

challenging religious privilege

national secular society

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006

FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT TORINO

JUNE 2007

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We are pleased to submit our report. This has been a successful year for the Society in campaigning, publicity, membership growth. A short selection of highlights follows:

The Society took an active part in several high profile events:

- Council of Europe (Committee on Culture, Science and Education) – Our Executive Director chaired one of the sessions on Freedom of Expression and Respect for Religious Beliefs at the French Senate building in Paris. The Council later decided: “The Assembly is of the opinion that freedom of expression as protected under Article 10 the European Convention on Human Rights should not be further restricted to meet increasing sensitivities of certain religious groups.”
- Church and State – a review of the establishment of the Church of England by University College London. Attended by constitutional experts from Parliament and academe, top officials from the Church and a representative of the Prime Minister. Our report was well regarded and is being included in a book to be published shortly <http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/3544b643b909e39315452680.pdf>
- Religious Education - at Windsor Castle where we publicly challenged the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education on the betrayal of non-religious children in the teaching of philosophy and ethics.
- Freedom of expression – addressed a rally in London’s Trafalgar Square

Our key work has been in Parliament

- The UK Government tried for five years, under pressure from Muslim leaders, to outlaw religious hatred with provisions that seriously impeded freedom of speech. The provisions were passed in 2006 but to the Government astonishment it was forced – by one vote - to drop the impediments to freedom of speech. The NSS played a major part in the parliamentary campaign and was the only organisation to oppose the provisions consistently for the whole five years.
- We were successful in initiating the insertion of a clause in an education bill giving older children the right to opt themselves out of school worship. Previously this required a parental request. The Government initially refused our request but backed down when we enlisted Human Rights expert help.
- We uncovered an education bill amendment being moved clandestinely at the behest of the bishops in the House of Lords to dismantle employment protection for non-religious school staff. We alerted the unions and proposed a reversing amendment which provoked a furious debate in both Houses of Parliament. The Government was severely embarrassed but used its huge majority to force the measures through.

We continue to award an approx €7,000 annual prize for *Secularist of the Year* at a high profile event which received television coverage. Our Concordat Watch website is being continually upgraded and its new URL is www.concordatwatch.eu

KPW Jun 07

Honorary Associates: Graham Allen MP Robert Marshall-Andrews QC MP Prof. Peter Atkins Iain Banks Lorraine Barrett AM Edward Bond Michael Cashman MEP Colin Challen MP Nick Cohen Prof. Richard Dawkins Lord Desai 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 Baroness Massey of Darwen Lord McIntosh of Haringey Jonathan Meades George Melly Sir Jonathan Miller Taslima Nasrin Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan Lord Peston Harold Pinter Philip Pullman Lord Raglan Claire Rayner Martin Rowson Joan Ruddock MP Joan Smith Dr. David Starkey Lord Taverne QC Polly Toynbee Baroness Turner of Camden Gore Vidal Prof. Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC