

## THE POLITICS OF ENCOUNTER

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THE first number of *Encounter* was welcomed by the Times Literary Supplement in an editorial which included the following comment:

"A possible criticism of the non-literary articles in *Encounter* has to do with the basic attitudes many of them express. These attitudes might be described as characterized by a negative liberalism, or a liberalism whose main positive features, at least, appears to be a hatred or a fear of Communism. . . ."

It was, no doubt, mildly embarrassing for the editors of *Encounter* to have their major political premiss so clearly defied at this early stage of their journalistic career, but they had no cause for alarm. *Encounter* quickly established itself, and its public, which soon became large, was evidently content with the mixture of an American packaged liberalism and an appearance of liveliness on the literary side that was much helped by the general thinness of literary monthlies and quarterlies in post-war Britain.

*Encounter*, whose first number appeared in October 1953, entered a dull and grey period in British intellectual and political life. The aftermath of the Labour Governments had left sour tastes in most mouths. The Labour Party intellectuals were still making exaggerated claims for the social revolution which the Labour Party was supposed to have accomplished, and the rank and file of the movement was understandably confused by the large gap between these claims and their own daily experience. Some of those among the middle classes with a claim to progressive thinking found their liberal pretensions crumbling before the difficulties of obtaining domestic help and the growing conviction, which had no basis in fact, that their living standards were being sacrificed to the "vast redistribution of incomes" in favour of the working class; and there was a decided shift in political affiliations towards the Conservative Party. The political Left of the Labour movement was at a low point. The Communist Party, and its intellectual following, was confined within the straitjacket of Stalinism, and its contribution to political enlightenment was only on occasion better than negative. **Bevanism** was the healthiest and liveliest political movement but its internal weaknesses and deficiencies were accentuated by the political isolation imposed by the great strength of the right **wing** trade unions dominated by Arthur Deakin. And added to **all** these factors **was** the reaction to Stalinism, in Russia and Eastern Europe as

well as in the general world situation, which both confused and immensely hardened political attitudes in the West.

The situation provided a splendid opportunity for those directing Encounter. The journal was subsidized by the Congress of Cultural Freedom, one of the more important intellectual outriders of the American State Department. It is not, of course, that the State Department actually pays. That privilege is normally afforded to one or other of the Foundations, like Rockefeller or Ford, which use what was formerly known as the loot of the Robber Barons and today is described as the rewards of enterprise, for the financial underwriting of good works. In the case of Encounter, it was the Farfield Foundation which made a special grant to the Congress of Cultural Freedom for the purpose of publishing the journal. The editors of Encounter have always denied, with proper indignation, the suggestion which the uncharitable have sometimes made that they are subject to outside control, and there is no substantial reason to doubt the assertion of independence. Nor will any but the most captious wish to deny to the editors of Encounter their single-minded search for truth, except that it became increasingly obvious from the early numbers of the journal that nothing it published would ever disturb the political philosophy of its conservative backers. The political coverage of Encounter has been extraordinarily selective and particularly in its international material that has never been printed anything to which the average president of the average American Foundation could possibly take offence. Perhaps in the case of Encounter's editors Humbert Wolfe's comment, *mutatis mutandis*, is also apposite:

"You cannot hope to bribe or twist  
Thank God, the British Socialist  
But seeing what the man will do  
Unbribed, there's no occasion to."

The editors of Encounter were Irving Kristol (who retired in 1958 when Melvin Lasky took his place) and Stephen Spender. It will come as no shock to Mr. Spender to learn that Irving Kristol emerges from a reading of the first five years of Encounter as the dynamic partner in the enterprise. Spender's own writings in Encounter have mainly taken the form of occasional Notes From a Diary, and they have been among the weakest contributions in the journal. Spender continually hearkened back to the 1930s and apparently found it difficult to condemn outright the intellectual anti-fascists of those days; and his anti-Communism of the middle 1950s lacked the committed toughness of the Central European or the American intellectuals who clustered so thickly around the Congress of Cultural Freedom. There was a soft centre in Spender's political writing which contrasted sharply with that of his tough-minded editorial colleague. For Mr. Kristol had no doubts about his role or the part which Encounter should play. As he wrote in

answer to the discussion provoked by the "negative liberalism" comment of the Times Literary Supplement, it is necessary that the "Communist régimes and the free world understand their profound mutual incompatibility" (May 1954). To encourage the recognition of these fundamental differences, and to deepen and maintain the gulf between East and West, were the aims to which Mr. Kristol dedicated himself in the middle years of the decade. It was a task which called for a fine sense of imbalance in the editorial make-up of each number. No one would guess, for instance, from a reading of the early volumes, that German rearmament, Cyprus, Kenya, the beginnings of the Central African question, were among the more important international problems that concerned the British people; for these matters were either not mentioned at all or they were given a perfunctory and lopsided treatment. It is not sufficient to argue that Encounter was a literary rather than a political journal, for there was much political writing and comment in these years. The report of his experiences by a young subaltern who hunted Mau-Mau in Kenya provides an interesting example of Encounter's illiberalism in this period. The extract which follows, published in 1954, is worth giving not only because it illustrates a section of opinion in the mid-fifties, but also because its kind of quaintness is not likely to be repeated in quite the same way again; and it is therefore of some historic value as representing a type of public school colonial ethos which has a long and dishonourable tradition in Britain.

"The happiest Africans I met in Kenya were not Assistant District Officers, qualified doctors, schoolmasters and the like, but the savage, uncultured Askaris of the King's African Rifles whom the authorities have resisted all temptation to Europeanize. Put a native in a collar and tie and he seems suddenly to become dissatisfied, uncomfortable, conscious if you like of his peoples' wrongs; but give him three blankets, enough ground maize to keep him from going hungry and one shilling eighty a day with which to buy cigarettes or send home to his family, and he will rarely show a sign of discontent. The colour bar, which is more blatant in the army than in any other walk of life, far from being a bone of contention actually makes for contentment. The K.A.R. Askari is happy because he lives apart from his European superiors; because he speaks a different language, wears different clothes, and eats different food from the white man. It is enough for him that we are the mouthpiece of what is reverently called 'Amri ya K.A.R.' (the order of the K.A.R.). On our part we respect the difference between the two races, the traditions and customs of his particular tribe; the fact that on pay day he **might** very well decide to draw all his credits, merely to help purchase a new wife. As long as the work in hand remains uncompromised, the Askaris are left to their own devices, to dance their own dances, to live their own accustomed lives. Only, like all officers, we try to satisfy their own needs before our own. Possibly that is the charm of serving with the K.A.R.; the needs of the men are so ridiculously simple; they are natural soldiers, having **been** carrying arms

for the last thousand years, and finally, once one gains their trust and **confidence**, they will follow almost anywhere."

It will be appreciated by the assiduous Encounter reader that what has just been quoted could not possibly have been published in its pages during the past half-dozen years, so changed have become the attitudes among intellectuals, and especially the younger generations, towards problems of race and **colour**; but it is among the many merits of Encounter that though it stands firm and steadfast on the rock of anti-communism, it has always shown a notable willingness to adjust itself to changes in liberal fashions. Indeed, to make a more general point, the recognition that Britain is not America is among the more important of Encounter's achievements.

Most of the international political comment and interpretation in the early years was straight anti-Communism, but it was soon clear that in addition to the important task of preaching a sophisticated American-style red-baiting at all levels, Encounter had also set itself the job of polishing the American image for the benefit of those British who remained sceptical about the beneficent nature of American society and of American foreign policy in particular. Peregrine Worsthorne, to be described in American terms as a moderate liberal, was prominent among the interpreters of the American scene, and he and others not only gave a good deal of prominence to Clinton Rossiter and other conservative thinkers but spent much time explaining how much healthier the conservative element in the American tradition was than the radical experience. The contradictions and the uglier aspects of American life were avoided, and there was no adverse comment on American foreign policy. As Dwight MacDonald discovered, possibly to his own surprise, Encounter was not prepared to print a critical essay on America, for when MacDonald offered a lively, albeit moderate essay on this theme, it was rejected. The editors of Encounter, when the matter was inconveniently raised in the pages of the *Universities and Left Review* (Nos. 5 and 6), naturally assured the world that the essay was rejected on its demerits; and the Paris headquarters of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, who felt it necessary to enter the discussion, were happy to point out that they never interfered editorially with the journals sponsored by them, and that in any case MacDonald's article was in fact published later by Ignazio Silone in *Tempo Presente*, the Italian equivalent of Encounter. Only the professional doubters will add that *Tempo Presente* has not, of course, the same standing in Italy as Encounter has in Britain, and that there is perhaps a difference between a critique of America published in Italian which most Americans will not read, and one published in English which Americans, including the American trustees of Foundations, can, if they wish, read fairly easily.

Encounter's attitude to America went with their general approach to

intellectual and political **life**. The concern of the editorials and the **non-literary** contributions was with the inadequacies of the traditional ways of political action, with the bankruptcy of all those who set themselves the aim of a radical transformation of society and with the difficulties, in the post-war world, of continuing to believe in the power of reason in politics. The approach took two main forms. The first was the deep despair emitted by Arthur Koestler and Silone—"the sense of bewilderment, tedium and disgust characteristic of our age" as Silone phrased it in December **1954**; and in the early numbers of *Encounter* this emphasis on the dark passions of human nature and the return of the barbarians was the most prominent feature of their philosophizing. **But** outright despair was a posture that had only limited value for a journal with the aims *Encounter* had set itself, and a more sophisticated and acceptable version underlined the futility of the left wing politics of the past, their lack of realism when applied to the present, and the blurring, in our own time, of the traditional positions of Right and Left. The argument, presented especially by Raymond Aron and Edward Shils, is the familiar one that ideological controversy is dying down in Western countries, partly because of the failure of the hopes that had been placed in the socialist **countries**, partly because the rising affluence of Western Europe and America was demonstrating, in Aron's words, that there was no incompatibility between "political liberty and wealth, or between free markets **and** a higher standard of life" (January **1955**). The most succinct statement of this position was a report by Edward Shils on the September **1955** Milan Conference of the **Congress** of Cultural Freedom. He wrote:

"The **obscuring** of the once clear distinction between 'left' and 'right,' the discovery that over the past thirty years the extremes of 'right' and 'left' had disclosed identities which were much more impressive than their differences, the disasters of governing societies by passionate adherence to formulae, the crimes committed in the names of sacred principles of policy in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, had all left a residue of scepticism among many intellectuals in most countries, and created uneasiness among others who are not yet sceptical regarding their inherited doctrines. The fact, too, that in our decade the nations which have most successfully managed their internal affairs—Great Britain, the United States, Western Germany, and the Scandinavian countries—have increasingly considered their major domestic policies without regard for the standard distinctions of 'left' and 'right,' of socialism and laissez-faire, but in a matter-of-fact way which recognized no general principles and treated each emerging situation on its own merits, has contributed to disillusion intellectuals of these countries of the notion that one side or the other had a monopoly of the care of freedom and welfare."

From the proposition that socialists everywhere have come to appreciate that the problems of liberty are immensely more complex and complicated than was formerly recognized, no one will dissent; but

these are not the questions in which Encounter and its contributors were interested. What concerned them was an emphasis upon the rejection of all but *ad hoc* piecemeal social engineering which, in the context of the political situation in Western Europe and America, could only be safely conservative in outcome. At the centre of their political thinking was a committed anti-Communism which has replaced the emphasis on liberty in the traditional liberal doctrine. It is a political stance which in its most pernicious **form** has been typical of the American conformist intellectual in the years since 1945, and it is well illustrated by Leslie **Fiedler's** article on Senator **McCarthy** in the issue of August 1954. In Britain, because the political situation is more liberal and open-minded than the American, the variations upon the anti-Communist theme have to be less strident in their emphasis and more sophisticated in their argument. There is, of course, no difficulty for the Encounter-type liberal in accepting important, but minor, and certainly politically innocuous causes, such as the abolition of the death penalty or the reform of the laws dealing with homosexuals; nor, as is argued below, have they found any difficulty in the most recent years in widening the debate to include radicals of the Fabian tradition. But some of their happiest moments come when they are able to excite among their liberal readership a passionate discussion on such prestige subjects as "U and Non-U" (first published in November 1955). Sophisticated trivia can always be relied upon to divert and entertain and, as Encounter has so obviously discovered, there is nothing that sells better.

Encounter's editorial problems in standing four-square on one side of the fence were exhibited rather brutally at the time of Suez. Since it was to the iniquities of Russia and Eastern Europe that the journal had devoted so much space, the error of Suez was much to be regretted, partly, no doubt, because it occurred at the same time as Hungary. But the Congress of Cultural Freedom, as reflected in its journals, is in the nature of things inhibited from making even the mildest critical comment on the Western Alliance except in the most abstract terms; and Suez was too serious a matter to permit any deviation from **firm** principle. Encounter was either fortunate or far-sighted in that Dwight **MacDonald** was actually in Cairo just before and during the British aggression on Egypt and his shallow diary jottings could be published to show that the editors were as news-conscious as their colleagues everywhere. But there was no condemnation, no discussion of the morality of the British action, no comment by an Egyptian, either in MacDonald's article or in any number of the journal in the following year. Hungary of course was different, and was discussed and condemned at length.

Even Encounter, however, was forced to recognize, indirectly rather than directly, that Suez represented a watershed in the politics of post-war Britain and that its effects upon political life and especially upon the young intellectuals and the students, have been profound.

Edward Shils' account of the British intellectuals, written in 1955, endeavoured to show that political accommodation to bourgeois society was as widespread in Britain as it had become in America, and it was false when it appeared; but even half-expatriate Americans, with all their devotion to the conservative institutions of British life, could not argue after Suez and the great debate on unilateralism, that conformity of the American kind was the hallmark of large numbers of British intellectuals. The appeal to unreason in politics could no longer command assent as it had done in the middle fifties, nor, with the processes of destalinization continuing in Eastern Europe, could the old type of anti-communist propaganda continue to be used. What was needed was a more positive statement of political ideas which would not conflict with the basic postulates that had always underpinned Encounter's editorial decisions, but which would appeal to, or at least be listened to by the new, more politically hopeful generations. The editors began to open their pages to a discussion of matters that were becoming of increasing concern to British intellectuals. There is only a strictly limited intellectual audience in this country for the ideas of the extreme Right, and to keep a place in the mainstream of intellectual life in Britain in the years since 1956 has involved Encounter in a shift towards the political centre. Encounter could not, of course, adopt any position but one of total opposition to the unilateralism that was rapidly becoming the major item of political controversy in the last years of the 'fifties. But while it could never waver on the issue of the Bomb and the central significance of N.A.T.O. to the politics of Western Europe, it was able to provide some of the more interesting discussions of the whole argument as well as—and this is typical—some of the most unpleasant and smearing attacks on the unilateralist movement. In domestic affairs, the positive political philosophy which met its requirements Encounter found mostly in the ideas of the right wing of the Labour Party. In particular Mr. C. A. R. Crosland provided a body of ideas and policies, intellectually well-constructed and excellently argued, whose fundamental assumptions included an acceptance of the American alliance, a passionate rejection of unilateralism and a cogent statement of social reform in neo-Fabian terms. With respect to Mr. Crosland, it is worth remarking that the Fabians have been at the game for many decades now, and while the outside of society has changed a good deal in the past sixty years nothing fundamental has changed within. There are no echoes today of that extraordinary chorus from Crossman, Crosland and the New Fabian Essayists who, in 1952, wrote in such delirious terms of the structural changes in capitalist society that had occurred during the 1940s, and especially as a result of the policies of the Labour Governments between 1945 and 1951. While what had been achieved did not quite add up to socialism they were equally certain that what was left was certainly not capitalism, a claim that it is difficult even for euphoric Fabians to sustain after the

enlarged freedom for profits, interest and rent that has come about in the years of Tory rule since 1951. As late as 1959 it was still possible for a well-known Oxford statistician to argue that there was a permanent bias in the British economy towards a greater equality of income, but again this has not survived the devastating analysis by Titmuss in his important *Income Distribution and Social Change*, published in 1962. There is, indeed, little in the Fabian tradition of social reform that is likely seriously to worry anyone in the United States except the American Medical Association and the lunatic Right; and the more sophisticated trustees of Foundations no doubt appreciate the historical differences between America and Europe as well as the relevance of the adage that there are more ways of killing a pig than by drowning it in milk. In recent years, therefore, with the change in the political climate of Britain, most of the staple political writing in *Encounter* has come from the Fabians on the left to the Bow group on the right. When there arise political issues such as Cuba, *Encounter* reverts sharply to its fundamentalist position; and its obsession with Cuba as well as the hostility to left-wing movements and ideas in general exhibit the hard core of its pseudo-liberal politics.

## II

In July 1963 Arthur Koestler edited for *Encounter* a special number devoted to the "condition of England" question, under the title of *Suicide of a Nation?* Six months later this was republished as a separate volume, and its contents permit a more detailed enquiry into the political areas occupied by *Encounter*. The contributors to this special number belong, as would be expected, to the centre of British political life, although their affiliations and outlook include the genuine liberal as well as the bogus and the pseudo-liberal. It was not, indeed, difficult to predict the general approach this special number would take, or the contributors it would call upon. The stagnation thesis argued in recent years by Andrew Schonfield and Michael Shanks would be given a prominent place; there would be much about the conservatism of the trade unions as a major retarding factor in economic growth, a theme always calculated to arouse the passions of all types of liberal reformers; education would receive a high place among the agencies of change; and, if at all possible, at some point the symposium would find room to emphasize the central importance of the N.A.T.O. alliance for Britain, with the usual side-kicks at unilateralists, neutralists and Fidel Castro.

It was to be expected that this special number would run true to *Encounter* form but what is more striking is that it can scarcely claim the title of having been edited in any of the usual meanings of the word. The volume is a rag-bag of bits and pieces. Much of the writing is trivial, and the essays are in most cases unco-ordinated one with the

other. The analysis of the younger contributors is attuned to the obvious, and the older writers appear sour because they have lived too long. After an introduction by Koestler there are two knockabout pieces by Henry Fairlie and Malcolm Muggeridge which, from his short preface to their essays, must have embarrassed the editor; but they are not untypical of a part of the Encounter tradition, for Encounter has always been willing to titillate its audience with near-radical or toughly conservative commentaries, and it uses either indiscriminately. Of the two essays in question, Muggeridge's railings against everything are the more absurd, and he achieves the not very difficult feat of caricaturing himself, for a licensed jester is always beset by the temptation to produce wilder and wilder versions of his art. The symposium in general, it must be said, is on a more serious level than Muggeridge's contribution although throughout there is a sprinkling of the stale prejudices of the English middle class—"the endless grinding cancer of the income tax" of Cyril Connolly—which always offer gratification to their conceits and hates without providing a basis for a genuinely radical solution. A "radical solution" is indeed asked for by several contributors to this symposium, and there are lengthy discussions of what are regarded as the symptoms of social and economic malaise; but there is no probing in depth, and a policy for the future, explicit or implicit, does not emerge except in the vaguest terms. When Marcus Cunliffe, for example, in a contribution for which the only excuse must be that it was written from a sick bed—that indeed is its title—asked for a radical revision of "our policies and politics, schools and universities, courts and prisons, décor and architecture, cookery and customs, commerce and industry, images and identities," he gives no hint in the discussion which precedes or follows this muddled and promiscuous catalogue, of what "radical" or "revision" may involve.

In the minds of those who planned this volume, however, there was no thought of radical revision in the sense of far-reaching social change. The editor made the matter clear in his introductory essay. "There seems to be general agreement" Arthur Koestler wrote, "that we are faced with a "functional" rather than a "structural" disorder. Structural diseases have objective, material causes, functional diseases have subjective, psychological causes." It is "not the loss of Empire, not the huge sums we must spend on armaments, not the misfortune that the steam engine was invented by an Englishman" that is at the root of the economic and social difficulties we are confronted with, but "psychological factors and cultural attitudes"; a variation, it will be appreciated, of the perennial theme of the anti-reformer that we must first change the human heart.

The symposium is divided into three main sections. The first, headed Cold Class War, is a mixture of complaint and analysis of the economic stagnation of Britain during the past decade; and this section includes a wildly irrelevant and unsubstantiated piece of American-style red-

baiting about the British Communist Party by Aidan Crawley. The second part, *Island and Mainland*, deals with some aspects of international politics and it contains, as was to be expected, the usual rehearsal of the arguments against those who do not accept the State Department view of the world situation. This time it is by John Mander, whose shift to a conservative position over the past few years provides an ironic comment on the biographical notes he himself supplied to the present volume: "Born London, 1932. An English upper-middle class education—prep. school, public school, Trin. Coll. Camb.—takes time to live down, liberal parentage notwithstanding. . . ." The third section, *Towards a New Society?* is presumably intended to offer an idea of the way forward but it is the weakest in the whole collection, and the only thing that needs to be said about it is that the question mark after the heading was correctly inserted.

The first section is the most seriously argued and the only part in which the individual essays present some degree of coherence with each other. The conclusions that emerge from this discussion of British economic backwardness summarize the majority view of the more intelligent Tories, the Liberals and the Labourites. The cult of the amateur in industry and administration is deplored; there are too few economists in the top echelons of both business and the civil service; the Top People do not work hard enough and the expense account has made them soft. If we want to help to put things right, Andrew Schonfield said (and he said little else), we must be more frank and open in our comments and criticisms and we must "borrow a large draught of this American explicitness." The criticism of managerial ability is extensive, and the solution offered is the familiar one of the need to educate present and potential managers more effectively, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology making its usual appearance as the prototype of what is required. Only Mr. Shanks adds that if we want a more dynamic society we must first have a more equal society, but this does not mean, he is careful to emphasize, a greater equality of income or wealth "but in the sense of an absence of class barriers, a greater equality of educational opportunity, of status, of power: in a word, social equality." What Mr. Shanks does not indicate is how an absence of class barriers and the rest will grow and develop in a society in which the existing inequality of incomes and wealth continues. But income distribution, the ownership of capital, and the concentration of economic power in industry are evidently material facts beyond and outside the range of the argument, although they might conceivably be thought to have some relevance to the main theme under discussion.

Apart from the emphasis on education, the one thing that most contributors were firm about (and most of the contributors were liberals in the British sense of the word) was the urgent need for trade union reform before advance towards the new Britain could be registered. The comment on the unions was spattered with familiar

phrases concerning the need to recognize the "social worth" of labour; and there was a fine peroration from John Cole, the former Labour correspondent of the Guardian, to the effect that union reform will be brought about only by men who are "fervent in their belief in a new society." One can only ask: What new society? and who is going to bring it about? There are not many shreds of evidence from the past conservative decade that those in positions of power have really been interested in the "social worth" of Labour or that a new social order is in process of development. The rise in the trade unionists' standard of living in the past ten years has come mainly from full employment together with a willingness to work longer hours and accept fewer paid holidays than almost all their contemporaries on the continent of Europe. To make the trade unions more effective, which is a synonym for more militant, would certainly involve important reforms in their structure, organization and democratic procedures; but this is a level of argument quite removed from the Encounter discussion.

This emphasis upon trade unionism illustrates the inadequacies of the liberal position when it comes to the analysis of decision-making and political power. Mr. Koestler's reference to the "civil servants, company directors, and trade union bosses [who] rule us inefficiently" is typical of the misleading vagueness of what political analysis there is in this present symposium. For the most part the important questions are missing. Since this was an inquest on Britain and its failings, it might have been thought obvious to ask who was responsible for the situation the customers were wailing over, and to find an answer that was not limited to the deficiencies of the educational system or the bloodymindedness of the trade unions. There had been, after all, over ten years of a Conservative Government when this symposium was published; or, to put the matter in a longer historical perspective, since 1918, a span of forty-five years, the Labour Party has held office, as a majority government for six years and as a minority government for just over three years, with the Conservative Party occupying the rest of the time. Some blame could not unreasonably be attached to the Conservative Party for the chipped cups, the grimy railway windows, the shortcomings here and the shortcomings there which the contributors write so feelingly about. But not at all. It is not perhaps surprising that this symposium is notable for its failure to mention, let alone document, the extent and depth of poverty in contemporary Britain about which so much has been written in recent years; for this would raise questions that might be too awkward for those who believe the problems of Britain are in the main problems of social psychology. But as the liberal Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal, has demonstrated in his important analysis of America, *The Challenge to Affluence*, the range and depth of poverty in mature industrial societies is of the most direct relevance to the problems of economic stagnation and growth. What is just as typical is the absence of any discussion of political

parties and their policies, and the critical comment in general is so generalized as to exclude direct responsibility. There is therefore no analysis of the failings of the Conservative governments since 1951; no comment on the meaning of Tory freedom; no account of the close and intimate relationship between the Conservative Party and the business world, on which there is abundant documentation; no enquiry into the ownership of capital, or the distribution of income, or the relationship between economic power and political power, and whether the facts of power concentration have any relevance to the stumblings of the British economy during the past decade. The editor, in short, exercised a remarkable degree of self-denial, and what purports to be criticism in depth is no more than a collection of trivia and marginalia. But to expect more of pseudo-liberalism is to misunderstand its selective nature and character.

### III

All the contributors to this symposium have one thing in common, and that is a belief in the central importance of education as a dynamic agent of change. In his opening remarks Arthur Koestler quoted Ian Nairn with approval: "We are at present dying by the mind," Nairn had written, "and it is the mind that must will the change"; and when the will to change becomes accepted by those at the top levels of business and administration, so the argument goes, and this can only happen with a vastly improved educational system, especially that part of the system concerned with the training of top people, then and only then will the British economy shift to higher gear. It is not argued, of course, that improved training by itself is all that is required but it is believed that without a more streamlined and efficient educational structure there can be no substantial increase in the rate of growth of the British economy.

This is a point of view that is widely accepted by many whom it would be unfair to include within the selective liberal *Encounter* tradition, and it is for this reason that the matter deserves attention. It does indeed form one of the central tenets of the creed of all liberals, including many whose formal political allegiance is to the Labour Party. It goes without saying that the argument has some truth in it. Within broadly defined limits man does make his own history, and in the era of an ever more complex technology the role and function of education in society becomes increasingly important. In the same way that the scientist's laboratory has shifted steadily towards the centre of each major industrial enterprise so on a national plane, education, in all its aspects, becomes more and more central to the development of economic and social policy. But to argue that the dynamic force of change resides in educational progress or that the way to transform a social system into something different lies through an alteration of the

existing educational system is quite another matter. For this general argument assumes that a society can develop a new type of educational structure regardless of other changes or that educational change in a radical sense can happen in the absence of other changes. This is the meaning of the discussion in the *Encounter* symposium where educational change is accepted as necessary and where it is assumed that once politicians have themselves been converted, then the change will happen and things in general will be improved. On their own assumptions the liberals, of all kinds, are correct, and one cannot fault them for wanting anything but a glossier and more efficient free-enterprise economy, since this is their starting point. If it were only liberals who were involved in the discussion, it need not continue, except to emphasize once again the class limitations of liberal thought. But the argument and approach of this *Encounter* volume are often sympathetically received by members of the Labour movement in this country, and it is because these illusions are so widespread that the question needs to be taken further.

For decades now the Labour movement in Britain has been agitating for equality in education, but the most striking conclusion from a survey of the socialist campaign for educational betterment is the meagreness of the results achieved. Educational privilege has, of course, lessened in the past half century compared with the absence of educational opportunities for the majority of the people in the nineteenth century. The educational ladder is no longer as greasy a pole as it was when Tawney was inveighing against the class barriers in education during the 1920s, although those who climb it today from the bottom still require more than average stamina. The significant fact of modern educational history has been the failure to alter in any substantial way the class rigidities of the educational system. As a general proposition, reformers in Britain have always been too easily satisfied with too little, although, given the massive obstacles to change in British society, their timidity is at least understandable. The deadweight of tradition and the vigorous conservatism of class interests mean that reform is always subject to procrastination and delay, often extending over decades; and when reform does reach the statute book it is more often than not a half-measure imposed on the existing situation and it has every chance of being perverted by the traditional interests which remain. All measures of social reform in Britain are twisted from their original purposes by the pressures of the class structure. The dynamic of inequality in contemporary capitalism is so powerful that short-term changes are easily absorbed within the interstices of the system. The story of the social welfare developments in post-war Britain, and the ways in which the balance of advantages has increasingly turned in favour of the middle class and against the working-class majority of the population, is only a particular example of a general truth. In the educational system during the past half century there have been two

developments that are important in this context. One is the slow but steady process of change whereby the academically brightest of the formerly excluded can now find their way into the institutions of higher education. What we commonly mean by increased educational opportunity is this creaming-off practice whereby the liveliest among the school-children of even semi-skilled workers can look forward to reading for a degree, usually, of course, in a lower grade university. But alongside this improvement in educational mobility must be set the fact that in the early 1960s nearly seventy per cent of the age groups between eleven and fifteen years were educated in secondary modern schools, and it is this which makes nonsense of the claim for equality in education. Now the much discussed increase in numbers entering the British universities, suggested by the publication of the **Robbins** Report, can be largely provided by the existingschool system without any fundamental alteration to its present hierarchical structure. The **eleven-plus** selection procedures will no doubt be increasingly modified and in the end abolished, and the grammar schools will need to be enlarged and much improved; but if the greater part of the present wastage of the grammar school population at the age of sixteen can be prevented, the universities will have available most of the increase which is now being planned. And this will leave the majority of the children of manual workers to continue to be educated in inferior buildings, with poor equipment and with lower grade staff, and the basic divisions in the educational system will remain broadly unchanged. There are, it is true, other Government reports besides **Robbins** which provide blueprints for a general improvement in the conditions of the present non-grammar school population, but if educational revolutions were made by Reports and Government White Papers, a revolution in education in Britain would already have taken place. Educational history in the twentieth century is littered with well-argued and well-meaning analyses and reports of what was needed to be done; but on the ground the changes came very slowly. From **the** experience of the past, only the most vigorous and positive political action, aimed at breaking up the present class system and restructuring education from the bottom up, will begin to make the slogan of equality of education something more than the hypocritical aspiration it is today among most people. A genuine educational opportunity for all children must rest upon a transformation of the present school system whereby a common schooling for all is established up to the age of sixteen, and, within a reasonable measure of time, up to eighteen. This assumes the **elimination** of all private schools and the end of education by purchase. But this is only the first major step towards the achievement of equal opportunities. Environmental factors are crucial to educational performance, and there can be no real equality until the living standards of a majority of manual workers are raised much above what they are at present. Housing conditions, economic insecurity and low wages of the

parents, the higher incidence of sickness and ill-health among the lower income families, all affect and influence the attitudes towards education, measured intelligence and potential and actual ability. So long as access is closed to a basic minimum of goods and services considerably in excess of what is available at the present time to millions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers and their families, the hope of achieving even a rough and ready equality in educational opportunity will remain frustrated, regardless of what is changing in the educational system itself.

Educational reform is not, and never will be, a matter only of a greatly increased social mobility and larger numbers in the institutions of higher learning, important though these reforms are in themselves. The British educational system has always been grounded in class and money values. The grammar schools, the public schools and the universities are traditional in their teaching and hierarchical in their organization. To send greater numbers into the present-day grammar schools and universities is to make certain that more of our young people become imbued with the liberal-conservative values these institutions encourage in their members. If they are to serve the egalitarian society of the future, the universities certainly cannot be left as they are today; and if any impression is to be made on the prejudices and conservatism of large numbers of school and university teachers, the Labour movement in general will have to develop an intellectual vitality that has so far been notably absent. Moreover, it is unlikely that we can alter the conservative values which influence so many in the educational system without far-reaching changes in the control and operation of the mass media; and this is a very large political question.

To begin to define problems of educational change in these ways makes abundantly clear the obstacles in the way of future progress. In the era of Parliamentary Socialism, and given the present balance of political forces in Britain, radical change of any far-reaching kind is not seriously to be expected and the improvements that are currently being planned will expand numbers in higher education quite rapidly without very much modification to the educational system as a whole. At their best, the universities in Britain have always produced a sizeable output of **efficient** young men and women; and there is no reason to doubt that they will not continue to be just as productive with the increased numbers now being organized. This is what the conservative and liberal reformers are seeking: a renovated educational system in the higher reaches, traditionally Clitist in structure and content, whose increased numbers will serve the steadily enlarging demand of an ever more complex technology and the growing areas of government intervention. And if the changes to be made include one or more institutions on the pattern of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Harvard Business School, the reformers' cup will be full to overflowing. At the other end of the scale, it is more than probable that in thousands

of schools up and down the country working-class children will continue to be at the receiving end of their own third-rate educational system.

#### IV

A majority of British intellectuals are, in varying degree, liberal in outlook although a firm adherence to liberal principles is much less common. Intellectual promiscuity is, within carefully defined limits, an Establishment sponsored practice in Britain and it has, perhaps, been the apparent openness of the political writing in *Encounter* that has encouraged support for the journal from many whose politics do not wholly agree with those of the Congress of Cultural Freedom; but if there is doubt about who is rubbing shoulders with whom, *Encounter* on Cuba or the smearing attacks on unilateralists will reveal the nature of the animal whose company is being kept.

The politics of *Encounter* are the new version of conservatism: a support for those causes—the abolition of capital punishment and the like—which have come to symbolize for many the meaning of progressive thought; a readiness to be open minded in the discussion of social reform in Britain provided the area of debate is set squarely in the middle of the political spectrum, although whether this disinterestedness will survive the years of a future Labour Government is another matter; and an undeviating anti-Communism whose expression today is a support for N.A.T.O. and the Western Alliance. With a lively, middle-brow literary section and a dash of the more piquant sociological surveys—street-walkers in London, for example—the mixture has provided the most successful journal in the monthly range of the whole post-war era. And that, no doubt, is what the historians will be asked to explain.