

**PE1514/A**

Gus Logan Email of 16 April 2014

Dear Convener of Public Petitions Committee,

As an ordinary member of the public but one with a deep attachment to Scotland's rich cultural, historical and religious traditions, I would oppose the Petition PEO 1514 by Dr Norman Bonney seeking to change allocations of contributors to TIME FOR REFLECTION .I believe that this petition is unrepresentative of the views of most of Scotland's population most of whom, however unaffiliated or even indifferent they may be, on faith -related matters do not wish to change the fundamental nature of Scotland ( or its Parliament ) from an underlying Christian culture. Indeed, as I write this only 30 names have been listed online as supporters of this petition and most of these names are those of committed activists in either the Edinburgh Secular Society or the Scottish Secular Society. It is not surprising that these small and, in the views of some , militant organisations would support this petition .Office bearers of the Edinburgh Secular Society have gone on record as describing religion as "irrational" and as "superstition". To have managed only to get thirty names online to subscribe says volumes about how unrepresentative of Scots public opinion such secular - lobby inspired petitions as this really are.

Many Scots may see this petition as part of a wider campaign to strip Scotland of its Christian heritage when, in fact, the memberships of the committed secular lobby groups who support it are numbered at best in hundreds if not , more likely, just dozens. Churches in Scotland by contrast still have hundreds of thousands of members. The petition is at least candid in not trying to pretend that it seeks secular objectives so much as to give "atheists" a voice (though it is interesting that in the list of online supporters today, so many campaigners who claim to be merely "secularists "are in fact supporting a petition which gives "atheists" greater representation. Many believe that secular campaigners are not really pro-secular so much as anti-belief in their views). I question the real "tolerance" values, or lack of them, that may lie behind a petition such as this. One of the secular campaigners, just to take one example, posting under the pseudonym "Veronique D.", and believed to be a member of Norman Bonney's Edinburgh Secular Society ,and one of the thirty online supporters of Petition PEO 1514, has recently posted in an online newspaper page that she wants churches to" shut their faces or pay their taxes ". Many may see this as simply a clear but typical instance indicative of a lack of tolerance by secular campaigners towards Scotland's faith groups. That example can be multiplied by other utterances from the Edinburgh Secular Society's members and the members of the Scottish Secular Society, between them the main backers online of this petition .

Some might feel that this petition, rather than being increasing of diversity in its result would rather in fact, if implemented, give a 25% allocation of time to a very narrow group of shrill, determined and quite aggressive anti-religious campaigners. That is the danger and fear for some of us.

Much play is made of statistics by the petitioner, for instance, in claiming that the most recent census indicates that 37% have no God or religion. Yet this does not necessarily translate into that "group" wanting "atheist" contributions! What exactly would "atheist" contributions be anyway? Would these preach against belief in God? Presumably, these atheist contributions would encourage people to live without belief in a deity, rather than as Christian and religious reflections try to do, as to how we can improve and enhance all our lives (loving our neighbour etc.). How would the "atheist" reflection time differ from this? - would it be a negative anti-faith stance or how would it really differ from the religious contributions? .The answer to this is not spelt out in the petition. In any event, the quoted statistic of 26% of Scots who say that there is definitely no God or higher power, but leaves 74% of Scots who believe that there is or might be a God!. This suggests to me that the believers / possible believers are in a large majority in Scotland though the twenty three names who currently support this petition are doubtless not among the 74% majority. However, even taking that 26% who apparently strongly believe there is no God, there is no indication that a particular "atheist" speaker would in any way reflect the views of that 26%, whose views may well be diverse and somewhat nebulous. The "atheist" speakers could not presumably come from the ranks of the secular societies whose numbers are so sparse that it would be unrepresentative for them to provide regular speakers and, moreover ,since these societies claim to seek secular objectives rather than anti-faith ones, would not be able presumably to furnish "atheist " speakers from their own ranks. So there is a problem about where and who "atheist" speakers would be and how diverse, or narrow, their contributions might be? .The petition is vague on this.

I would urge the committee and Parliament to refuse this petition and refuse it on grounds that is out of step with Scottish history and tradition, that it has pathetically little backing even by secularist partisans and activists, that it is arguably part of a campaign to de-Christianize Scotland and is potentially anti-faith in its consequences, that there is arguably a prevailing intolerance behind supporters of the petition's sentiments in the opinion of many observers, and that the petition in any event is too vague in its language for it to be implemented.

GUS LOGAN