

March is not human rights, but old fashioned trust and a sense of duty which we acquire Kantian-fashion from inner knowledge nurtured in the family. 'Without competent and committed persons and institutions, duties simply won't be met; and if they are not met, rights won't be respected; and if rights are not respected democracy won't be achievable'.

Onora O'Neill reserved her most withering comments for the human rights movement itself. As she retorted to a question from Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner of the NIHR: 'I think the human rights movement is in danger of undermining the very things that are most important to it by irresponsibly 'magicking' supposed rights out of the air. And of course, as for declarations we all know a proclamation justifies nothing. One could proclaim just anything'.

But to embattled UN outposts it is the support of campaigners and proclaimers which is most needed. This was one of the key points in Mrs Robinson's address to another Conference in Belfast earlier the same day. The British Council's international economic and social rights conference at the Belfast Hilton, innocently entitled 'Beyond the Rhetoric' coincided fittingly with publication of the Concluding Observations on the UK's fourth periodic report by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

It is no coincidence that the Hilton conference endorsed the Committee's concerns about shortcomings in UK government's economic, social and culture policies, including the observation in Paragraph 30 that 'The Committee strongly recommends the inclusion of effective protection for economic, social and cultural rights, consistent with the provisions of the Covenant in any Bill of Rights enacted for Northern Ireland.'

Though one suspects that this is the kind of rhetoric that Reith lecturer O'Neill had in mind, such aspirations must surely be preferable to the unspeakable things done here in the name of duty in the past. ♦

Anarchist goes to Heaven

Brian Moore

John McGuffin died at the end of April, a couple of days short of his 60th birthday. And so his funeral took place on May Day. It was a most appropriate date for his family, friends and comrades to pay their last respects to him for John was a lifelong anarchist.

His coffin, draped with the anarchist flag of red and black, was carried into Roselawn crematorium and friends such as Fr. Des Wilson, Bernadette McAliskey, Eamon McCann and Joe Quigley paid their respects and said their farewells. Most had known John as a student at Queen's during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement and even then he was noted for his extremism. He came from an irreproachable Protestant background but he himself had been an atheist since he reached the age of reason and regarded all religion, organized or otherwise, with distrust, if not outright contempt. He was imprisoned, albeit briefly during Internment and this was the subject of 'The Guineapigs', first of his many publications.

A spell in the States saw him take to the law. An unusual trade perhaps for an anarchist but McGuffin, Rumpole-like, would only act for the defence and was reported to have preferred clients who were obviously guilty. It is said that his business card bore the slogan, "No crime too big, no crime too small". Despite the sunshine, the abundance of recreational drugs and a willing audience for his increasingly implausible anecdotes he decided to return to Belfast and, to the relief of his many Belfast friends, settled on Derry as his place of residence. He continued to write and publish but it was the internet which provided him with an outlet for his favourite mode of journalism—the hilariously funny, but uncorroborated, rumour.

He was aware of his approaching demise and it did little or nothing to alter his approach to

the world. He was forever an anarchist, forever apposed to all violations of human rights, an enemy of state oppression and injustice, an unapologetic atheist. And when he died we all, agnostic, atheist or whatever, forgave him his trespasses for with his passing the world became a less colourful place. ♦

Derry gets verbal

Cian O'Neill

The official opening of the Verbal Arts Centre in the City of Derry in May was important for what it signified—not nothing, though the absence of the perhaps most famous *filis patriae* (Heaney) was belittling. Fintan O'Toole was the Guest Speaker, addressing an admixture of clerks and art types in the beautiful First Presbyterian Church on the City Walls. The Centre shall run an MA in Creative Writing with Magee College, and has already issued a CD-rom of Irish Voices to primary schools in the island. Some of those little benefactors attended. The Blue School Choir, in their white stockings, blue blouses and expansive white ruffs, resembled the napkin chorus. They sang charmingly. The John Taverner premiere performed by the City Youth Choir added some gravitas.

The Centre adjuncts a rather maudlin police station (burglary prevention was in the planners' minds). It has neat, airy rooms and a writer in residence, a recording studio etc. Essentially it betokens the new north—a paradigm of bodhran, bongo and lambeg, with homogenic arts lovers gathered round in daring haircuts (white wine permitting), perchance to listen in. To what? Well, the superb O'Toole explained, drawing a neat parable on the importance of (respected) mutual languages from disquisitions on language theory, etymology and history. He spoke of language as tokens of shared feeling, as a new species, as being fundamentally inculcated in the worst things we do. The Centre should prove to be one of the better things. ♦