other officials at the conference. It seemed they were secretly cheering us on, and that was why we received such warm applause. As more than one of this influential group said to us privately: ‘Thank goodness you said it – I wouldn’t have dared.’”

“Well, your international representatives did dare. As a result, it opens up the opportunity for much more emphasis to be given in dialogue to the representatives of civil society relative to that given to religious leaders. As soon as it became clear just how many references to ‘civil society’ had been inserted into the final communiqué, supporters came up one after another to congratulate us. Only then did we realise that we had achieved much more than we had ever thought possible”. ■

www.coe.int/T/dg4/intercultural/Source/sanmarinofinal_EN.doc

◀ (“Education Minister” continued)

Christian schools, he could not do other than support the idea of faith schools for minority communities.

We believe history will identify the unbridled expansion of religious schools in the state sector as one of the Government’s greatest mistakes – a mistake aggravated by the fact that their active pursuit of this policy has been totally unnecessary.

The NSS thanked Mr Johnson for facilitating the introduction of Section 55 (our very own section – see last *Bulletin*) of the Education and Inspections Act, which gives older pupils the right to opt out of Collective Worship without the need for their parents’ intervention. We sought, and received, assurances that the proposed increase in school leaving age would not result in an increase in the age at which pupils would be able to avail themselves of the new opt-out.

Mr Johnson was helpful in putting us in touch with those who are drawing up the Regulations, brought in as a result of the Education and Inspections Act, which will reduce job security for some classes of non-religious employees in schools. Our aim is to minimise the adverse effect of this aspect of the Education and Inspections Act on existing staff. The arrangements, called for by the churches, were fiercely opposed by the Society during the passage of the Act last year. While we were unsuccessful in blocking these measures, it was clear that our interventions had caused the Government considerable discomfort. ■

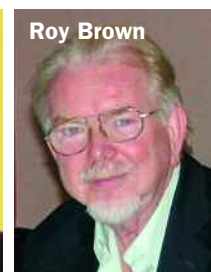
Making a stand against religious power in Europe

In March, Vice President Dr Anna Behan represented the National Secular Society at the launch of the Brussels Declaration at the European Parliament. The Declaration is the centrepiece of the campaign to head off attempts by organised religion to gain even greater influence in Europe’s political affairs. The Declaration was drawn up by a team led by Roy Brown, of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and a team of editorial advisers which included our Executive Director.

The meeting, hosted by the European Parliament All-Party group on Separation of Religion and Politics, was chaired by MEP and NSS honorary associate Sophie in ’t Veld. At the meeting Roy Brown challenged Europe’s political leaders to “ensure that any future constitution defended Europe’s liberal, humanitarian and



Anna Behan



Roy Brown

inclusive values: the values still shared by the great majority of our citizens”.

David Pollock, president of the European Humanist Federation, played a major role in collecting signatories. They include leading conservative, liberal, social democratic and green party politicians, Catholic, Protestant, Humanist, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu leaders, and many leading academics, philosophers and scientists, including several Nobel prize-winners.

NSS bangs the Freedom of Expression drum again at Liberty AGM

The NSS is affiliated to the Human Rights organization, Liberty. We intervened at their AGM in May over a motion from the Communication Workers Union noting ‘with alarm, the increasingly intemperate attitude of some mainstream politicians towards the religious and civil rights of Muslims, and other minority faiths’. The NSS amended the motion to insert a freedom of expression provision, to refer to Human rather than Civil rights, and to introduce parity in the motion for the non-religious.



Peter Vlachos

Council member Peter Vlachos spoke to our amendment, which was accepted by the proposers of the original motion. Peter also emphasised the need for Liberty to maintain a secular ethos. His intervention was warmly received. He also referred to the motion we had introduced at their previous AGM seeking support for the abolition of the blasphemy laws, as a result of which their Council had subsequently reaffirmed its support for freedom of expression. Past president Denis Cobell supported Peter at the meeting and Keith Porteous Wood drew up the amendment.

Generous Donation

The Society was remembered in the will of Mr J Craddock, who most generously left us £25,000. We would also like to thank members who have made much appreciated donations for their continuing support.

If you would like to remember the NSS in your will, please contact our office to ask for a legacy leaflet.

Getting the message across

President Terry Sanderson has been busy in all sectors of the media. On radio, he has been on Radio 5 Live talking about the new Sexual Orientation Regulations, which the NSS fought so hard to protect from extensive religious exemptions. He was on Radio 2's *Jeremy Vine Programme* talking about the MoD's tests on 'psychics', then up against Christian Voice leader Stephen Green in a discussion on BBC Radio Belfast about whether religious groups are unfairly portrayed in drama. This followed a complaint by Opus Dei that they had been presented in a BBC film as secretive, corrupt and criminal.

Terry also spoke on the *Vanessa Feltz Show* on BBC Radio London, talking about David Cameron's desire to send his daughter to a faith school. He took part in an hour-long debate on church-state relations on BBC Radio Merseyside. Such was the level of interest that Terry was invited back the following day to continue the discussion in a phone-in.

In the press, Terry was quoted in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and a front page *Daily Express* story. He had a letter in the *Guardian* about how 'twinning' schools from different religions to create 'cohesion' was discredited by a study by Professor Irene Bruegel of London South Bank University. He took part in a

The National Secular Society attacked the plan. Keith Porteous Wood, the society's executive director, said: "This is Blair's parting betrayal of the majority of the population who are not practising any religion. The more people abandon the churches, the more academies Blair wants to give the CofE to be run at taxpayers' expense.

"Already non-religious parents are practically forced to pretend to be religious and even attend church simply to secure a place to their local school.

"We can only hope that Gordon Brown has noticed the 60 years of decline in religious attendance."

The Church of England hit back at the criticism. A spokesman said: "In the Church of England schools that currently exist there are large numbers of children with no religious backgrounds and of no faith.

"They do not go to our schools to be indoctrinated. No one is forced to go to assembly. No one is forced to do RE.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, 19/5/2007

Guardian podcast on faith schools, as well as contributing a couple of blogs to their *Comment is Free* site. One was on Easter and the other on the divisive effects of faith schools. Both provoked high levels of response.

Terry's international appearances include an interview with a Brazilian TV network about secularism in Europe after the Pope's visit to Brazil. In addition, he was a guest on an American atheist group's webcast, talking about religious education in British schools.

In April, the NSS was featured in the *Wall Street Journal's* cover story on Secularism in Europe.

Keith Porteous Wood kept up the NSS profile on TV. He took part in an interview on BBC1's *Heaven and Earth Show* in March and gave an interview to Sky Television, filmed outside the House of Lords, in February. He also recorded an interview with Meridian ITV about faith schools.

On radio, Keith's contributions included an interview in April with

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said it was 'disgraceful that the churches were given these exemptions at all'. 'But we hope that this case will demonstrate once and for all that those opt-outs must be interpreted very narrowly. They must apply only to people directly involved in promoting religion - such as vicars, priests and nuns.

'Gay people must not find themselves pushed out of work because the church doesn't like their sexuality. I hope the bishop of Hereford comes out of this with a great deal of egg on his face.'

From *The Observer's* feature on discrimination by the CofE 1/4/2007

New Honorary Associate

The NSS is pleased to announce that Angela Eagle, Labour MP for Wallasey, has agreed to become an honorary associate. Angela, who is on Labour's National Executive Committee, is a long-time campaigner for equality and has been prominent in the Government's equality agenda - particularly in the fight for women's and gay rights. She has also worked hard to secure better treatment for animals.



Angela Eagle MP

Church of England plans to open 100 new academy schools

Matthew Taylor

The Church of England is expected to open 100 academy schools as part of Tony Blair's attempt to cement controversial education reforms before he leaves office. A deal struck with education ministers this week will see church officials take direct control of a multimillion-pound expansion programme over the next five years.

The schools, which are state funded but privately run, have formed a central plank of education reforms. Ministers say they have brought a dynamism to struggling schools in deprived areas although critics, including many Labour MPs, claim they have handed religious groups and individuals too much influence.

Last night the church, which runs five academies and more than 200 other secondary schools, said there was growing demand from parents and pupils. Nick McKemey, its school improvement officer,



The church says it is not looking for a short-term rise in exam results or for trophy schools, but for long-term improvement

said: "We have committed ourselves to providing good schools for the poorest. We're not looking for a short-term rise in exam results or for trophy schools, but for long-term improvement."

Under the plans individual dioceses will be free to open academies, which will be overseen by the newly formed Church of England Academies Services Ltd.

A spokesman for the Department for Education and Skills said: "This sort of activity by sponsors demonstrates the added value sponsors can bring and the importance they place on improving educational opportunities for pupils."

The move drew criticism from the National Secular Society. "The Church of England cannot get children into church, so it is determined to bring church into school, where the children have no choice and no escape," said Terry Sanderson, its president. "It is Mr Blair's final, self-indulgent gift to the religious establishment."

Under the plans the church will put forward £1.5m per academy in return for a large degree of control. A spokesman said they would have a Christian ethos but would be open to children of all faiths or none.

There are 46 academies and Mr Blair wants to increase that number to 400. This week, David Cameron announced the Tories would expand the programme.

From *The Guardian*, 19/5/2007

Radio 4's flagship *World Tonight* programme, talking about the role of religion in modern society. He was also quoted in a story about faith schools and community cohesion in the *Daily Telegraph*. The Press Association and *Daily Telegraph* quoted him extensively over a plan to hand over 100 new academies to the Church of England, which forced the Church to respond to our criticisms.

Scottish representative Alistair McBay was among the commentators in *Scotland on Sunday's* weekly news reviews with a 'moral dimension' during May. He also had a letter in the *Dundee Courier* about a row over séances in a stately home. Earlier that month he was quoted in the *Daily Express* on a new play about Mary Whitehouse. ■

Message from the President



Secularism and atheism are topics in a worldwide debate at present, with thousands of articles and books being published, with conferences being organised and seminars run.

Why has this happened now? Perhaps it all springs from 11 September 2001, when the Islamic militants of al-Qaeda finally managed to bring off the “spectacular” that made the world sit up and take notice. They had been trying for some time, but their previous attempts had been small scale and mostly unsuccessful; the destruction of the Twin Towers changed all that.

Then followed the bombings in Madrid and London and a hundred smaller outrages all aimed at cowering and scaring the West into submitting to the demands of the extreme Islamists whose stated purpose is world domination.

At the same time, the USA had fallen into the hands of religious demagogues and power-seekers, some of whom were determined to destroy the precious first amendment of their Constitution, which separates church and state. They intended to replace the secular democracy that has served America so well with some kind of Christian theocracy.

It seemed the battle cry of “Religion is back!” was true. Religion was clearly back in the corridors of power, given undeserved new importance by fearful Governments anxious to appease the bringers of violence and terror. Christians, Hindus and Jews rode on the back of the Islamic extremists’ insurgency and demanded privileges for themselves.

Religion may be back in the frightened dealings of politicians, but it is not back in the hearts of the people. Indeed, religion is fading fast in most affluent parts of the world. Adherence to Christianity is falling steeply in Europe and, despite propaganda claims to the contrary, it is static in the United States – even falling in some places. Only Islam is growing, and that is primarily because of very different demographics rather than convincing “infidels” to convert.

The vast sales of Richard Dawkins’ book indicate

many people share his view that religious faith is nonsense. And some will also identify with what has been described as the “anti-religion” of the book, which calls for religion’s domineering and all-too-often lethal passions to be tamed.

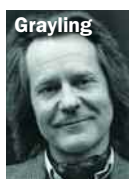
Most of the people who tell researchers they “have no religion” will not, however, define themselves as atheists or agnostics or humanists or secularists. They are indifferent: neither pro-religion nor anti-religion. They simply have no attachment to organised religion, even though large numbers will still reply “Christian” when asked baldly “What is your religion?” in surveys such as the census.

It is a complex phenomenon and it is the NSS’s job to persuade this vast army of “Indifferents” to adopt the values of secularism. And they are becoming a more receptive audience; many of them are already very uneasy about the growing aggressiveness of religious groups in the public arena.

We shall all be the safer and our human rights more secure when religion becomes more a matter for the home and the church, mosque or temple, and religion no longer has a privileged status in public life. A secular democratic state is one where all can be equal and all can have their say with no-one being privileged or disadvantaged because of their beliefs or lack of them.

It is the role of the NSS to encourage these “Indifferents” to stand up for secular values. That’s what we, the NSS, are fighting for. And it is a momentous task we have set ourselves.

Terry Sanderson President



“We would be better off without religion” – official

A capacity audience of more than 2,000 people crowded into Westminster Central Hall (opposite Westminster Abbey) to watch a debate on “We would we be better off without religion”.

The proposers of the motion, Professors Richard Dawkins and A C Grayling and Christopher Hitchens, all NSS honorary associates, were

confident and amusing as well as being persuasive. The opposition apparently rolled out their big guns too: Rabbi Julia Neuberger, philosopher Roger Scruton and classicist Nigel Spivey. But their dull, pre-prepared speeches were no match for the spirited arguments of our champions.

Keith Porteous Wood was even applauded simply for

pressing the opposition to justify religion’s role in the oppression of women. This gives some idea of the mood of the debate.

The proposition was overwhelmingly accepted, but our many supporters’ euphoria was almost tinged with pity for the impossibility of the other side’s task: justifying the unjustifiable.

Women and Islam conference packs out university venue

Women, Islam and the Veil, the conference co-sponsored by the NSS in March, was a great success. Held at the University of London Union, it was packed to the doors with people wanting to hear from exceptionally courageous women standing up for their rights against a controlling and often violent religious establishment.

Speakers included former Secularist of the Year Maryam Namazie, Ann Harrison from Amnesty International, NSS Honorary Associate Taslima Nasreen and Mina Ahadi, Iranian women's activist and founder of the Central Council of Ex-Muslims



Before and after: Central Council of Ex-Muslims' founder Mina Ahadi

in Germany. Renouncing Islam can carry the death penalty in a number of countries and Mina has been subject to endless death threats.

President Terry Sanderson spoke at the end of event: "This has been a superb and exhilarating evening. I cannot say how much admiration I have for these courageous women. I sense that they are at the vanguard of a growing movement and that many of the women of Iran are aching to be freed from the confines of the 'medieval rag' and all it represents."



Maryam Namazie

Secular Medical Forum

The Secular Medical Forum has now been launched to campaign for a secular approach to current major health issues. Dr. Michael Irwin, a retired GP and a former Medical Director of the United Nations, is its first Co-ordinator. Members are naturally not opposed to physicians and nurses holding religious views, but believe these personal opinions must not influence how they care for their patients. As it says in the NSS founding documents: "this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge and human effort should be directed wholly towards its improvement."

In mid-April, the Forum's website was launched at www.secularmedicalforum.org.uk. It has statements on a variety of subjects ranging from abortion to HIV/AIDS, and from the funding of hospital chaplains to physician-assisted suicide.

Membership of the Secular Medical Forum is open to all physicians, nurses, medical students and nursing students in the UK who support its aims.

Secularist of the Year 2007 – make sure you're there!

This year's Secularist of the Year event will be held on **Saturday 20 October** and it promises to be a thoroughly exciting and enjoyable event. Indeed, the presentation of the £5,000 Irwin Prize has become one of the highlights of the NSS's calendar. This year it will be extra special – taking on a distinct European theme. After all, Secularists are citizens of the world, and this year we're going to celebrate that.

Generously sponsored by Dr Michael Irwin, this prize is awarded to the person considered to have made a significant contribution to secularism in the preceding year. There is still time for you to nominate someone – just send their name (with a few words about why you think they should win) to tas@secularism.org.uk or write to NSS Irwin Prize, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

The event itself – a much-enjoyed social occasion – will be held at an exciting new central London location. There will be an aperitif, a three-course (with several choices)

lunch with wine or soft drink and coffee included. After lunch there will be top entertainment, a few surprises and then the announcement of the winner and presentation of the cheque.

Members who have been before describe the event as a wonderfully upbeat occasion – an opportunity to meet other members and honorary associates, and have a truly memorable afternoon. Make sure you don't miss out! Ticket numbers are limited, and we want to ensure NSS members have first opportunity to get them. They cost £45 and you can purchase yours either securely online with a credit card at our shop www.secularism.org.uk, or by sending a cheque to NSS Tickets, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. It has to be first come first served, so please avoid disappointment and book your place for this key date in the secularist calendar.

The lunch is on 20 October, a Saturday at 1pm for 1.30pm, to give those outside London the best possible opportunity to attend.

NSS meets CEHR Chair Trevor Phillips

The NSS was delighted to be invited to meet Trevor Phillips as the Chair of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR).

This new body will inherit the responsibilities of the existing equality commissions: the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. It will also have responsibilities on rights in relation to age, sexual orientation, religion and belief. In addition, it will ensure Unions and organisations such as the Citizen Advice Bureau have the correct training and information to advise people on these rights. The new body will become operational in Autumn 2007.

Vice President Dr Anna Behan and Keith Porteous Wood met Trevor Phillips in an informal but comprehensive round-table discussion. Anna commented: "We were impressed by Trevor Phillips' openness to our concerns and his willingness to start with a clean slate and try some fresh approaches. Mr Phillips and we didn't see quite eye-to-eye on religious schools, but neither did we get the impression that he

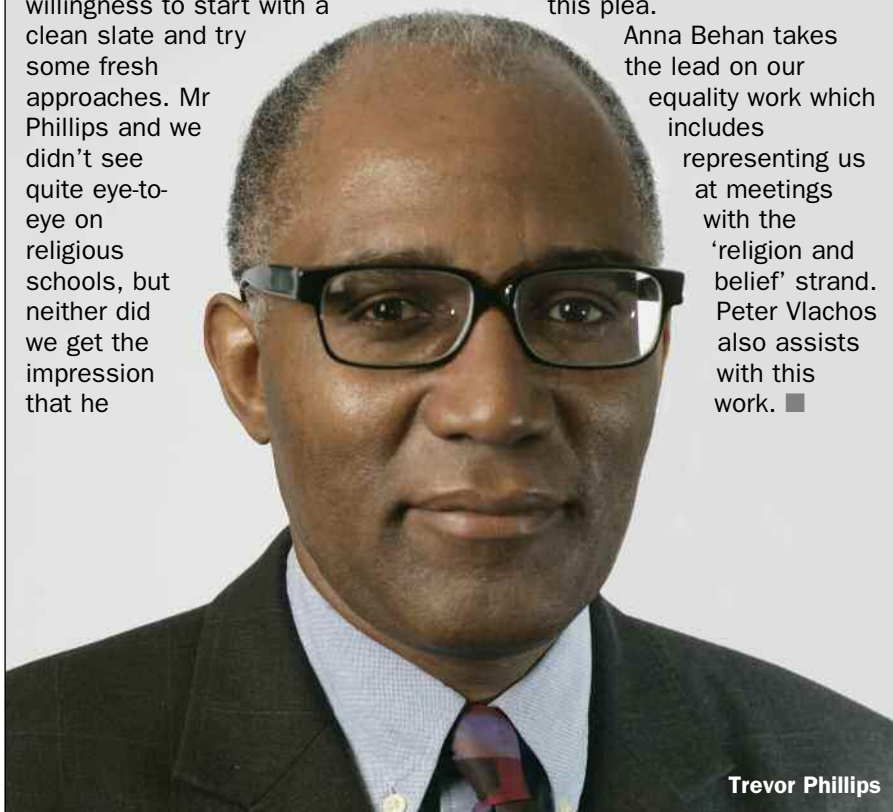
would be inviting an endless procession of religious 'leaders' to his door.

"The current approach shoe-horns together the religious and non-religious in one fundamentally divided strand called 'religion and belief'. We hope a better way can be found to organise equality work, and we are pleased that the CEHR is clearly thinking outside the box."

Keith Porteous Wood had an opportunity to meet some of the CEHR officials at a seminar at which they spoke. He turned a few of the delegates' heads by echoing points he had made at Council of Europe conference that religion was the greatest threat to Human Rights. He emphasised that those not practising religion are in the majority, but do not have hierarchical representation as religions do. It was therefore vital the CEHR seek out the views of this majority, for example using independent research and, if necessary, surveys of individuals. The officials seemed receptive to this plea.

Anna Behan takes the lead on our equality work which includes

representing us at meetings with the 'religion and belief' strand. Peter Vlachos also assists with this work. ■



Trevor Phillips

Join us at the theatre

The Last Priest tells the story of Jean Meslier (1664–1729), a French Catholic priest and author of what is considered to be the first full-blooded atheistic testament. The play had rave reviews during its Edinburgh Festival run and is now in a new extended version. The NSS has negotiated a dedicated performance at the Kings Head Theatre in Islington for our members and supporters, to be followed by a discussion with the actors, writer and producer of the play on Saturday 23 June at 3pm.

Tickets for this extra-special event – with its opportunity to socialise over a complimentary glass of wine with other NSS members – cost £15. We have chosen a Saturday afternoon to make it as accessible as possible to members travelling from outside London.



Jean Meslier

Book with the Kings Head Box Office on 020 7226 1916 and mention the NSS. The theatre is at 115 Upper Street, London N1 1QN. For any other information, please call our office on 020 7404 3126, during business hours only please.

Party conferences

A NSS member is planning to underwrite the cost of and help to staff an NSS stand at the Conservative party conference this year. He is inviting financial contributions or other offers of help. Please contact the office or email admin@secularism.org.uk if you would like to assist.

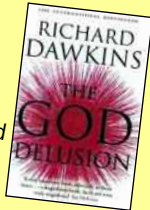
We are open to offers in respect of other party conferences and are happy to provide speakers. Keith Porteous Wood has been invited to be speak at an event at the LibDem conference.

EXCITING NEW BOOKS!

The God Delusion

by Richard Dawkins

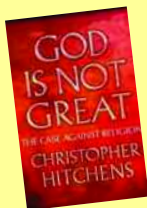
The book that set the world talking is now available in paperback from our shop. *The God Delusion* opened up the religion vs. atheism debate in a new way – it is straightforward, no-nonsense and disregards the unwritten law that says that we shouldn't be disrespectful about religion. But Dawkins' book is not the tirade of abuse described by its many opponents: it is a systematic and reasoned dismemberment of religious ideas. If you haven't read it, you're in for a treat. £8.99 plus £1 p&p



God is not Great – the case against religion

by Christopher Hitchens

The publication of this book, hot on the heels of the *God Delusion*, has just about caused a nervous collapse among the American religious establishment. In the USA its subtitle is "How religion poisons everything" but this seems to have been changed for the apparently more sensitive British market. Hitchens also goes for the very fundamentals of religion and illustrates how all the Abrahamic faiths have fostered murder and oppression. The book is hard-hitting, doesn't dress up its message in opaque language and will have you cheering by the end. £17.99 plus £1 p&p



Buy from our secure online shop at www.secularism.org.uk or by sending a cheque (payable to the NSS) to the address below.

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LOUIS CONSTANDINOS for putting *Newsline* on the web.

ROBERT STOVOLD for programming work on a new membership database.

STEWART WARE in his new role as consultant on all things office-related.

NSS on the Web

You can keep in touch with news and views from the NSS by subscribing to our weekly email newsletter *Newsline* – just visit the website and click on 'Newsline'.

In May we changed the way we send out *Newsline*, so those of you who subscribed but aren't receiving it may need to re-train your email provider's spam filters to not reject it as spam. Visit the website for more details on how to do this. If you are having difficulty in receiving *Newsline*, or it has simply stopped arriving, please let us know.

You can also read both current and back issues of *Newsline* online, published every Friday on the website www.secularism.org.uk (click on 'Newsline').

While there, you can keep up to date with what the international media is saying about secular issues by checking out our What the Papers Say feature. You'll find a daily selection of news, comment and revelations from the press around the world.

Parent Power

The NSS has responded to requests from parents and compiled a Parents' Pack with advice, sample letters and extracts of legislation for those who want to withdraw their schoolchildren from Collective Worship.

We are also receiving an increasing number of requests from parents who have persuaded their children's headteacher to include a secularist among religious speakers who come to the school.

We would like to congratulate them on taking action and remind them to let us know of any reactions.

Both the Pack and speakers can be arranged by contacting the office.

Sutton Group

The Sutton Humanist Group enthusiastically received our past president Denis Cobell talking about NSS campaigning present and future.

Farewell to Council member Nick Pullar

Nick Pullar has resigned from the Society's Council to emigrate to Hungary with his family. Nick was a valued and energetic member of Council who helped organise the Freedom of Expression rally in Trafalgar Square. We wish him the best in his new life.