



Development of Active Humanism in Uganda by Roger McAdam

Earlier in the year I reported on my visit to Ugandan Humanists in February.

I went back for two and a half weeks in August on behalf of IHEU together with Jack Jeffery, primarily to offer some assistance in preparing budgets and business plans for the three humanist secondary schools.

North East Humanists have had a close connection with the Isaac Newton School and our continuing support through bursaries for students from poor families has been acknowledged by Peter Kisirinya – manager and inspiration for the school – as a significant contribution over the last four years. Contributions via the 'New Humanist' have also gone to the Mustard Seed School and the 'Humanist Schools' Trust' has provided bursaries at the Humanist Academy. Other funding has come from IHEU and from Norwegian, Dutch and Italian Humanists.

The schools have visions of providing good secular secondary education for local disadvantaged young people. They also envisage a future where they'd attract fee paying students from more prosperous families who would otherwise be educated in one of the many 'faith-financed' schools. Each school has a strong ethos despite many practical shortcomings like lack of water or electricity supply, and it's uplifting to participate in school activities with active and articulate young people who relish the opportunity they have to be educated. They consider issues critically and creatively and their contributions in English – which is not the language of their domestic usage – compare very well with debates we've attended in secondary schools here.

We had to address what's needed for continuing development. Given the dependence for each school for the foreseeable future to rely on charitable funding, it's necessary to ensure their legal status enables overseas charitable organisations to provide funding within Charity Commissioners' rules. That's being resolved currently in Uganda, supported by a UK lawyer from the Humanist Schools Trust. Another issue has been that the Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Schools operate on a leasehold basis relying on the goodwill of landowners. Investment in their capital development requires that the title of the land be secured. Through IHEU we've raised £10,000 to enable the two school managers concerned to buy the freehold of their plots as soon as possible.

Essential immediate requirements are provision of basic hygiene facilities – water, sanitation, electricity and perimeter fencing. To obtain water for the Humanist Academy – situated on a commanding hill top – a local man on foot makes the twenty minutes steep ascent carrying a five gallons jerrycan of water. Fetching water for domestic use is part of the daily round of duties that rural Ugandans accept and it's a task for the youngest in the family, often walking more than a mile to a water source. There are local solutions at each school for water, power and sanitation and we've identified a total of £25,000 to provide these, together with secure fencing.



Each school has its own priorities. The Humanist Academy requires boarding facilities for students and for teachers, and the Isaac Newton School needs boarding facilities for female students who have far to walk to get to school. The Mustard Seed School is in a more densely populated area and has no current boarding needs. We've drawn up the capital needs for each school to offer secondary education to 'O' and 'A' Levels with an annual intake of eighty students. As fellow Humanists, we see our role as co-ordinating international sources of future funding to work towards that end.

Additionally in August I attended workshops with two of the UHESWO women's groups which have grown since my February visit. There were more women victims of prostitution training in tailoring skills and offering mutual support. There were more women students from Makerere University offering 'listening' support to other students – including using a dedicated mobile phone. We also had a real celebration when we shared in a full Humanist ceremony – probably Uganda's first – when we named five young people, children of humanists.

The energy and commitment of Humanists in Uganda is an inspiration for those of us like Barrie, Jean, Jack and myself, who've spent time there. If Humanism means anything in practical terms, then these active projects in Uganda are a wonderful illustration.

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World Population Growth

In November Professor Colin Gallagher, a former NEH Chair, spoke to a well-attended meeting at the Lit and Phil. His talk generated much discussion, and as he had predicted, the topic proved to be somewhat controversial.

Introduction

Since we invented agriculture 20,000 years ago, the human population on the planet has been doubling every 40 to 50 years. In CE 1 it was a modest 0.25 billion, and by 1800 it had grown to 1 billion. Since then it has grown rapidly to a staggering 6.8 billion, and is forecast to increase to 9.15 billion by 2050. This is in contrast to all other species on the planet, which, while their populations fluctuate significantly, have not continuously and inexorably grown.

This rapid growth will be unsustainable. We will run out of resources and in particular, food, and water. In spite of the belief of many to the contrary, the laws of science do also apply impartially to the human species. At the same time, we are rapidly destabilising our climate and destroying the natural world on which we depend for future life. (*Jonathon Porritt March 4, 2009*). In regions of rapid population growth such as Africa, it explains why despite our best efforts, we are unable to eradicate poverty and starvation. Such growth is also often the real underlying provocation for national and international conflicts. For example, the Nile which flows through Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt is already depleted. Yet by 2050, their populations will have doubled. Similar situations are poised to erupt in other parts of the globe, such as the Middle East. Only the basic issues are described here, to enable people to come to their own conclusions.

Why is controlling population growth such a controversial subject?

It is one the least amenable to logic, for a number of good reasons. It is concerned with our most basic biological instincts of family, reproduction, and kinship. Sex and reproduction, it is assumed, should be only of private concern. It is tied up with issues of masculinity, and male-female power and control. In recent history, it is associated with 1930s ideas of eugenics, racial superiority, and with Nazi euthanasia. Roman Catholics hold that reproduction is a sacred issue, and should never be interfered with by man. In many countries, it is associated with issues of immigration and racism. Finally, on the international stage, it is concerned with the politics of size, world status, and national image. For all these reasons, most people, and in particular the press and politicians, avoid any discussion of the subject. It is seen as dangerous, and offensive to their readership or electorate.

North-South Population Impact

As we reach 2050, the combined population of the European Union, Eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus is projected to decrease slightly. In contrast, the populations of Western Asia and Africa will more than double, from 0.8 to 1.8 billion. But a single child born into a wealthy Northern family will do as much damage to the planet's environment in their lifetime as up to 200 poor children from a village in Bangladesh.

What about the UK?

UK population is now 60 million, and is forecast to grow to 72 million, by 2050. Compared to other developed countries we have a very high population density. We have more than three times the number of people per square kilometre, compared to the EU, and more than ten times the number in the USA. Our population explosion principally happened in the 19th Century during industrialization. Yet UK population has almost doubled since I was born in 1938, with all the political and economic implications for roads, schools, health service provision, and social cohesion.

Religious views on population and family size

Most religions (excepting Roman Catholicism) are not antagonistic to the control of family size. Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity mostly are sympathetic (*see notes*). Total Fertility Rates in Iran, Turkey, and Brazil, have all fallen between 1950 and 2010, from around 7% to 2%.

Family planning services in the developing world

This is a story of unimaginable suffering in the developing world. More than 600,000 women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth. And it is a story that is silenced, 'by the insulating layers of censorship and embarrassment that still surround the issues of sex, blood, and birth in most societies of the world' (*Peter Adamson, UNICEF*). The first and most obvious step towards reducing this mortality toll is to make quality family planning services available to all who need them. It is now possible to do this in ways that are acceptable to all countries and cultures.

World Population Growth *continued*

The costs of meeting only the existing demand for family planning are almost derisory, yet they receive less than 2% of all developing world government health spending and international aid. 'Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race'. (*Unicef 1992*)

World Poverty 1960 to 2050

Despite all of the 'development' over the past 50 years, it is estimated that 50% of the world population is still in significant poverty, and this will continue. This is because between 1960 and 2050 our numbers will have trebled from 3 billion to 9 billion (UN prediction).

Strategies to curb world population increase

The empowerment of women in the developing world

This must involve improved education, better health services, later marriages, and the confrontation of cultural attitudes against women.

The widespread provision of family planning services.

More than a quarter of all pregnancies worldwide are unwanted.

Improved economic development

In the developing world, this must involve more employment opportunities, the reduction of poverty, more equal income distribution.

Coercion

Coercive population control is immoral, unethical, and unacceptable. These tactics used by some governments (e.g. China) have unfortunately undercut support for legitimate international family planning programs.

Conclusions

1. World population is a major problem.
2. There will eventually be a big dangerous price to pay.
3. There are acceptable effective non-coercive solutions for population reduction.
4. The principal strategy lies with the education and empowerment of women.
5. Family planning could bring more benefits to more people for a very small cost, than any other single technology now available.
6. It is a myth that any concern about human numbers on a finite planet must be coercive.
7. The reduction of per person consumption will not be enough to stop global environmental damage (or, we will see significant world poverty).

Notes

The Dalai Lama, "Forum 2000" Conference, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997

Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi, Public Population Reference Bureau. (Iran)

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Accepting the Planned Parenthood Federation Margaret Sanger Award 1966

Commentary: A failure of imagination By Peter Adamson of UNICEF at <http://www.unicef.org/pon96/womfail.htm#Peter> 1996

The **Optimum Population Trust** campaigns for stabilisation and gradual population decrease globally and in the UK. www.optimumpopulation.org/

Some supporters are Sir David Attenborough, Jonathon Porritt, and James Lovelock.

A copy of the PowerPoint presentation which accompanied the talk is available from colin@colingallagher.plus.com

The Case for Vegetarianism

In October Professor Brian Newbould from the Vegetarian Society put a well reasoned and, to many, a convincing Case for Vegetarianism. His talk gave rise to a thoughtful discussion.

Meat-eating is, for many of us, a pleasurable activity. Confronted by meat on the plate, we do not think of the creature grazing or gambolling or pecking in its pasture, if it was lucky enough to inhabit a pasture. Nor do we view the cut in front of us as a portion of decomposing corpse. Least of all do we visualise, as the fork goes into the mouth, the process by which the living creature became a lifeless carcass. Yes, man, who claims superiority over the animal kingdom on grounds of supposed intellectual primacy and a unique capacity for moral thought, can only consume his 'inferior' fellow-creatures by suppressing those very faculties – intellect and ethical awareness – on the strength of which he claimed that superiority. Perhaps there is an argument here for compulsory school visits to an abattoir, so that all of us are better able to exercise those superior intellectual and ethical attributes.

As Sir Paul McCartney has said, "If slaughter-houses had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian." But if you think vegetarianism means self-denial, think of the positive benefits. We will enjoy better health, will exercise our human capacity for compassion, we will be living in harmony with our physiology, and will be doing the planet a favour. An excellent vegetarian restaurant chain which operates in Canadian cities claims that 90% of its clientele comprises non-vegetarians who enjoy what it offers. They go to practise self-denial? Hardly. But as for the 10% who are convinced vegetarians, what makes them so? Read on.

Think of the numerous surveys published this year, pointing to newly-discovered virtues in certain vegetables and advising reductions in the consumption of meat. Cancer of lung, bowel, liver and oesophagus can all be reduced by eating less beef, lamb, pork, sausages, ham and bacon. So why did meat ever have a good press? Because it gave us iron, B12, and proteins galore? We do not need meat for protein; and even meat-eaters get 90% of their iron from vegetable sources. Both veggies and vegans easily find their B12 elsewhere. Meat *is* rich in cholesterol: but that's not exactly good news.

If it were necessary to kill animals for food, moral objections to doing so might be over-ridden. But if meat is not merely unnecessary but risky too, then, as Leo Tolstoy observed, man is taking animal life merely for the sake of his appetite, and "to act so is immoral".

If instead of delegating the nasty business of slaughtering, we had to conduct the process of slaughter ourselves, would we not be moved by human compassion to think again?

Consider matters of physiology. The teeth, claws and stomach acid of the plant-eating animals differ in design from those of the meat-eaters. Those of humans match those of the plant-eaters. But most significant of all is the fact that the intestinal tract of the vegetarian animals is six times the body length, while that of the meat-eating animals is only three times the body length, allowing decaying meat to pass out of the body quickly. The human intestinal tract is six times the body length, like that of the vegetarian animals. In other words, you and I are designer-veggie. Why abuse our bodies?

Albert Einstein warned, nearly a century ago, that "Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances of survival for life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet". Science has since only added force to his prophecy. We now know that the fossil fuel required to produce a calorie's worth of beef is 12 times that required to make a calorie's worth of grain. Cattle are also a huge source of methane. Then there is the matter of water. The current global water shortage is a matter of almost weekly news. We are warned that by 2025 two-thirds of the world population will live in water-stressed countries. It doesn't help that populations relentlessly increase. So it is of topical relevance that a kilogram of beef has a water footprint of 4,226.8 gallons (19,215 litres). DEFRA recently placed adverts in the national press urging car-owners to wash their vehicles with a bucket and sponge rather than a hose, which consumes 16 litres a minute. I have asked the Minister for Environment whether his Department will follow that up with a press campaign urging us to deny ourselves an 8oz steak tonight and save 4,521 litres of water. Will he agree? Don't count your chick-peas. But do think about the power of the trade lobbies.

With continuing population growth forecast, can the planet honestly afford to consume its water resources and spread pollution at the present rate, when we can significantly reduce the rate by a means beneficial to the human condition and to our humanity?

This is a very brief summary of a carefully crafted talk, the full text of which Jean Berkley will be happy to send on request.

E mail Jeanbkly@aol.com

NEH News in Brief

Thanks to Margaret Jones

Margaret Jones is standing down as newsletter editor. Thanks to her for all her hard work over the past couple of years from the NEH Committee.

Diane Jones will take over the role of newsletter editor.

NEH Members Speak

In November, for the second year running, Roger McAdam and John Hodge addressed second year theological students at St John's College, Durham on the nature of Humanism. This was a stimulating occasion with a robust exchange of beliefs and views.

Also in November, NEH were represented at an information event held at the RVI at the start of the Newcastle Inter Faith Week.

Annual NEH Quiz

DEREK TRIUMPHS AGAIN !

Friday 20th November took the annual NEH Quiz back to Newcastle's Bridge Hotel.

Kate Wild set the ISLANDS theme and tried to trip up the team led by Derek Cattell, who made a clean sweep in the August photo competition. An early lead was taken by one of the Recyke y' Bike teams, who clearly scented victory. But the foxy cunning of the master prize hunter was not daunted, and the last lap saw his team of Barbara Cattell, Jean Tustin and Chris Butler nose clear of the pack. Peter from Recyke y' Bike gave out the prizes but, whilst being happy to kiss Barbara and Jean in their moment of triumph, he drew the line at Derek (and Chris).

Who can stop this man?

NEH Committee Member Profile

Peter Latham

Peter retired in 1997 after a long career in languages and teaching and pastoral care at Newcastle College. He had a very high profile in the lecturer's union representing staff in national negotiations, and he was actively involved in a number of committees. Since then he has pursued his passion for changing the world by helping to run the Wallsend People's Centre, working with asylum seekers and other local projects. He is a Francophile. He cycles and goes to the gym whilst wishing he could adopt Oscar Wilde's approach "Whenever I feel like taking violent exercise I lie down until the feeling passes." Married to Judith, a former Greenham Common supporter, they have one daughter, Jo. Peter would love to have dinner with Mandela, Bob Dylan, Karl Marx and Oscar Wilde.

Peter is a member of the North East Humanist Executive committee and takes the minutes. He also represents Humanists on the North Tyneside SACRE and is the Humanist Chaplain at South Tyneside College.



BHA News snippets

New Chief Executive

Andrew Copson

Andrew became BHA Chief Executive in January 2010 after five years coordinating the BHA's education and public affairs work.

He has written on humanist and secularist issues for The Guardian and New Statesman as well as various journals and is a director of the European Humanist Federation as well as a delegate of the International Humanist and Ethical Union to the Council of Europe.

BHA responds to government appointment of new 'faith advisers.'

6th January 2010

"The British Humanist Association is disappointed to learn that the Department for Communities and Local Government has appointed 13 'faith advisers' to advise the government department on "the big issues facing society such as the economy, parenting, achieving social justice and tackling climate change."

"Life is not presented by Humanism as something for our judgement, something finished, take it or leave it. It is presented as raw material for our creative use, a task for our responsible undertaking."

Harold J. Blackman 1903 - 2009

Architect of International Humanism, Founder of the BHA

Forthcoming Meetings Tyneside Humanist Group

The meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at the 'Lit and Phil'

Tea/coffee and general conversation is available from 6.45pm, with the main meeting beginning at 7.15pm.

January 21st *Face to Face*

An evening of discussion in small groups on selected topics

February 18th *Hidden Chains - the Slavery Business and North East England* John Charlton

March 18th *Annual General Meeting*

An opportunity to learn about what the group has been doing in the past year and to discuss future plans

April 15th

From Epicurus to Grayling: a History of Humanism

John Severs, NEH member

(This meeting will be held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham)

Teesside Humanist Group

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

Cumbria Humanist Group

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

January 20th Annual General Meeting (Penrith)

February 17th *The Rev Bert Thomas* (Carlisle) Chair of the Cumbria SACRE.

March 17th *Dan Bye* (Carlisle) Member of NSS Council and Freethinker publishing board.

For further information, please contact Chris Allen on 01228 810592

Reports of the Meetings of the Cumbria Humanist Group can be found on their website:

www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk

Ceremonies

For information about Humanist Wedding, Baby Naming, Affirmation and Funeral Ceremonies, please contact our secretary Les Milne on 0191 482 0464 or email leslie.milne@virgin.net

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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Social Diary

2010 NEW YEAR PARTY

Due to weather conditions, the New Year's Party arranged for 9 January was postponed. The party will now be held on **Sunday 21st February**

Members who booked a place for the original party need not re-apply and will be contacted nearer to 21st February. Other members who may now be free to come to the party can obtain details from Grace Hodge 0191 281 2808 or e-mail johnhodge@blueyonder.co.uk

NEH CHARITY OF THE YEAR 2010

Your chance to choose ...

Members are invited to send in suggestions for the NEH's charity of the year 2010. As we already support an overseas charity - the Isaac Newton School - your choice should be a UK-based charity.

Please send your proposal with a short description of the work the charity does to:

Tony Wild, 18 Eston Grove, Fulwell, Sunderland SR5 1QB email: t.wild652@btinternet.com

The closing date is 11 March and voting will take place at the AGM on 18 March.

Hundred Club Winners

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|------------------|----------------|-----------|
| September | Alison Munkley | Number 5 |
| October | John Hodge | Number 79 |
| November | Eric Morgan | Number 4 |
| December | Robert Brindle | Number 33 |

Have your say.....

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

Diane Jones 0191 272 1929
email: diane@dianjo.co.uk

The deadline for receipt of material for the next newsletter is **21st March**

Newsletter - Contributor Guidelines

We now have guidelines for contributors which give more detail on word counts for articles and deadlines for submission.

Please ask Diane for a copy if you would like to contribute

Visit our website for more information
www.northeast.humanists.net