



## IHEU's 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress in Washington D.C. was a Great Success!

In July, members at the Lit & Phil heard an account of the International Humanist Congress and other associated Humanist meetings which were held in Washington in June from the four NEH members who were present - Jean and Barrie Berkley, Jack Jeffery and Roger McAdam. This is a summary of their contributions.

Unlikely though it might seem, it was in the US that Jean and Barrie discovered Humanism some twenty years ago. In June, they went back to Washington for the 17<sup>th</sup> International Humanist and Ethical Union World Congress. They were representing the North East Humanists, who are Associate Members, and themselves, as individual supporters.

IHEU was founded in 1952 in Amsterdam as an umbrella organisation for the various secular groups around the world. It has more than 3 million members in over 40 countries and is an international NGO with Special Consultative Status at the UN, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The President is a Belgian woman, Sonja Eggerickx, (see photo on page 2) and the First Vice-President is NEH member Jack Jeffery. IHEU's vision is a Humanist world, in which human rights are universally respected and everyone is able to live a life of dignity. Its mission is to build and represent the global Humanist movement.

In Washington, there were 500 participants from over 20 countries. Several other meetings took place around the Congress. The IHEU General Assembly met and the American Humanist Association, the Secular Student Alliance and the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation all held their annual conferences.

The Congress opened on Friday June 6<sup>th</sup> with a series of enlightening and well informed talks, beginning with a session on Human Rights. Roy Brown, a former President of IHEU, who is British, but lives in Geneva, is IHEU's main representative at the UN Human Rights Council. He gave an extremely pessimistic account of the way in which the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which represents 57 Islamic States, had managed, with the support of its allies, including China, Russia and Cuba, to distort the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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### Is Evolution Over?

*Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics at UCL London, is the guest speaker*

**Tuesday November 11th 5.30pm**

*In the Curtis Auditorium (Herschel Building)*

*A public lecture jointly organised with the University of Newcastle, to commemorate the forthcoming 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin.*

*There will be a display of NEH activities in the foyer and all are welcome to have a glass of wine or a soft drink after the talk to celebrate this event.*

Discussion of any aspect of religion would effectively now be banned at the UN Human Rights Council.

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the British National Secular Society, spoke on how he thought IHEU members and organisations should react to this appalling situation. As hard-line religious dogma was being directed at politicians with a much greater intensity, we needed to become much more pro-active and concentrate on consciousness-raising at a high level on the political and diplomatic front.

Other very interesting talks on a wide variety of important topics followed. After lunch, the Congress dealt with Freedom of Conscience as a Fundamental Right.

Maryam Namazie, an Iranian, is the spokesperson for a new organisation - the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. She stressed the need to push religion out of the public sphere, put human beings first and advocate secularism, not neutrality.

Matt Cherry, Chairman of the UN NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, spoke of the Catholics and Muslims ganging up on the non-religious at the UN and the importance of non-religious involvement and freedom of expression. There followed talks on Creationism, Humanism in Norway, Untouchability and Humanist charities. In the evening, awards were made to two US politicians, one for acknowledging his atheism and the other for his work for civil rights and liberties.

On the Saturday, a wide variety of discussion groups were on offer. Jean and Barrie went to a session on bioethical issues, run by the Humanist Center for Bio-Ethics at the UN, which is actively involved in the important issues raised by new developments in this field.

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Later, awards were presented to a young man who had exposed a proselytising teacher at his school, a Judge who had ruled the teaching of Intelligent Design unconstitutional and a prominent woman feminist. In the evening, there were two particularly interesting people honoured. One was planetary scientist Carolyn Porco, who is leader of the imaging science team for the Cassini space mission to Saturn. The other was Philip Pullman, the British author of 'His Dark Materials'.

The final day of the Congress included an address by Christopher Hitchens, author of "God is not Great", who was a compelling speaker, extremely critical of religions and their malign influence.

The Congress was very well organised by the American Humanist Association and was a most illuminating and enjoyable occasion. The next World Congress, on the theme of Humanism and Peace will be held in Norway in 2011 and this could provide the opportunity for more NEH members to attend.



### **IHEU General Assembly**

IHEU arranges a General Assembly every year, the location depends on what other events are taking place at a similar time. This year it was held on the day before the World Humanist Conference and on the afternoon afterwards. Participants included the EC of IHEU, IHEU staff members and consultants, delegates from Member Organisations, and individual members of IHEU. There were 87 present for this meeting.

The total income from member organisations, and from a relatively small number of individual members, has a major impact on the number of staff that can be employed by IHEU. At present, there are 6 paid staff and consultants. These are two part-time administrators in London, the editor of the International Humanist News, and three full time representatives in the field located in India, East and West Africa. The webmaster is an unpaid volunteer. The wide range of activities undertaken by IHEU can only be accomplished through the additional dedicated time and effort put in by individual committee members and by volunteer delegates to important international bodies such as the UN in Geneva and New York, UNESCO in Paris and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

NEH members' involvement with IHEU's activities is quite significant. In Washington, Jack Jeffery was elected as the First Vice President. He is a member of three Committees – the EC, Finance and Audit, and he is a Trustee of the International Humanist Trust. Barrie is a member of the Growth and Development Committee with a particular interest in African projects.

As mentioned above, the dues paid by member organisations limit the number of paid staff. There are no funds available from this source to provide grants for the many worthwhile projects identified by IHEU. It is necessary for IHEU to appeal for project funding to its member organisations and to individuals. This is usually through the International Humanist News where there was a recent appeal to 'Adopt a Dalit (Untouchables) Village'. Projects are also to be promoted through the IHEU website.

Two very welcome sources of project funding come from the Netherlands and from Norway. The governments of each of these countries treats the Humanist life stance as being equivalent to a religion and provides Humanist organisations with money for charitable purposes on a similar basis as for religious organisations. Funds from the HIVOS organisation in the Netherlands have been provided annually to IHEU and the Grants Committee has been able to give 8-10 grants a year of up to 10,000 Euros (about £7,500) each. In fact, the Isaac Newton School that we are supporting was able to get a grant from this source to build a much needed Science Laboratory.

The Norwegian Humanists provide their charitable grants through a separate organisation known as HAMU. They have their own representatives who travel to Third World countries and recommend to their board projects which they consider merit support.

With a worldwide remit and limited manpower and financial resources, IHEU must decide priorities for its activities. For this purpose the EC prepares a detailed Strategy Plan for the next 5 years and this is circulated ahead of the General Assembly so that delegates have the opportunity to review it and be in a position to ask questions if they wish before it is formally adopted. Africa and India have been given priority in the IHEU's Development Programme.

At the Congress, Babu Gogineni gave a very instructive account of his work among the Dalits (Untouchables) in India and at the NEH July meeting Jack Jeffery spoke about his visit with Babu to India in January this year. Jack was very impressed with the work he saw being carried out and the people he met.

The two African IHEU representatives were not granted visas to enter the U.S.A. and so were not able to speak at the General Assembly about their work. Barrie was asked to present their reports. He also spoke about IHEU's work in Africa at the NEH July meeting.

Also at our July meeting, Roger McAdam gave his impressions of the 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress and spoke of his particular interest in a secular association, Self Management and Recovery Training (S.M.A.R.T), for helping alcoholics and those with other dependencies, which he had learned about at the Congress and is hoping to promote in our region of the U.K.

All four NEH participants in these IHEU Washington meetings felt that this had been a very worthwhile and quite uplifting experience.

## **East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group (EAASSG) – Common Ground**

**In September, Chris Carroll, Project Development Manager, spoke eloquently about the plight of Asylum Seekers in the UK and the ways in which EAASSG is able to help those in East Newcastle. A number of NEH members are involved and EAASSG is our 2008 charity. Chris has written this summary of her talk.**

The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees (Geneva Convention) defines a refugee as:

A person is a refugee where, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, that person is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to return to it and is not excluded from the protection of the Geneva Convention.

Arrival in the UK does not guarantee refugee status. The process is long and complicated. During the process, the person is an asylum seeker. Around 80% of applications for asylum are refused.

Common Ground is what it says. Firstly it is a place of welcome where everyone who comes through the door is offered equal dignity and respect. There are no labels in Common Ground.

The ethos of Common Ground is to work with people rather than to deal with cases. When they arrive an asylum seeker is given a series of numbers: a port reference number, a Home Office number, a Border and Immigration Agency number, a number for their appeal. These may be necessary but too often that's all an asylum seeker is – a number. At Common Ground we meet people, real people, human beings.

People have left all they know – home, career, family, friends, in order to find safety. As well as struggling through complex legal structures, coping with another language and culture, people also carry within themselves an immense sense of loss.

In Common Ground we support an individual throughout the process of seeking asylum and beyond. We assist those granted refugee status to integrate into UK life and culture and, sadly, we also support in whatever way we can those whose application for asylum has been refused.

A major area of our work is offering support to those who are destitute. When a person's claim for asylum has finally been determined as negative he or she is expected to make arrangements to leave the UK. They are evicted from their accommodation. Their weekly allowance of around £42 a week is stopped. Yet many people, despite the opinion of the Home Office and the Immigration judge, have a genuine fear of being returned to their country of origin. They would rather live in poverty and destitution in this country than risk persecution or death in their home country. Such people have been described as 'bed-hoppers', spending each night with a different friend.

At Common Ground we are currently supporting over 50 people who are in this situation. We are able to offer a weekly payment of £10, a pack of some basic food and a few toiletries. We rely heavily on donations to sustain our 'hardship' fund.

It is not possible to get alongside one another, to share hopes, dreams, disappointments, loss and pain and not be challenged and changed in some way.

Perhaps if some of the policy makers and Home Office officials could be enabled to see people, rather than case numbers, life would be easier for those who live with a "well-founded fear".

N.B. After Chris' talk, £134 was raised for EAASSG and members had donated two shopping trolleys full of goods.

If you would like to help or find out more, ring 0191 262 2522 or look up [www.eaassg.org.uk](http://www.eaassg.org.uk)

## Isaac Newton High School

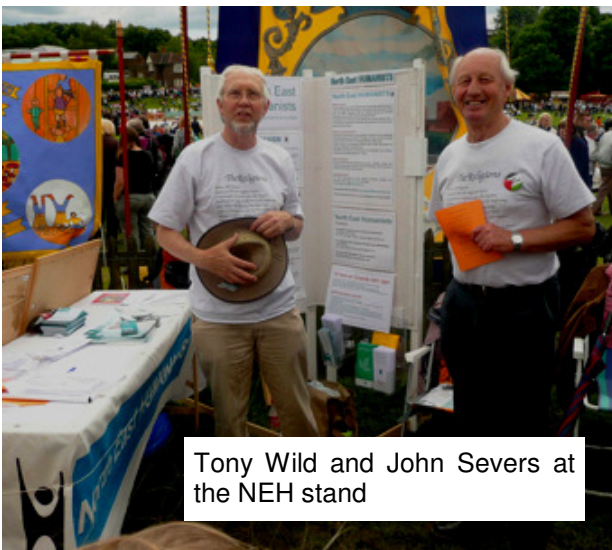
Through the generosity of NEH members, we have been able to send a second donation to the school to support orphans and other disadvantaged children at the Humanist secondary school near Masaka in Uganda. This grant of £1200 enables 10 children to be provided with tuition and a school uniform for one year.

With the £1440 sent in February, the total sum we have sent this year is £2640. This supports 22 children out of the 133 registered at the school. We are in regular email contact with the project manager who provides us with information about the progress of the school. He has expressed his appreciation for our continuing support over a period of three years.

## Durham Miners Gala

Roger McAdam reported that the weather held fine for a good day on Saturday July 12th for North East Humanists at the Durham Miners Gala. There was a lot of interest in what Humanists really are and in what we do as North East Humanists.

There were four of us at our stand – John Severs, Tony Wild, Pam Boito and Roger McAdam – and we took email contacts from fourteen visitors to follow up and sold 4 copies of our 'Beliefs, Values and Actions'.



Tony Wild and John Severs at the NEH stand

## Hundred Club

Our members' lottery, the Hundred Club, resumed in September. The draw takes place once a month at the start of our meetings at the Lit & Phil. Winners are always notified directly but we thought you would like to share in their joy at winning by keeping an eye on this list.

**September: REG WALTON**

## Garden Party

Derek and Barbara Cattell were our hosts at this year's Garden Party which was held in their delightful walled garden near Bishop Auckland. Fifty one members and friends enjoyed the party on a sunny Saturday afternoon on August 16<sup>th</sup>.

A total of £153.70 was raised for NEH funds from a raffle and a successful bring and buy sale.



NEH members at the August Garden Party

## Induction Courses - Can you help?

As some of you will know, we are planning to hold Induction Courses on Humanism for new members and other members who feel that they would like to understand more about what is involved in adopting a Humanist lifestance.

If you think that you would like to help with developing and running these courses and you have not previously been in touch, please contact Jean Berkley on 01434 632 936

or email [jeanbkly@aol.com](mailto:jeanbkly@aol.com)

## Teesside Meeting

The Teesside members met together at Masquerade, a cafe run by Stuart Wilson in Marske by the Sea, on Monday 18th August. The venue was ideal as several members who live in East Cleveland do not drive. 24 people attended.

A presentation offered by John Severs on The Levellers was thoroughly enjoyed. The cafe is run entirely for Wateraid and £70 was raised for the charity at this event.

It was felt that we could meet there again and perhaps alternate free discussion of topics chosen at the time with more structured meetings when a particular presentation or talk is given. Tyneside Humanists would be willing to help with this and Celia McEwan will arrange a further gathering in early October when a general discussion can be had to decide what would be a welcome next topic.

## SUGGESTIONS SOUGHT FOR CHARITY OF THE YEAR 2009

The Fundraising & Social Projects Group would welcome your suggestions for next year's charity. The NEH is proud of the work that it does each year in support of a local charity which not only helps people in need but ensures that we receive public recognition as a local group doing good. If you would like to nominate a cause that is dear to your heart please contact Chris Haine on 01670 861871 or e-mail him at [Chris.Haine@Phonecoop.coop](mailto:Chris.Haine@Phonecoop.coop)

## Forthcoming Meetings

### Tyneside Humanist Group

Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at **The Literary and Philosophical Society**, ('Lit & Phil') 23 Westgate Road, Newcastle.

Tea/coffee is available at 6.45 pm for a 7.15 pm start.

**We are now able to remain at the Lit and Phil until 9.30pm which allows us more time for discussion and informal conversation**

#### November 20th

#### "A Philosophy for the 21st Century"

Professor Willie Thompson, NEH member

#### December 18th

#### "Topics from a Hat"

Member's written suggestions will be drawn out for discussion.

Light refreshments will be served.

### Teesside Humanist Group

For information on meetings and social events please contact: CHARLIE McEWAN Tel. 01642 817541

### Cumbria Humanist Group

Meetings commence at 7.30 pm on the third Wednesday of each month, in Carlisle (Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road) or Penrith (Eden Rural Foyer).

#### 19 November 2008 : Members' Soapbox.

Short talks by members – topics to be notified – each followed by discussion. (Carlisle)

#### 3 December 2008 : Annual Buffet / Dinner at The Black Lion, Durdar, Carlisle

#### 21 January 2009 : Annual General Meeting (Penrith)

For further information, please contact Chris Allen on 01228 810592

or see Website: [www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk](http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk)

### Ceremonies - For information about Humanist

Wedding, Baby Naming, Affirmation and Funeral Ceremonies, please contact our secretary John Hodge on 0191 281 2808

or email [johnhodge@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:johnhodge@blueyonder.co.uk)

## Social Diary

### Make a note of these events!

#### FIRST TUESDAY DINING CLUB

Dates and venues for the next 3 months:

**6 pm Tuesday 4 November MORPETH**  
**Black Door Bar & Dining Room,**  
Bridge Street, NE61 1PQ

**6pm Tuesday 2 December WASHINGTON Arts Centre**  
**Courtyard Bar,** Biddick Lane, Fatfield, NE38 8AB

**6pm Tuesday 6 January NEWCASTLE**  
**No1 Chinese Buffet,** 41 Stowell Street, NE1 4XQ

If you would like to join us on any of these evenings please ring **Chris or Barbara Haine on 01670 861871** to reserve a place. There is no need to pre-pay - we all settle our own bills and the evenings are very informal and friendly. Join us!

#### QUIZ NIGHT AND BUFFET SUPPER

A date for your diary: Quiz Night and Buffet Supper on **Friday 21 November** at the **Bridge Hotel** in Newcastle.

This is our annual fund raising evening for our "charity of the year" Common Ground.

Please see the accompanying invitation and booking form.

#### RAFFLE PRIZES

The monthly raffle draw at our meetings at the Lit and Phil contribute a not-insignificant amount to NEH funds over the course of a year, and add a certain frisson to proceedings.

Offers of raffle prizes are always sought and if you can ever spare a bottle of wine, box of chocolates or something much more imaginative, please pass them on to Chris Haine or John Hodge.

### *Have your say.....*

We welcome letters for publication of around 150-200 words; also longer articles by arrangement with the new editor:

Margaret Jones  
5 Albany Mews, Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE3 4JW 0191 213 1013

email: [daisy2502@talktalk.net](mailto:daisy2502@talktalk.net)

The deadline for receipt of material for the next newsletter is 29th December

**DISCLAIMER:** The views expressed in articles and letters are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the North East Humanists.

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