

## THE COMPUTER AGE: ACT NOW TO PROTECT PRIVACY

When Anthony Wedgwood Benn, the former Minister of Technology, opened the Workshop on the Data Bank Society in London last week he described it as "one of the most important conferences I have ever attended". It was organised by the National Council for Civil Liberties and attended by experts from Sweden, Belgium, the United States, Ireland and Denmark. British participants included representatives of industry, banking, hospitals, universities, and organisations for the defence of privacy and civil liberties. Conference expressed the view that the terms of reference of the Parliamentary Committee on Privacy (the Younger Committee) should be extended to include threats to privacy from the public sector as well as from industrial and commercial organisations. The individual should have the right to know and verify the information stored about him, and legislation should be introduced at an early stage to prevent the invasion of privacy through the misuse of computer information. Computers are not yet controlling the world, but unless safeguards and ethical standards are developed and formulated in time the computer data bank could become a menace.

### Scientific Developments

Mr Wedgwood Benn recalled that he attended a data processing conference in Edinburgh three years ago at which it was stated that during the last 25 years there had been three great scientific developments. First, there was nuclear energy, which at Hiroshima had shocked the world. Secondly, there was space travel which thrilled the world. Third, there was the invention of the computer, and although it had gone almost unnoticed, it was without doubt the most important of the three, and provided the central nervous system of all organisations. He added: "Information is the new man-made material. The using of knowledge is going to be the basis of man's life from now on. This is not a technical problem but a political one. It does not require technical knowledge to understand what is happening and what the problem is".

Mr Wedgwood Benn spoke of the spectre which haunts us: of every child at birth being traced and tracked by government and business, recorded and analysed, progressed and supervised throughout the whole of his life and every fact known about him will be available to everyone: family, income, views, health, moral and political convictions. He had doubts whether the problems was one of privacy at all, or whether it was really a problem of power. He felt we might no really be talking about privacy as an end in itself although the importance of privacy is something we must consider. In a world of data banks, man would be so frightened of what use was made of all the information held on him that he would really shrink back and decline to take any risk, or think any daring thoughts, for fear it would impede him in his career. And thus as the machine grows in strength, man would demobilise his own genius and only the mediocre would prosper.

### Citizen's Right to Information

Mr Wedgwood Benn then pointed to the need to discuss the regulation and control by law of this enormous power. "It is necessary to regulate and control those authorised to collect and store information, to whom it is given and for what purpose, where it is kept and by whom and for how long. It would even be possible to destroy the careers of others by joining organisations in their name. It should be



Anthony Wedgwood Benn, MP



(Continued from previous page)

ascertained who is responsible at every stage for the information. The privacy of those who record the facts about us must be ended and if the information turns out to be inaccurate the identity of those who put information into the machine must be clear. The doctrine of personal responsibility must be injected into these systems. The citizen has got to have the right to know what is being collected, to decline to give information, to know why the information is being collected, who is collecting it and for how long it is to be stored. He is entitled to receive a print-out, to know when information is destroyed, to whom he can appeal and against what".

### "Significant Step Forward"

Mr Wedgwood Benn concluded: "Anonymity in modern urban life is one of the most soul destroying things that has ever happened to society, and having achieved it we find that people need to break through it by talking to psychiatrists, welfare officers and MPs. We are not promoting the right of everyone to live entirely separately from his fellow men. It should be made clear that as a community, we recognise the great potential and value of the system that is now at our disposal.

"However, we must make it clear that we do not intend to surrender our power up to those who have information which could be used to take away our civil rights. We should not be pessimistic about the capacity of winning this argument, or be depressed because no one seems to be interested. All great changes—trade unions, the Welfare State, Health Services, education, and war against pollution—have bubbled out from below, and were carried through when sufficient people were concerned with the problem to demand an answer to it. No doubt that when the history of the battle to control the data bank comes to be written, this seminar will be seen as having been a significant step forward in informing the public as to what is happening."

### Teachers' Memorandum on Privacy

On the day following the NCCL conference the National Union of Teachers, with a membership of 318,000 serving in primary and secondary schools and in various institutions for further and higher education, published its memorandum to the Younger Committee. The NUT's concern for privacy in schools is related to three areas: the protection of the teacher, protection of the child, and protection of the parent.

The National Union of Teachers argues that a teacher should be permitted to see any confidential report about him, and that this policy of communicating reports should be a general one. The NUT points out that at the moment, non-union teachers, or teachers serving in a school with a non-union Head, have no redress if the Head refuses to divulge what he has written in his report. Students on teaching practice and those on probation should also have access to any reports made on them. Confidential reports, as such, do not necessarily infringe individual privacy, but with the increase in the size of schools and the inevitable increase in the use of computers, safeguards must be provided to ensure that neither the local authority nor the Head divulges information, for example, to journalists, publishers or mortgage companies.

### Protecting the Child

Reports are made by teachers on a child from the time he enters school to his school leaving. The advice which the Union gives to its members is that school reports should contain only what the teacher, as an expert educationalist, has observed in the child during his period at the school.

Nevertheless, reports may be biased in a particular direction to achieve a short-term educational aim. They may also contain information which it would not be in the best interests of the child for the parent, or others, to know, for example, evidence of petty theft. Comments might be made in a report on the home or family, possibly based on information from the parents, but equally, sound evidence may be available which is not voluntarily given by the parent. Such evidence could be damaging both to the child and to the parent if it were broadcast, or available to agencies other than the school.

The child should be protected against the undue interference of research workers. Few safeguards are available at the moment to ensure that confidentiality of research questionnaires is respected, although some bodies ensure that individual schools which answer their questionnaires cannot be identified in their reports. The Union has been informed that some research workers ask Head teachers not to divulge their surveillance to staff or students. The teacher has a duty to protect the child from continual observation and the Union would deplore any move which made this attitude standard practice. The Union believes that precautions must be taken in the installation of closed circuit television and two-way address systems, that the teacher in the classroom is aware that he and his class are being observed or overheard.

The National Union of Teachers believes that the use of computers can increase efficiency in schools, but safeguards must be found to guarantee the secrecy of confidential statements made in good faith.

### European Conservation Year, 1970

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(President, the Conservation Society)

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Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

(President: National Secular Society)

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

Tuesday, 8 December, 7 p.m.

Organised by the

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1



## SYSTEM-BASHING

There was once a man who lived outside the System. His name was Alexander Selkirk and he had been shipwrecked on an apparently uninhabited island. What bliss! No bureaucrats to push him around; no loafers idling on the doorsteps of betting-shops to scrounge on the products of his honest toil. Everything he did was planned, executed and enjoyed by himself alone.

Until that fateful day! Strolling one afternoon through the grounds of that once and only Utopia he came across—a footprint in the sand. It was nothing less than the deadly harbinger of the System; it was the expulsion from Eden all over again. The age of innocence was over; from now on life would have to be organised.

It isn't simply that it takes two to make a system. That would imply that, just as two sensible people can avoid having a quarrel, so two people living on an otherwise empty island, can, if they wish to, avoid having a System. The trouble is they can't. Somehow or other "relations" have got to be sorted out between them. Even if they just draw a "dehumanised zone", a Dee-Aitch-Zee, wider than the carrying power of the human voice, right across the island and agree to remain one on either side of it, they have nevertheless, in doing so, established a System. And the odds are that sooner or later one "party to the agreement" will begin to suspect that the other has got more than his share of coconut palms or is urinating into the brook that flows across the Dee-Aitch-Zee.

### Good in Parts

There is, it seems, something in human nature—or at least in most human natures—that can't refrain from trying to establish some kind of ascendancy, even if it only takes the form of writing letters to *The Times* or sending rude messages by carrier-pigeon across the Dee-Aitch-Zee.

Now the System, if it works properly, is the mechanism by which we sort out our relations with one another. It substitutes letters to *The Times* for the daggers of assassins carrier-pigeons for guided missiles. It may work badly or it may work well. But mostly, like the curate's egg, it's good in parts. It functions by means of institutions and an institution can be anything from a carrier-pigeon to the World Postal Union—or the Mission Control in Houston. What matters about the System isn't whether it exists—it can't help doing *that*, wherever two or three are gathered together—but whether it works.

The institutions through which the System works are, like spaceships, the products of human ingenuity and are liable, like space-ships, to go wrong. They can also, like space-ships, be put to rights. The fact that our present System is in poor shape is no reason either for blowing it to pieces or for going off to live on a desert island. When Apollo 13 went seriously wrong and endangered three men's lives, nobody thought, for a moment, either of destroying it or of opting out and letting the helpless astronauts vanish into outer space. Instead, they put every available ounce of brain-power and computer-power into fixing the rickety apparatus so that it could cope with the dangers and bring the men home alive. (Let me make it clear that I have no sympathy with the space programme as such.)

We have, at present, an international system which is worsening all the time and now endangers the lives of the whole human race. Yet it cannot be beyond the wit of man to redesign it, as the Houston technologists redesigned

TONY MILLS

Apollo 13 even while it was moving fast and far away. If you concentrate enough brain-power on the real danger-point, there is probably no mal-functioning human institution which human intelligence can't put right. What then, we must ask ourselves, are our great universities and research institutes wasting their time on? Spotting the winner of next year's Derby? Oughtn't somebody to go and tell them there's a human race at risk?

### Our Only Chance

I hope I have now made it clear that it's a waste of time blaming the System and an even greater waste of time dreaming up ways of destroying it. Our only chance is to treat the redesigning of it as homo sapiens' top priority, just as the remodelling of Apollo 13 was the only hope for James Lovell and his companions. Time is short enough, but the situation isn't yet hopeless. If I may borrow and adapt a sentence of Desmond Morris in *The Naked Ape*: "By using his brain as hard as he can, man stands a chance".

So if you hear anybody using four-letter words to describe the System, you can tell him that he is wasting his breath. Two letters are all that he needs, for the System is US. If we would only say to ourselves, as Jim Lovell said at that dramatic moment: "Hey, we got a problem", and if we would then turn all our attention and resources to solving it, the space-ship earth might well be made safe for thousands of years to come. But if, as is much more likely, we continue to devote our attention to our education, our careers, our bank balances and our next summer holiday, we may vanish, very shortly, into outer space.

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By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

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## FREETHINKER

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

## EVENTS

Humanist Holidays. Christmas House Party. Osborne Private Hotel, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight, 23 to 28 December. Details from Mrs Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Leicester Secular Society. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 29 November, 6.30 p.m. P. Miller, A. Ross, A. Humphrey: "Anarchism, Direct Action and Illegality".

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8, Sunday, 29 November, 7.30 p.m. Poetry Evening.

Merseyside Humanist Group, Ethel Wormald College, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool 2, Wednesday, 9 December, 7.30 p.m. Roy Murphy: "Anarchism".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 29 November, 11 a.m. Dr Helen Rosenau: "Interaction: Ethics and Aesthetics".

Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, opposite the Pier, Worthing, Sunday, 29 November, 5.30 p.m. Michael Adams: "The Arab Question".

## CHRISTMAS STAMPS

Members of the public are well aware of the deterioration of postal services in recent years, but it seems that the Post Office is unaware of people's indifference to religion. The Christmas stamps which went on sale on Wednesday are all, predictably, illustrated by religious scenes. I don't know if this is an indication of a lack of imagination on the Post Office's part, or religious pressure—either could well apply.

Certainly religionists have triumphed in Israel where they forced the Israel Post Office to withdraw one of the stamps issued to commemorate the Jewish New Year. It showed the synagogue of Tunis with the Hebrew name for God on the stained glass window. According to the devout ones, to lick or frank it was a sin. The destruction of the stamp was also a sin; so remaining stocks will be kept for ever in the Post Office vaults.

# NEWS

## MRA SPLIT

Moral Re-Armament, the religio-politico movement whose standards are declared to be "absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness and absolute love" is battling on a sticky wicket at the present time. Like that other repository of absolutism and virtue, the Roman Catholic Church, MRA enjoyed a field day during the decade immediately after the last war. By exploiting the anti-Communist hysteria which gripped America and other countries, it was able greatly to increase its following and resources. They claimed the support of many famous people, although it was alleged on many occasions that these claims were spurious. But MRA seemed to have little difficulty in contacting "atheists" who found God, shop stewards who enjoyed rubbing shoulders with the factory manager, and other oddballs who were proudly displayed at meetings and Press conferences.

There have been rumblings in the American and Canadian movement for some time, and it appears that the discontent has spread to Europe. A breakaway group of young rearers have formed an educational trust whose main activity seems to be touring those treacly shows for which MRA is noted. It is believed that the younger generation of MRA is not so keen on the four absolutes; nevertheless the American movement has sold all its offices outside New York to finance them.

The British have not departed from the straight and narrow path that is paved with moralising clichés and exhortations. But the more wordly German and Danish brethren have turned to the fleshpots, and sold much of their property in order, presumably, to finance the frolics of youth.

It has been said that the rot set in with the death five years ago of the dynamic and versatile Peter Howard. Certainly his loss was a hard blow, but it is more likely it was the rot which is to be found in MRA policies that led to its decline and the present split.

There has been a fundamental change in outlook since the time when MRA was making its greatest impact. The "cold war" may not have ended, but relations between the Communist and Western blocs are more relaxed. The ultra-Right supporters who regarded the Roman Church and MRA as the supreme champions of anti-Communism are now rallying to the National Front and Enoch Powell. And for the cranks there are always the Jehovah's Witnesses and Exclusive Brethren.

## TIME FOR ANOTHER

The Government is considering reports which may lead to radical changes in Britain's licensing laws. And about time too! The present laws were introduced a century ago to curb drunkenness among the working class, although there was as much hope of achieving this as curbing over-eating by affluent Victorians. Certainly such laws are now out of date, and have little relation to the needs of the present day. Indeed, their harmfulness to the tourist industry may be reflected in the economy. Appropriately, the British Tourist Authority is among those stepping up the campaign for reform.

At the same time the Government should support future attempts to reform the Sunday Observance laws. The last Government's shilly-shallying and equivocating on John Parker's and William Hamling's Sunday Entertainments Bill were unworthy of a Government which supported other reforms in the teeth of fierce and ignorant opposition.



# S AND NOTES

# PUBLICATIONS

## WASTED EFFORT

Peter Hain has displayed superb courage, tenacity and enterprise in campaigns against discrimination and injustice. So it was a great pity that he made an ass of himself by announcing his intention of joining with others in disrupting the Miss World contest.

The contest has been described as "undignified", "de-basing", "degrading". But the contestants are adults, volunteers, and no doubt perfectly capable of looking after their own interests. If they wish to display their faces, thighs—and any other part of their anatomy for that matter—to judges and photographers, that is their concern. It is quite amazing how some libertarians, always the first to throw up their hands in holy horror when National Front louts disrupt a public meeting, rush in to defend the antics of the hysterical viragoes of the Women's Liberation Movement. It was they who were undignified, and who debased and degraded women at the Royal Albert Hall. The British WLM is obviously as dotty as its American counterpart, and that is an achievement in itself.

There are so many important things to protest about that the Miss World contest, like other hardy annuals of boredom, can be safely ignored.

## BIRTH CONTROL BAN STAYS

"The wealthy bachelor is at it again", said David Tribe, president of the National Secular Society, last week in a Press statement on the Pope's speech to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The Pope (who presented the FAO with a large ceramic frieze depicting the biblical parable of the loaves and fishes) told 119 delegates from member countries that the Roman Catholic Church ban on birth control remains. Referring to the difficulties to be overcome in solving the world's food problems, Pope Paul said: "There is a great temptation to use one's authority to diminish the number of guests rather than multiply the bread that is to be shared".

The Food and Agriculture Organisation reported that about 15 per cent of the world's population is underfed and often hungry, and about 50 per cent of the population is malnourished or undernourished. It is going to take an awful lot of loaves and fishes to feed the hungry even if the world's population were stabilised.

David Tribe points out that much of what the Pope actually said was sound sense, "but he persists in a naïve belief that little homilies or the grace of God will stop the disastrous population explosion. So again we have a fulmination against 'artificial' family planning.

"In illustration of Christian virtues he resurrects his old, and by now utterly weary, metaphor of the dinner guests. All we have to do, he says, is order more bread. Unfortunately, the current number of *World Hunger* shows that food production is falling behind rather than striding ahead. So the baker has no spare bread to supply. To extend the metaphor, even if the food were unlimited we should have to find chairs and toilet facilities for the invasion of guests. And, as they huddled ever closer together, arguments and fighting might well break out.

"I hope the UN has now passed beyond the phase of yielding to the Catholic bloc vote and other forms of political blackmail. Perhaps the question is, how many Catholics will now give heed to him."

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Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux	Eddie and Win Roux	45/0	2/0
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Religious Education in State Schools	Brigid Brophy	2/6	4d
Ten Non Commandments	Ronald Fletcher	2/6	4d
The Cost of Church Schools	David Tribe	4/0	6d
A History of Sex	G. L. Simons	9/0	1/0
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Freethought and Humanism in Shakespeare	David Tribe	2/0	4d
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## BOOKS

## THE PAUPER PRESS

by Patricia Hollis. Oxford University Press, 70s.

*A pauper Press, which administering to the prejudice and passions of the mob was converted to the basest purposes, . . . which sent forth a continuous stream of falsehood and malignity, its virulence and its mischief heightening as it proceeds.*

The language is not modern of course: the words which provide the title to Patricia Hollis' very thorough and capable piece of research, were actually uttered in 1819 by Lord Ellenborough, England's magnificently reactionary Lord Chancellor—but do they not call up recollections of remarks made about the mass media today? There is, however, this fairly big difference. Those who today, in print or on radio or television, are believed by others to be “administering to prejudice and passion” do not face anything more serious than the displeasure of Mrs Mary Whitehouse and the not-very-great possibility of prosecution. But between 1830 and 1836—the period dealt with in this book—those who published pamphlets and newspapers which had not paid the heavy Government tax (the Stamp Duty) faced regularly the threat of the sale of their premises and machinery, fines and repeated imprisonment. Read the brief stories of the leaders among them (set out in Dr Hollis' biographical notes); William Benbow, Richard Carlile, William Carpenter, John Cleeve, Henry Hetherington (who died of cholera), Julian Hibberd (the rich man among them, who bailed the others out time and again), Richard Lee, James Watson, Bronterre O'Brien and the rest of them. Recall the names of a few of the journals they produced and suffered for: *Twopenny Trash*, *Poor Man's Guardian*, *The Twopenny Dispatch* and *Cleeve's Weekly Police Gazette*; they are entries in the roll of fame. Recall also the names of police spies and *agents provocateurs* like Popay, who incited poor men to break the law, and reported meticulously (where they did not invent it) what they were doing. And if only you could find them, the names of the members of London juries who, for example, refused to convict Benbow, Watson and William Lovett the Chartist, on a charge which was proved up to the hilt, and after the killing of a policeman in a riot at Coldbath Fields in 1833 determinedly brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide. One of the reasons why the Government went ahead with the building of barracks to house the soldiers was to prevent them reading “falsehood and malignity” if they were billeted in ordinary people's houses.

Dr Hollis' book is not altogether easy reading; it is so crammed with fact. It is also limited in its scope to a certain extent. It deals in detail only with the events of the six years I have mentioned, and with the story of the unstamped Press. It makes reference only to the suppressive measures of the earlier years, of the Napoleonic wars and the repression which followed them; of the Six Acts of Peterloo, and it does little more than touch on the parallel middle-class agitation for the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge which is associated particularly with the names of Place, Mill and Lovett, and to a certain extent with Brougham. Her subject is the struggle of the working-class element, and she does not attempt to conceal the fact that in some respects and on some occasions the middle-class reformers were at loggerheads with their working-class contemporaries. The Tories, in Parliament and outside, were, generally speaking, against all education, other than

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perhaps the minimum instruction in reading for the working classes on the simple ground that it endangered their conception of society—as it certainly did; and not all of them had the common sense to distinguish, as did Pitt in the case of Godwin's *Political Justice*, between the subversive opinions held, and the class and income of the those who held them.

Place and Mill, however, and their allies, laid great stress on the function of the Press in *giving information*, in teaching the people to discriminate between “liberty and licentiousness, boldness and recklessness, public principle and necessary mob-serving”. It was for the good of the body politic, and as a part-safeguard against violent and ill-considered action, that the populace should have suitable and thoughtful instruction by the more fortunate and educated. So Francis Place took essentially the same line as he did towards the emancipation of the Trades Unions from legal shackles. But working-class champions like Hetherington and O'Brien did not go along with him in this paternalistic attitude. “A People's Education”, said O'Brien, “is only safe in a People's own hands”, and he went on to explain to the *Poor Man's Guardian*, just what he meant by asserting that the kind of instruction given by the better-off classes was of no help to the poor. In 1835 he wrote, in a passage not without relevance 135 years later: “The capitalist, we know, will say that machinery cures the evil it creates; he will tell us that by making goods cheaper, it extends consumption, and that increased consumption causes increased employment. So it does, but it is *increased employment for the machine, not the worker.*”

So did some of the working-class writers resist middle-class teaching upon economics; so also did they push aside the view that all cheap newspapers ought to be uniformly “serious” and “improving”. In 1834, Henry Hetherington said of his *Twopenny Dispatch*: “It shall abound in Police Intelligence, in Murders, Rapes, Suicides, Burings, Maimings, Theatricals, Races, and all manner of moving atrocities, by flood and field. . . . Our object is not to make money, *but to beat the Government*”. But however the two parties in the fight might from time to time fall out and criticise each other—as is indeed the way of reformers throughout history—politically they were not deeply divided. They both wanted to beat the Government, and to end the Taxes on Knowledge, and why they helped each other practically. The middle-class adherents gave comfort, help and asylum to the part-time sellers of the unstamped Press—the croppers, shoemakers, weavers, hatters, hairdressers, teachers, warehousemen, cabinet makers, publicans, all of whom appear in Dr Hollis' chronicle, along with the man who “kept a low Shell and Fried Fish shop in Moorfields”, and the man who printed and sold political handkerchiefs covered with slogans: “your wives and daughters may become moving monuments of political knowledge.”

All was not sad and serious in the fight, although many risked all they had in the world. They succeeded—partly because the authorities were less pigheaded and unintelligent than they sometimes appeared; the taxes were practically abolished in 1836. Yet sometimes I wonder, if they could see today's uncensored media, how happy would they be with the outcome of their struggle?

MARGARET COLE



# REVIEWS

## THE RISE OF THE STUDENT ESTATE IN BRITAIN

by Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson. MacMillan, 50s.

And its fall, perhaps? The authors have written a complex and enterprising book which, from a sober history of student representation flowers surreptitiously into a manual on how to screw demonstrators without them noticing.

The first four chapters, considering Scottish and English university strictures from 1815 onwards, delineate the progress and, on occasion, retrogression of the concept of students as responsible adults. Indeed, these chapters are written from a viewpoint which acknowledges the necessity of "divesting the pompous teacher of nearly all his acquirements and . . . impressing upon the mind of the pupil that his own sense and reflections were the only sure guide to knowledge". And then authors, like most of their contemporaries, completely fail to see the pertinence of this quotation from 1825, to the universities of 1970. Like so many academics they have failed to appreciate the one great truth to come from the culture of this century—of which, more later!

Despite the misuse and atrophy, Scottish students of 150 years ago elected the rector of their university, presented petitions to the Royal Commission on Scottish universities, awarded academic prizes and occasionally participated in correcting exercises. There are many colleges with less student participation than this in Britain today. Where participation has flowered it has been an uphill climb against the self-interest of bigoted professors, the apathy of students themselves, and the *impérialisme mystifiant* of often archaic academic tradition and of "the system".

It is very easy to mock the ostensibly paranoiac outbursts of students and others against this system, but to do so means a failure to realise what the students have realised; that the invisibility, diffuseness and complexity which facilitates its permeation of our lives, and that a paranoid attitude, with its deliberate interpretation of phenomena as manifesting an underlying hostile structure, is a major, if not the only, weapon against the system and one's internalisation of it.

Moreover this same structuring has the consequence of validating the statement, "Apathy is more evil than evil"—that is to say, silence is consent. He who denies the relevance of the system to himself, he who denies the relevance of his tacit support to the system, he who, as a scientist or intellectual deludes himself into thinking he is impartial and unaffected by his environment, constitutes the greatest barrier to progress, political or academic.

The "central truth" to which I casually referred has been quietly present in our culture ever since the birth of Christianity, but first became truly overt, perhaps, with the Formalists, and since then has been the conscious or implicit basis of much of our art. Marshall McLuhan stated, "The medium is the message"—in other words the form of a communication defines and limits its content. The same is true of men.

To refer to student revolutionaries as "fumbling for a new ethic" is to fail completely to appreciate what the "Woodstock nation" and "hippies" and "drugs" are all about. They are about the "system", and the extent to which it not only curtails our actions, but structures our

personalities and channels our motivations. It outmodes Marxism by saying to us, workers, bosses, intellectuals, that we need material goods not only for our comfort but for our self-respect. They are about the fact that people moulded by this system are castrated as instruments of change, not simply by what they want or do, but by what they are. They are about the value of art, of drugs, of a directional intellectualism (not a "free" intellect, for freedom of the mind is rare to impossible for the above reasons; the only solution is to seize your own mind and make it what you want, take it where you want) as providers of alternatives; alternatives of form, upon which alternatives of content will be consequent.

And about the manners in which comfortable suburban self-interest—not so much greed as laziness—cause academics and others to ignore these truths and their relevance, and plant themselves firmly in the 19th century.

But can this by itself explain the sudden tergiversation of this book? Is it necessary to postulate a coolly conscious hypocrisy on the part of Ashby and Anderson? Oh Eric! Mary!—how is it that on page five you not only refer to but accept the necessity of "divesting the pompous teacher of nearly all his acquirements" and 150 pages, 150 years later, you offer counter-propaganda techniques for maintaining the "authority of the university" against the revolutionaries from whom you could learn so much?

DAMIEN DOWNING

## THEATRE

EXILES. Mermaid Theatre, London.

In September 1916, after reading the script of *Exiles*, Ezra Pound wrote to its author James Joyce, "Yes, it is interesting. It won't do for the stage". For all the loving care lavished on the current Mermaid production (for a very limited season), I am inclined to agree with him.

Not for the reasons given by Pound: that no audience "could follow it or take it in" and no manager "would stage it in our chaste and castrated English speaking world". Though all this may have been true of 1916, after **Oh! Calcutta!** and **Council of Love** and the theatre of the absurd no audience has anything more to fear and no manager anything left to hide. Indeed the trouble is that extended agonising over "betrayal" by youthful passion and middle-aged lechery—with whiffs of hersy and echoes of the class struggle in the background—are hard to believe in today; or, for that matter, in the Dublin of 1912. Of course the play is much more than this. It is an allegory on free will and determinism, relativity and absoluteness, frightening truth and congenial falsehood. But myth-involvement itself fails unless the characters portrayed are credible and moving. For me at least the "portrait of the artist as a young prig" (John Wood) and the surprisingly well-spoken puppet of the serving wench (Vivien Merchant) he got into trouble and swept off to Italy nine years before, with a sexual foil (Lynn Farleigh and Timothy West respectively) for each (stopping short of the homosexuality that might have given the non-events more point), failed to come to life. Mainly I felt the trouble was in the sub-Ibsen writing, which resonates better in the ideological than in the sexual exchanges which form the bulk of the play. But Harold Pinter's statuesque production, of a sort calculated to bring out the hidden menace in his own plays,

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## TELEVISION: WHY, OH WHY?

PETER COTES

The Royal Variety Performance (BBC-1) was neither royal nor variety. It was uniformly dull, pedestrian, conforming all the way with the pop scene; it bored. One felt sorry for the "Royals"; even the stoutest republican would have been forced to admit that they deserve, by way of compensation, a yearly bonus stipend for enduring so stoically this annual embarrassing shindig.

The following night on ITV came Britain's reply to the American "Lucy Show", with yet another episode in that infantile *Girls About Town* series. Contrived and effortful, it is an up-to-date anglicized *Dr Finlay's Casebook*; as affected and insincere as its Scottish counterpart, and as unimaginatively concocted. The canned laughter (was it really a "live" audience laughing at such a sorry performance?) depressed further. Why, oh why? as Malcolm Muggeridge would cry. And talking of the Sage of Robertsbridge, a recent programme on *Why Patriotism?* (BBC-1) showed us Lords Brockway and Chalfont as splendidly sincere folk; articulate and thoughtful. And some of those trendy, vocal, bright young things in a not so splendid light. The self-love and self-indulgence the yippie, hippy, snip-snap of a few nights later (with the clownish Jerry Rubin and Co.) was given a "trailer" in the quasi-religious programme conducted by Malcolm the Wise. The kids enjoyed themselves; the good Lords (and in this programme they seemed to be the only worthy ones present, apart from the Misses Morrison and Wingate) looked suitably embarrassed as the TV demo proceeded to turn this into yet another student protest show. But this time, protest about what? The Lords weren't retrogressive, illiberal, reactionary. The hippies and weirdies were loud-mouthed, intolerant and obscure. They did not wish to hear another side, or consider their opponent's case, or forget their beards. They could have quite easily qualified for membership of Mosley's pre-war bully boys, or even the present National Front. There was a member of this latter benighted crew on the panel, who scorned the hippies present, but reserved his loudest vocal counterblasts for the liberal Lords present. However, he didn't disguise his hope that Enoch Powell would be our next Prime Minister.

It was sad to see the genuine depression of Lord Chalfont when the camera caught him, unexpectedly, listening to the strident shouts of the "opposition", who seemed to place nihilism well about politics, Right or Left; "in-politics" with a vengeance. No wonder Brockway was sadly reflective and Chalfont uncomprehendingly sad. Only Muggeridge looked pleased with the result. The sincere radicals on this type of "show-off" programme sink without a trace. And they will continue to do so, unless the question master acts as chairman with responsibility, and ensures that decent discussion, not anarchy prevails in a programme allegedly given over to rational debate. Anarchy it has become, and as such, it makes nonsense of its title *Why?* The viewers have the right to ask "Why?"

In the current over-exposed telly stakes the winner is easily George Melly. Melly is much better read than seen or hard. The pity of it is we see and hear him all too often, discussing a variety of subjects about which his knowledge is strictly limited. Along with Sheridan Morley and Jonathan Miller, Melly seems to be popping up on the screen too much these days. Further evidence of over-exposure one felt, was the Laurence Olivier interview on

*Late Night Line Up* (BBC-2). This would have been enhanced by the absence of Morley. Oliver came across as "Larry O"; smooth, soft, self-assured and self-effacing in an actorish way. It was an accomplished dramatised-documentary performance, which had no need of that self-conscious "feeding" as prop; so much part of the interviewing of theatrical personalities, for all too long now, by the BBC's very own special show-biz correspondent.

## PAMPHLET

### SOUTH AFRICA: BRITISH INVOLVEMENT IN

APARTHEID. Europe-Africa Research Project. 2s 6d.

The clue to the answer is to be found in this informative pamphlet. The writer gives a list of big British companies which have large vested interests in the South African economy. They include producers of oil, electronic equipment, rubber products, motor components and various other things. There is an influential lobby at Westminster which has little difficulty now in keeping the Conservative Party to the line that public morality has nothing to do with private, profit-making industry and commerce.

This attitude—which, incidentally, is not applied to trade with eastern Europe or the Soviet Union—gets Britain more deeply involved every year in southern Africa.

The Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola hold the key to the whole situation. They are weak and South Africa at present has more to fear from the weakness of its neighbours, including Rhodesia, than from the strength of its avowed enemies. To repair this weakness, Portugal, a so-called ancient ally of Britain's, is actually increasing the settlement of white farmers on lands occupied by black peasants. The latter will in time be reduced to labourers earning a very low wage and deprived of their rights in the land.

Public opinion in Britain is firmly against the racial policies for which South Africa is notorious. Thanks to the persistent work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the facts about the colour bar are widely known. Why, then, do successive governments do little or nothing beyond saying that we all disapprove of apartheid?

JOHN GILD

## THEATRE

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did little to enliven a play which depends on other psychological nuances. The charm and realism in the set and costumes designed by Eileen Diss and Robin Fraser Paye helped to bring the play down to earth, though I always feel the Mermaid succeeds best with a stark unconventional set.

For all that, we must be grateful for a rare opportunity of seeing the only play by perhaps the most interesting novelist of the twentieth century; and if there is no Molly Bloom's soliloquy or "Ballad of Joking Jesus" to enliven the evening there is frequent subtlety of word and voice.

DAVID TRIBE