



# Humanistically Speaking

March 2021



**A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview**

## All the Presidents are Men...

Just in case you hadn't noticed, the Americans have elected another 'old white man' to the White House when being old, white, and male seems to have become increasingly problematic in some quarters. The good news, of course, is that the Vice President is female, Black, and Asian. It will be interesting to see what impact Kamala Harris has on American politics.

Meanwhile, we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup>, and in this edition of *Humanistically Speaking* we focus on feminism with a particular spotlight on sex workers.



### Features this month:

- Maryam Namazie
- Brief History of Feminism
- Feminism in SciFi
  - Sex workers
  - Your emails
  - Book review

Humanistically Speaking



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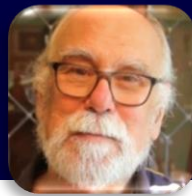
Humanistically Speaking

A Humanist hotline to a secular worldview

# In this Issue

Come in, sit down, put your feet up...

David Brittain  
Executive Editor



## Contents:

1. Cover Story
2. Editor's Welcome
3. Breaking News
5. Special Guest Feature
7. Amelie: History of Feminism
9. Dear Darwin
10. Peeking at Prostitution
12. Matters relating to women
14. Brittain Interviews
15. Thought for the Day
16. Yesterday's future women
17. Musings by Maggie
19. Letters and emails
20. David's book review
21. Network contact map
22. Back page

Dear reader,

Welcome to our March 2021 issue of *Humanistically Speaking!*

It so happens that March 8<sup>th</sup> is International Women's Day and we note that there is, at last, a woman in a central seat of power in the USA. Kamala Harris stands as a symbol of aspiration for *all* women, and I for one look forward to the day when a woman becomes US President.

There are indeed encouraging examples of national female leaders these days – Angela Merkle, Jacinda Ardern, Nicola Sturgeon and Arlene Foster to name just a few – and there are many captains of industry breaking through that glass ceiling! But below the highest levels it seems clear that there is still a long way to go.

The status of women in some parts of the world remains not only unjust, but sometimes brutal. We know about cultures where daughters are forced to marry men they hardly know, where wives can become prisoners of the home, where personal sexual behaviour is literally a matter of life and death, and where women are intimidated, coerced, brutalised and even murdered for reasons of so-called 'family honour'.

But we Brits have our own wrinkles. Demands for female suffrage actually go back deep into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and whilst things have improved for women over the years, progress has sometimes been frustratingly slow.

And finally we get to sex workers, who today exist in a problematic legal no-man's-land that actually *conspires* to threaten their very safety and security. With that in mind I should like to leave you with the link below to a 2-minute video that illustrates very well, I think, the dilemma that prostitutes face every single day – please watch it. One way or another, something must be done before we can truly call ourselves a civilised society.

<https://youtu.be/ltpi28l0BbE>

David Brittain

## CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Our editorial team consists entirely of humanist volunteers. Articles are written by them, or by our readers and contributors, and published at the discretion of the editorial team. We strive to publish content in line with humanist aims and values but views expressed by writers are their own and not necessarily shared by the South Central England Humanists Network or Humanists UK.

# BREAKING NEWS



## Social Media Influencer

Are you a person who enjoys making regular posts on social media? Experienced in running an account? Happy to do it in the name of Humanism and for a good cause with no financial reward?

*Humanistically Speaking*, now monthly, is growing every day, and we are seeking to reach out to people via Social Media to increase our readership base, and develop our interaction with Humanists across the region. This will be Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Humanist groups in the UK have been mostly operating in silos with little interaction, but now we have 14 member groups as part of our immediate network, and many more whose members are making us known. We are still growing, we are still in lockdown, so now is the time to find our feet, so that once normality returns we can really make a difference between groups right across the UK. Can you help us out?

Alright, I'm in / Tell me more

## We're on Twitter

*...so a little bird tells me*



Communication, that's the business we're in. Sharing stories, bringing to you interesting and relatable articles in, around, surrounding and outside of Humanism.

Our intention is to reach out to more people and make contact with high profile Humanists, scientists, and social influencers. By having a presence on Social Media this will help us get better known, more established, and out there! So do follow us, do share us and we will continue to work hard as volunteers in the background.

@HumanisticallyS

and YouTube

Once our videos have been sent out via link in our magazines, they will be available on YouTube afterwards. (Click above or [here](#))

Please do subscribe though, as from time to time we may release updates, little video snippets and additional things that won't be for general release, so watch your mail boxes for a surprise link from time to time.

Email with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

# BREAKING NEWS



## WEB Feet



### Stepping into cyberspace

That's right, we are launching a [website!](#)

This is a major step that most of you won't even notice or use, but a necessary step for us in having a central location to host our magazines where people can easily access them.

The [website](#) will be where Twitter and other social media users will land, where back issues can be found if desired, and where various contact points and submission donations can be made.

Do take a look. If not already subscribed, please do so, as this is the only way we can tell how many readers we actually have.



## Like What We Do? Help Fund Us!



## WHY do we ask you for money?

As well as our ambition to upgrade our volunteers' technology, we've also created this booklet that we're eager to get printed and into places where the Internet may not reach. This will be prisons and hospitals in the first instance with wider scope beyond that. A monthly donation from many people will make all the difference.

*Humanistically Speaking* is created by unpaid volunteers, yet we do incur some costs and we'd like to expand our operations. Could you make a voluntary donation by Standing Order from just £1.00 a month? Or a one-off donation? We'll leave our bank details here and let you surprise us. Please use HS DONATION as the reference.

Account name: **Basingstoke Humanists**  
**Sort 30 98 97 – Acc 33031168**

- Running Costs
- Technology upgrades
- Leaflet printing
- Travel expenses



# NO BAD WOMEN, JUST BAD LAWS?

*A guest article from the English Collective of Prostitutes*

For sex workers, the last few decades have seen few changes. Thousands of women, are still arrested, raided, prosecuted and even imprisoned each year under the prostitution laws. Loitering and soliciting laws force women into isolated areas, and brothel-keeping laws make it illegal for two or more sex workers to work together. Women are therefore made to choose between possible arrest and keeping themselves safe, or avoiding a criminal record and putting themselves in danger. Migrant, trans and women of colour are disproportionately targeted under these laws. Prostitute cautions and convictions show up with a criminal record check which can bar access to other jobs.

One woman who worked in a flat in Soho in the 1960s described how the police would come into the flats and arrest women on a rota – “...you got to know when it was your turn”. Fast forward four decades and Soho is still the target of mass police raids. On one occasion 250 officers in riot gear with dogs broke down doors and took at least one woman out into the night in her underwear in front of the waiting media. Our [Soho zine](#) is full of Soho sex workers’ history.

The pandemic has inevitably changed sex workers’ lives. Women’s income has dropped off a cliff and sex workers have been deprived of the support packages and benefits available to others. What has made the suffering so much worse is that the pandemic



came on top of an existing crisis of poverty, homelessness and debt. Over 86% of austerity cuts have targeted women. Child poverty has risen dramatically.

At the start of lockdown, we called for emergency payments for sex workers in crisis, worker status so that we can get sick pay, wage relief and the benefits that other workers can claim, healthcare regardless of immigration status and a moratorium on arrests. In New Zealand, where sex work has been decriminalised, sex workers were able to get wage subsidy grants and benefits without the need to disclose they are a sex worker.

Three MPs put forward written questions in Parliament asking what was being done to protect and support sex workers in the ▶

pandemic. The Government responded that “people who want to leave prostitution should be given every opportunity to find routes out”. Yet its own policies, including the introduction of Universal Credit, are promoting prostitution and forcing thousands of women, and particularly mothers, into “survival sex”. Shockingly, the police have continued throughout the pandemic to target brothels and arrest women.

At the same time there are definite signs that the movement for decriminalisation is growing. In Hull, former street workers defeated a harsh no prostitution zone. In New York, a loitering and soliciting law has just been repealed.

Decriminalisation increases sex workers’ safety and well-being. After New Zealand decriminalised sex work in 2003, over 90% of sex workers said they had additional employment, legal, health and safety rights. In the UK, decriminalisation could be introduced by implementing the 2016 Home Affairs Committee recommendation to decriminalise sex workers on the street and working together in premises. Decriminalisation is the removal of criminal sanctions and is different from legalisation which is the strict regulation through, for example, municipal and health acts as we see in the Netherlands.

A bill by Diana Johnson MP to increase the criminalisation of sex work by criminalising clients and clamp down on the online sites where sex workers advertise, prompted opposition from trade unionists, women’s rights organisations, and thousands of individuals. This kind of law, known as the Nordic model, has been proven to increase violence.

Criminalising clients would make it more difficult and dangerous for sex workers, the



majority whom are mothers working to support families. Low wages and exploitative conditions cut mothers out of many other jobs. Yet horrifyingly some sex working mums have had their children removed from their care by the state.

It is for this reason that we have joined the campaign for a Care Income Now for all those who care for people and the planet. [Please sign the open letter](#) initiated by the Global Women’s Strike and the [Green New Deal for Europe](#). An income that addresses mothers’ poverty and recognises their vital contribution to society would go a long way to tackling the economic conditions that drive women, especially mothers, into prostitution.

You are very welcome to contact us directly by email [ecp@prostitutescollective.net](mailto:ecp@prostitutescollective.net), via twitter [@ProstitutesColl](#), and via Facebook [@ProsColl](#). You can [donate](#). Do [watch our Make All Women Safe film and sign our petition](#).



Click to visit website

What are your thoughts on sex work? We’d love to hear your views.  
[humanistically.speaking@gmail.com](mailto:humanistically.speaking@gmail.com)

# A Brief History of Feminism from Capitoline Hill to Social Media

By Amelie Forbes



In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, Roman women blocked all of the entrances to the Capitoline Hill Forum, demanding that laws regarding the limitation of women’s use of expensive goods should be repealed. Although an isolated event, this was when the first rumblings of feminism began – and the start of a fight that would last centuries and span the world.

It wasn’t until the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment period, however, that feminism was established as a movement. Women pointed out that the new reformist rhetoric that spoke of liberty didn’t actually include them. One of the written works that came from this was Olympe de Gouges’ *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* (1791) in which de Gouges declared that women should be equal to men. There was also Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which challenged the notion that a woman’s sole purpose is to please men and suggested that women should get the same opportunities as men. With the abolitionist movement working to abolish the slave trade, female abolitionists called for the abolitionist concepts of freedom and equality to be applied to women.

Feminism’s next move was the suffrage movement. As politics was largely an issue of the upper classes, the suffrage movement failed to focus on the issues and perspectives of working-class women. Sojourner Truth’s



First rumblings of feminism in Rome

*Ain’t I a Woman?* speech in 1851 was particularly striking. Being a former slave and the only non-white voice of this time, Truth spoke of experiences that the suffrage movement didn’t speak of. She talked about how men don’t “[lift her] over ditches”, “[help her] into carriages, or over mud-puddles” or “[give her] a best place” like they would with white women.

It wasn’t until English suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst introduced more violent tactics, and American activist Alice Paul followed Pankhurst’s lead in America, that goals were achieved. A few categories of women over the age of 30, based on property and education, were granted the vote in Britain in 1918, and women were granted the vote in America in 1920 with the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. But feminism essentially collapsed once the vote was won, as that had been its primary purpose. Any feminist action that ▶

remained was suspended with the beginning of World War 2. While the war did improve employment opportunities for women, they lost their jobs when men returned from fighting when the war was over.

## Second Wave Feminism – 1960s

'Second wave' feminism came about in the 1960s. There was concern over President J. F. Kennedy's 1961 *Commission on the Status of Women* as it supported the nuclear family and focused on preparing women for motherhood. However, Kennedy did pass the 1963 Equal Pay Act and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, both of which barred employers from discriminating on grounds of sex. It was in the second wave that discussions about the origins of the oppression of women first began. Feminism also became more complicated and multifaceted with the nuances that came with people having different definitions of 'liberation' and 'equality'. Three streams of feminism formed: pragmatic, radical, and difference. Pragmatic feminism aimed to integrate women into power systems. Radical feminism worked to reshape an inherently patriarchal society. Difference feminism focused on celebrating the differences between men and women, with the argument that men and women are biologically wired to have different strengths.

## Third Wave Feminism – 1990s

The 1990s brought the third wave of feminism. Third wave feminism was more progressive than previous waves, as it brought racism and classism into the conversation. Unlike before, women of colour were far more included in mainstream feminism. Third wave feminists proposed the idea of the 'gender continuum' in which individuals possess a range of 'masculine' and

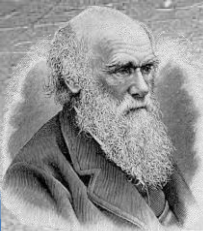
'feminine' traits. With an awareness of how sexuality and gender identity is shaped by society, feminists experimented with expressing traditionally sexist images and they reclaimed sexist slurs. Critics have questioned whether this form of sexual expression is actually freedom, or whether it is old oppressions in disguise. A group called the Guerrilla Girls wore gorilla masks in an effort to expose sexist stereotypes. The third wave could also be known as the 'girl power' era, as powerful female figures were becoming prevalent in the media, and merchandise with girl-power-type slogans was becoming increasingly popular.

## Fourth Wave Feminism – 2012 onwards

And finally, we have the fourth wave. Fourth wave feminism started in 2012 and is the main form of feminism that can be seen today. Fourth wave feminism is characterised by a focus on sexual harassment, body shaming and rape culture. Social media platforms are utilised to shed light on and fight against these issues. A key movement in fourth wave feminism, and one that was largely a Twitter phenomenon, was the '#Me Too' movement when women spoke up about their experiences of being sexually harassed by Harvey Weinstein. Another key trait of fourth wave feminism is the focus on, and calls for, 'intersectionality', which means, for example, that a black disabled woman may experience not just one but three intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.

**While everyone has their own definition of feminism, my question is this: is feminism really feminism if people from all backgrounds and of all identities are not included?**





Charles Darwin.

# Dear Darwin

Ask Charles your difficult questions...



The Mount, Shrewsbury.  
Darwin's family home.

**Dear Darwin**

Do my politics and who I vote for shape what kind of humanist I am, or can be? Are there political parties that are not aligned with humanist values?

Jacob, Somerset

Dear Jacob

I rather expect that things have moved on since my day. Our two main parties are the Liberals and the Tories – I doubt that they still exist in your day. The Liberals were the progressives, interested in reform, free trade and business interests, whereas the Tories were more in favour of the Church and the landed gentry.

I take it that when you refer to 'humanist values' you are thinking in terms of creating a good society that helps everyone to flourish. I must of course declare an interest at this point. Both my wife and I inherited a vast amount of money – she from the Wedgwood family, and I from the Darwins. We never had any money worries and we could run a large house with children and servants. That dreadful fellow Marx was scribbling away in London and had socialism been brought in I suppose I would have been in reduced circumstances and would never have had the leisure to write *Origin of Species*.

If I may venture an opinion, I think what you want is a political party that is economically competent and not too hell-bent on utopian solutions which can so easily go wrong. Trial and error is the best humanist approach.

**Dear Darwin**

I noticed that you were doing an issue on women's rights and feminism. Would you say it's still OK to whistle at a pretty girl in the street? Surely this is a harmless way of making them feel attractive and good about themselves, but it seems to be frowned upon these days. Am I doing something wrong?

Bob the Builder

Dear Bob

Feminism hadn't really got off the ground in my day although Harriet Martineau was a feisty female journalist and a good friend to my brother Erasmus. I expect if she had been whistled at in the street she would have knocked the perpetrator for six. But I see what you mean. Women, and men for that matter, are always full of doubts about their own attractiveness. I was full of self-doubt myself about my appearance. I suppose one has to ask oneself where the line is between harmless appreciation and unwelcome harassment. I was a shy lad and a gentleman and any such gesture would have been a dreadful *faux pas*. But I see you are a labourer by profession and perhaps you live by a different code of conduct. I think I will have to leave this difficult question to your good judgment and the social etiquette of your own day.

# Peeking through the window...

## *At Prostitution*



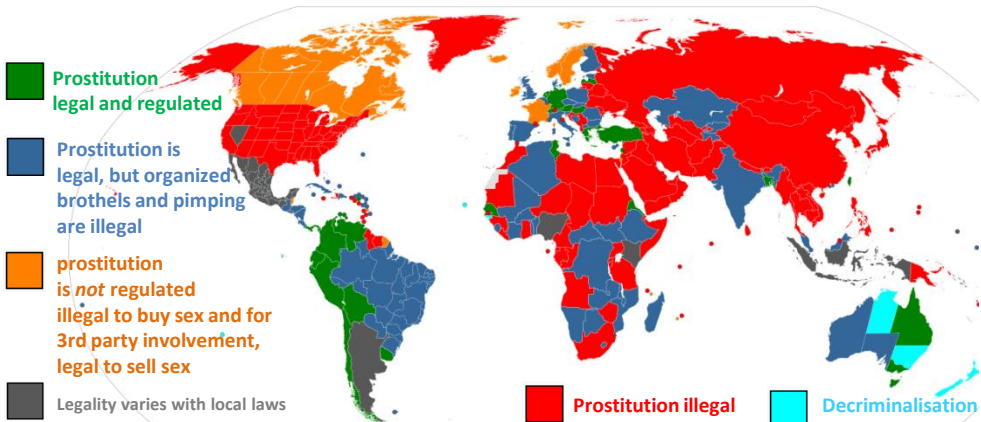
**Until recently I was a strong advocate against the legalisation of prostitution on the grounds of what I thought were Humanist values. But join me in my findings...**

*by Aaron Darkwood*

In conversation with a group of progressive social media friends during lockdown, the topic of legalising prostitution came up. I was immediately against it, and found my lifelong rehearsed lines being trawled out: “Nobody grows up wanting to be a prostitute” and “A human being is worth more than just a piece of meat”. My feeling was that prostitutes were dirty, disease ridden, drug addicted and only doing sex work for money, certainly not for pleasure or as part of some carefully structured career plan. What if your sister did this, or your mother? How could a person live with such shame, how could this in anyway be acceptable? Yet legalisation was being proposed by intelligent human beings as part of a well-formed argument. These were young people that will one day be politicians and people going places. Why did they think this? So, intrigued, I listened to their argument.

In the political arena we were discussing, they had mocked up a bill: “Sex workers would be limited to 6 acts per day. need to be over 21, companies may only take a 20% cut, workers would be part of a union, brothels must be licensed, sex workers would have regular health checks every two weeks, workers must be allowed 30 minutes between acts to sanitise themselves adequately after each service, workers must be given 60% of the profits, with a minimum of £51.10 per act, workers must have a licence to work, brothels must be located in certain areas that are not residential, users need to be over 18 to enter and over 21 to be a client, counselling would be available to all workers.”

It had been well thought through, but my initial objections still stood, so we debated. I phoned a friend, and then raised the topic ▶



*Humanistically Speaking* actively encourages readers to reply, feed back and help enlighten us with your responses.

In my local Humanist Zoom coffee morning the next day. I posed the scenarios and invited thoughts, and to my surprise the views were overwhelmingly in support. Former nurses, teachers and others all shared opinions, some with experience of Amsterdam (as visitors) and said it would be great to legalise it.

It was generally accepted that nobody wanted someone to go into sex work, but if this was an avenue someone went into then it is much better for them to be protected, clean, checked and looked after. It was, after all, going to happen with or without the state's consent, and it was better for the women for it to be open and acknowledged.

Most agreed that they wouldn't want it in their neighbourhood, and the feeling that for it to be contained within brothels would be much better and safer than for the women to be on the streets. More questions were posed: What if a prostitute joined our Humanist group? How would they be welcomed? Yet again, the feedback was generally positive. It was voiced that all jobs should be acknowledged as a person going to work, earning and living and paying their taxes, that not everybody enjoys their work, and not all jobs are full of praise and or

respect, and that this needs to change. Some feminists are against the idea, stating that it is exploitation where males dominate women, calling it "an intolerable form of male violence". In February 2014, members of the European Parliament voted in a non-binding resolution (adopted by 343 votes to 139, with 105 abstentions) in favour of the Swedish model of criminalizing the purchasing but not the selling of sex.

Clearly there needs to be protections in place where women are not forced, trafficked, bribed or drugged into prostitution. However, there is a realm of modern day thinking where a person's body is their own, and that they can eat, drink, pierce, smoke what they like and do with their body as they please. This seems to be the Humanist consensus on this issue.

It could be argued, to what extent can you do what you like before that infringes on another person's rights? But on this topic at least, I think that if the sex acts take place out of the public eye, that both parties are willing participants, and that the buildings themselves are not causing a public nuisance, then I guess this is fine with me, and I would back such a bill.



# No one is free until everyone is free



by David Brittain

**It's rather shocking, I think, that in the UK women over the age of 21 did not get the vote until 1928.**

This was a full 25 years after the establishment of the *Women's Social and Political Union* (the Suffragettes), 15 years after Emily Davison threw herself under King George's horse in protest, and 10 years after British women 'manned' the dangerous munitions production lines that played such a large part in winning World War 1.

But the suffragette movement was not so much about *women's rights*, as *human rights*, and it's interesting to note that there were male organisations that stood alongside the women which rarely get a mention. Most prominent amongst them, the *Men's League for Women's Suffrage*, was founded by Henry Brailsford in 1907. And the role men played was more important than we usually think today.

The point I'm trying to make here is that *no one* can be entirely free until *everyone* is free, and true freedom must go hand in hand with the right to elect those who govern.

Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> March is International Women's Day, and it should be remembered – and revered – as a potent symbol, because it is essentially about the struggle for equality and fair play, and its heroines and heroes. It's about tolerance and acceptance of everyone for what and who they are, regardless of their gender, their sexuality, or whether they come

gender, their sexuality, or whether they come from a racial, ethnic, political or religious minority. There are some disturbing tales in this issue of *Humanistically Speaking* for sure, but this should be seen as a tribute to the fearlessness of those courageous women who suffered social derision, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, beatings, prison and the humiliation of forced feeding. But it is also about everyone who is disadvantaged without good cause.

Moreover, it is a worldwide cause, and a *Humanist* cause - and rightly so.



***Men's League for Women's Suffrage***  
**founded by Henry Brailsford in 1907**

At the time of typing, the issue of Princess Latifa, who appears to have been imprisoned by her powerful father Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, is in the news. But there are myriad examples of women being intimidated and oppressed in many countries – and it has to be said *particularly* in those countries where religion has a big say in the political scene. See, for example, my interview with Maryam Namazie on page 14. But let's not get too smug. This is not just about Islam or Islamic countries. Women are struggling for the right to abortion, throughout most of South America, in Poland, in many countries in Africa, and even in the bible belt of the USA women are being bullied and coerced, ▶

abortion clinics are being attacked, and staff actively intimidated.

## English Collective of Prostitutes

Women in the sex industry are also being discriminated against, and this is another profoundly unfair issue even *here* in mainland Britain. This also has, at its root, a religious dimension and the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) has been invited to present their case in this issue (pages 5 and 6).

Many politicians have tried to address the issue of prostitution in this country, but rarely has any thought been given to actually consulting the ECP. I hope you find their report interesting and enlightening but you might also find it horrifying. They don't mention the instances where women complain to the police when they have been beaten and instead of pursuing the criminal, they arrest the victim. Or the allegations of police strip-searching women when doors are left ajar for some of the men to watch for their prurient enjoyment. There are an estimated 70,000 sex workers in the UK, and you may wonder why people apparently *choose* to be sex workers? Well, no doubt some are trafficked and forced into sex work, whilst others choose to be so for a range of other reasons. But in spite of what we are told in the media, the ECP claim that these are actually a small minority. The overwhelming cause is poverty, and make no mistake – real poverty still exists in the UK.

## What can men do?

As with the suffragettes, the support of men comes in here. Some years ago, I attended an AGM of the ECP in London, and I noted that at a gathering of around 500 or so women, there were only two men. And one of them was me! The other chap sat behind me and when I remarked on that fact he said 'That's because

men are afraid of being considered clients.'

That led me to wonder, is *that* why the ECP are so often ignored? What about the social issues? What about poverty and freedoms and safety? Are we chaps so afraid of social derision that we don't even want to *talk* about the issues when it is usually *male* demands that are being met?

## No furlough scheme for sex workers

And there's more. As with other services, coronavirus has made life particularly tough for those in the sex industry. Even *here* they suffer disproportionately from the rest. The government has not provided a safety net at all for these people. There is no furlough scheme to ease the hardship of sex workers. In fact in the overwhelming majority of cases, we are simply adding to the very poverty that most of them are trying to escape.

As you will see in the ECP's report, our government seem to be disinterested in addressing this problem in any meaningful way. There must be few votes in addressing the plight of sex workers.

So much for a caring government.

## The Humanist dimension

But what have we Humanists to say about the suffering, the poverty and the injustices? Shouldn't we all be engaged about this?

So come on lads – these women are sisters, mothers, daughters – and whether or not we approve of what they do, they are simply trying to survive, and they need our support as well. We must lobby our MPs and try to work together to bring this issue much nearer to the top of the political agenda.

Things have changed little since the Yorkshire Ripper (Peter Sutcliffe). Something must be done now for a range of reasons - and before the next Ripper comes along.

# Brittain Interviews...

*Our video conference with notable Humanists, interviewed by David Brittain*

## Maryam Namazie

Maryam Namazie is an Iranian-born writer and activist. She is the Spokesperson of One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.

She is on the International Advisory Board of the Raif Badawi Foundation for Freedom and Euromind; a Laureate of the International Academy of Humanism, National Secular Society Honorary Associate; Honorary Associate of Rationalist International; Emeritus Member of the Secular Humanist League of Brazil and a Patron of Pink Triangle Trust.

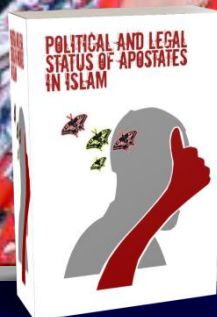
Read more about Maryam here:

<https://maryamnamazie.com/about/>

For the full video interview please click below.



Watch here: [VIDEO](#)



*Click to see six brave women who turned their back on Islam [Here](#)*



# Thought for the Day

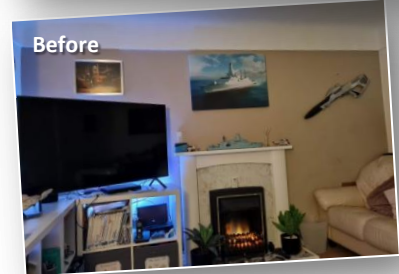
*Aaron Darkwood reflects on the Year of the Pandemic, mental health challenges, and living on a budget...*

**As an unpaid volunteer editor for *Humanistically Speaking* I'm a man on a budget, so life is one of those "make do" situations. I can squeeze a bargain out of any retailer given the right mood, but some things are a bit beyond my scope.**

Life threw a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday at me last year, and to celebrate I had planned a holiday in Gran Canaria. I'd saved for 18 months and I was looking forward to it as the time approached. But then Covid-19 struck and none of us were going anywhere for quite some time.

Luckily, *Humanistically Speaking* had been launched in 2020, and I usually exercise on my own, so keeping busy was not difficult. Lockdown after lockdown was imposed by Boris and his scientific advisers, and my mental health really took a hit third time round. So I decided to wrestle depression to the ground and blow my holiday money, all £500 of it, on a lounge refurbishment.

With the help of one 'bubble buddy', we worked hard all through the third week of February painting, cleaning, and shaping. Luckily, DIY stores were still functioning, so all went according to plan. An electrician completed the down-lights and my room is now complete. This project has really lifted my mood, provided me with a place I can



**How to transform your living space on a £500 budget!**

retreat to, feel safe, warm and comfortable - truly a home I can finally feel proud of.

Our surroundings are such an important part of our mental health landscape and it's easy to let life grind us down, influence our decisions and mark out pathways into an unknown future. Yet Covid-19 with its many challenges has provided an opportunity for me that has ended up improving my life and wellbeing. I certainly hope many of you out there have found ways to take full advantage of this unique period of history, to help learn, motivate, change and improve the world around you in some way.

Do you have a **Thought for the Day** worth sharing?  
[humanistically.speaking@gmail.com](mailto:humanistically.speaking@gmail.com)



# Yesterday's Future Women



## *Aaron Darkwood takes a look at feminism in science fiction...*

In almost every futuristic vision of humanity, women are treated as equals. In the 1960s, *Star Trek's Enterprise* had a woman first officer, the 1970s had *Blakes 7* with prominent tough women and female lead bad girl Servalan, in the 1980s *Buck Rogers* featured a female in charge of the Earth Defence Force, and the 1990s saw *Star Trek's* first female lead captain. In the 2000s, the remade *Battlestar Galactica* changed Starbuck and Boomer to female, and even Dr Who is now a woman - who saw that coming?!

One thing is certain, as gender role depiction on television has evolved, the image of the helpless vulnerable female victim, escaping the villain and falling in high heels and needing a man to rescue her are gone – long gone in terms of the SciFi genre. In fact, the latest *Star Trek Discovery* has more women, and LGBT representation than anything else I've seen, with at least two gay, two transgender and a gender-fluid person represented. No longer do 'weaker' sex or minority groups get inserted into minor roles

just for balance. Anyone can be anything as in real life should be the case. If you are good at the role you get the job. Biology and sexual preferences play no part in it.

Looking back, who you are attracted to and what gender you are seem such strange criteria to judge a person by. It's a wonder that was ever a thing once we left our caves.

Although in real life history we now have a female US Vice President, noted because it's a first, the UK seemed to take its *second* female Prime Minister in its stride. Because Chancellor Merkel has been around for so long female leaders no longer excite the newspapers. The very prominent New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern is strong, determined, popular and successful, leading her nation out of the pandemic and seemingly, from an external view at least, uniting her people.

That we have a 'Women's International Day' says something about us as a people, yet on which side of a line on a map you stand on does very much dictate just how as a gender you are treated, accepted, or permitted to take different roles. I imagine it's a Day that we will continue to need for at least decades to come.

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[Link to values booklet](#)





# Musings by Maggie

## Humanism & Feminism: are they inextricably linked?

**Certain attitudes follow from a non-theological, humanist approach to life. It is, of course, perfectly possible to identify as a feminist without being a humanist, but I do not believe it possible to be a humanist without being a feminist.**

The term “humanism”, with its present meaning, did not really come into general use until the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although humanistic ideas go back to ancient times. The history of humanism is closely tied up with feminism. One of the earliest feminist writers honoured by humanists is the Enlightenment author Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. She died at the comparatively young age of 38, but her life and attitudes reflected the more enlightened views of her age, and she had an optimistic belief in the possibility that society could be improved through self-advancement and self-education. She also felt strongly that we should think and live our lives independently, without relying on a supreme being. She spent her short life working for these ideals and especially to improve the rights of women.

John Stuart Mill, the well-known Utilitarian philosopher, could also be considered a proto-humanist. In 1869 he published a treatise entitled *“The Subjugation of Women”* (written with the help of his wife Harriet Taylor) in which, anticipating likely objections to his views about the emancipation of



MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, AUTHOR OF  
*A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN*  
PUBLISHED IN 1792

women, he wrote: *“Perhaps we’ll be told that religion imposes the duty of obedience on women — as every established fact that is too bad to be defended in any other way is said to be required by religion.”*

Writing in the late 1940s, Simone de Beauvoir had viewed feminism unambiguously as an expression of humanism in a quite straightforward sense. Indeed, the main feminist message of her book *The Second Sex* is the assertion that women must be considered first and foremost as human beings.

More recently, Diane Munday, the feminist campaigner who lobbied successfully for ▶

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the passing of the Abortion Act 1967, numbers among the long list of patrons of Humanists UK (photo below).



**Pioneer feminist and humanist Diane Munday**



any country that does not grant it, unless you count the Vatican. In theory, women are also permitted to run for political office in all countries, but they are still by no means always encouraged to do so.

I support her marital, domestic, sexual and social rights: the right not to be married off as a child or against her will to a man not of her own choosing, the right not to be a victim of domestic abuse or sexual assault, the right not to be ostracised from society during her period and the right to be granted a legal divorce if that is her choice.

I support her right to her own physical integrity; not to be forced to undergo more pregnancies than she wants or can physically sustain or to undergo physical mutilation such as female genital mutilation.

I support her employment rights; the right to equal pay with men doing the same job, the right to equal consideration when it comes to job applications or when it comes to redundancies, the right not to be sexually harassed or bullied at work and her right to maternity pay and maternity leave.

I support her right to appropriate physical and mental health care; high-quality health care that means she won't die in pregnancy or during childbirth.

I support her right to economic empowerment so that women are supported and assisted to run their own businesses, meaning that they don't have to be financially dependent upon men.

I support her right not to be the subject of misogynistic harassment online.

**All these things I strongly believe in and humanism does too. Humanists are, and have always been, in the forefront of feminism and I am right there with them.**

As a feminist and a humanist, I support certain rights for women. I support the right to autonomy and self-determination of each individual whether male, female or transgender. This includes a woman's reproductive rights, including the right to use contraception and the right to seek an abortion if, after due consideration and careful examination of all her options, she is convinced that that is the right decision for her and I support her right, having come to this difficult and painful decision, not to be publicly harassed outside the clinic which she needs to access. It is best, of course, if every child is a wanted child and improved Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), more widely and freely available contraception, and better education and services for young people can all help to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies.

I support a woman's right to an education of equal quality to that afforded to men, a right that women are still denied in many regions of the world.

I support her political rights; now that Saudi Arabia has at last granted women the franchise in that country there is no longer



# Your Letters & Emails

## ***Humanistically Speaking* makes me feel more connected...**

I feel I have been with you 'from the start' as I have read every issue. I'm based in Salisbury where there is very little - obvious - humanism and I'm not in a position to start a group myself so *Humanistically Speaking* makes me feel more connected to like-minded people which is very welcome. So absolutely, it is an affirmation of a worthwhile job - I always look forward to reading it and thank you for the time and effort you give to making it happen.

*Best wishes, Annette, Salisbury*

## **What on earth is 'Imbolc'?**

Many thanks for your magazine. We became aware of it through the Woking and Guildford Humanists newsletter. We have made a donation to help with your running costs.

Just one point of possible contention arising from the December issue, many people, including astronomers, regard the winter solstice as the start of winter and the spring equinox as the start of spring although meteorologists have a slightly different definition. Those with a slight pagan tendency would celebrate midwinter fire festival at imbolc\* 1st and 2nd of February, the cross-quarter day.

*Keep up the good work, Keith Creswell*

\*Imbolc or Imbolg, also called Brigid's Day, is a Gaelic traditional festival marking the beginning of spring. It was traditionally held on 1 February.

## **Population concerns...**

There was a bit about climate change in February's issue and how green technology will help. Whilst the article mentions population, there is no mention of how population size is also a big (if not the biggest) factor in regards to the environment (worldwide, not just in developing countries). By reducing our population size our overall consumption rates will fall even more dramatically than by use of green tech. It is a shame that this is not promoted more, both in Europe/UK, the US as well as the developing world. By educating everyone, especially women, about contraception, and making it freely available, to enable all people to choose for themselves how many children to have, we can make big strides towards a greener world.

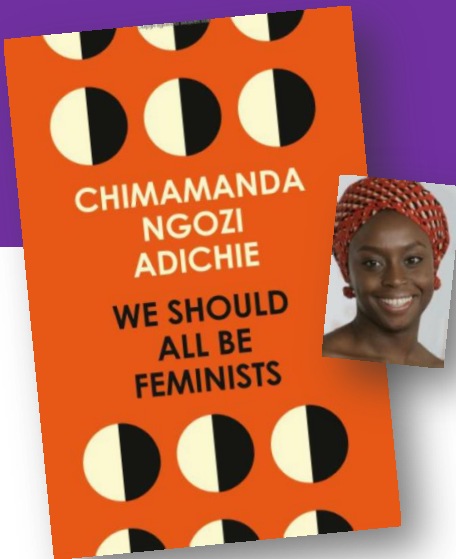
*Regards, Mitul Mitsky, Croydon*

With a global population closing on eight billion and with exponential increases until it's standing room only and a planet denuded of any resources, a sea that is so polluted by plastic and sewage that nothing can live in it, an atmosphere full of carbon emissions that allows the sun to melt the icecaps and turn pastures into deserts - I suggest mankind has a problem. What are the chances of a covert international agency producing a serum to spread a deadly infection around the world so effectively as to cause panic and death to every population? Then to continue the infection by supplying an inoculation under the guise of protection? Perhaps this is the only way forward for life to continue to exist on earth.

*Peter Brittain, Scottsborough, South Africa*

## Book Review by David Warden

### 'We Should All be Feminists' (2014) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian-American writer. Her books include the novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017).**

I have chosen to comment on this book for two reasons: it has an uncompromising message which can be accepted or rejected, and at just 48 pages it is admirably short and can be read in about a hour. It is, in fact, a transcript of a TEDx talk watched 6.5m times.

Adichie was born in 1977. When she was in primary school Nsukka she took part in a classroom test to select the 'class monitor'. She came first in the test but the runner up was selected because he was a boy. It's unthinkable that this could have occurred in an English school in the 1980s. I'm not surprised that this humiliating incident, based purely on gender difference, was burned into her consciousness.

One evening in Lagos, Adichie had been out with friends including a man by the name of

Louis. Finding somewhere to park in Lagos can be difficult and energetic young men earn a living as personal car parkers. When Adichie and Louis returned to collect their car, Adichie reached into her bag for some money to give a tip to the young man. Instead of thanking her, he turned his face to Louis and said 'Thank you Sir' even though it was Adichie who had given him the tip. His assumption was that the source of the money was the man, not the woman. Again, it seems unthinkable that such a thing could occur in modern European countries.

I'm often surprised when I come across women who identify as humanists but not as feminists. Perhaps it's because feminism has done its job in the modern West and only survives as a kind of neo-Marxist fanaticism which views all gender-based differential outcomes as 'structural oppression'.

I'm sure there's still work to be done. My partner has taught in both single-sex boys' schools and single-sex girls' schools. The main difference between boys and girls, he told me, is that many girls preface their remarks with the phrase 'I may be wrong...'. Perhaps this is admirable intellectual modesty, or perhaps girls more than boys feel the need to *apologise* for having opinions.

Feminism is an integral element of Humanism going back to Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and many others. Let's have no more humanist women, or men, saying they are not feminists.

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