

PAUL GOODMAN AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

I AT LEAST got the impression that hearers of the previous speakers at the International Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation (advertised as 'a unique gathering to demystify human violence in all its forms, the social systems from which it emanates, and to explore new forms of action') were relieved by a balance and moderation in Paul Goodman's speech on Tuesday morning (July 25) which contrasted with the tone of some earlier contributions. His whole message — which he delivered through his whole presence and not simply through words — was one of determined optimism, clear-eyed with regard to our present desperate condition, but not tragic, much less apocalyptic. His theme was political immodesty, and the need to give up such a dangerous addiction. The experimental part of the social sciences is political action, and political action involves getting a lot of people to do things together; the archetypal politically immodest man is the predatory Ruler* who sets out to produce this communal action by imposing himself and his ideas of what ought to be done on other people. But the same attitude often persists among those who profess to dissent from the Ruler's politics and wish to change it: they call their vision of change commonsense, and all other suggestions are so much nonsense not requiring serious discussion.

Destructive Potential

The present world situation is an increasing destructive potential in the hands of men and an increasing likelihood that the world will be destroyed. But this situation does help to clarify the fundamental division between the people of the world and the power structure. The only real revolution is humanity and peace. National liberation is fine as the means whereby the individual seeks and begins to achieve an identity; but if it is not informed by — if it does not issue out into — a vision of the humanity of all men, it becomes a stultifying — and aggressive — self-obsession; this is the hidden meaning of national independence which Gandhi endeavoured to point out in India, and Buber in Israel, and which the so-called political realists, Nehru and Ben-Gurion, ignored. The other obvious aspect of the world situation is a gross and wild urbanisation which has become more and more an international phenomenon and which will do us in if the nuclear bomb doesn't first; the abusive technology of this urbanisation is making the mass of mankind not relatively but absolutely poorer — and yet this mass lusts for the whole package of this abusive technology; of the emergent nations only Tanzania and perhaps now Cuba realise that this technology will be the doom of human beings; in other countries the people just see and feel that they are starving. It is in this situation that the community planner must realise that he is not merely a technician who applies an already given programme, but one who implements and therefore is called upon to make ethical decisions.

Goodman described himself as an old Jeffersonian way-out-of-date. He thinks people are much too politically ambitious. They hope to achieve some great human good by some political arrangement; when all that can be expected is the establishment of some minimum level of decency in which some human good may occur. Societies in which such a level does exist are Tanzania, Cuba and Ireland — where the average per capita income is a quarter that in the USA, and where the average per capita technological power is probably one-seventh or one-eighth: Ireland is of course not a paradise, but it is not bad when compared with the USA. The problem of the society of the USA is no longer one of the exploitation of the mass of the people, but their exclusion; a brief look at the history of the world shows an increasing sophistication and completeness in the ways in which one set of men have dominated over another: from the simple exaction of tribute to this last and completest form. Every Puerto Rican family in New York receives 10,000 dollars every year from the government of the United States, in the form of welfare services — that is, in a form which it is unable to use, which is useless to the family. The object of domination today is, not to make use of the labour of other men — with increasing automation this is becoming unnecessary: its object is, to keep them quiet, to keep quiet the people for whom there is no place in the lovely high technology of the city of conspicuous consumption*: why don't they go away? Why don't they simply cease to exist? In the United States the excluded groups are: the Negroes and the Spanish Americans, 12% of the population; the farmers,

5%; old people; the so-called insane and the delinquent who amount to many millions and are simply all those who cannot manage this sort of society; and of course youth as a whole is an excluded group. Education in the United States is an instrument of exclusion, and organized attempt to break the spirit of the young. The policeman knows far better than the White Liberal the threat to the society he is paid to protect which is in the hippy movement: however insubstantially and transiently, this represents real, existential revolt, while mere industrial unrest can be bought off.

The questions for the would-be revolutionary and for the free society to ask are: what forms of automation liberate, and what enslave, the human spirit? What items of the present system of upbringing should be retained? How can technological developments be adapted to the local needs of community and culture? Spread across the world we see an authority relationship which is too much accepted, and what is needed is its loosening up; power and social control must be decentralised as much as possible, so that people know what is happening, so that they are making the decisions for their own society. To make decisions concerning technology professional knowledge is required; most professionals are links, not true professors of a science, but the personnel of a management hierarchy; but we must learn to separate knowledge from the abuse of it; as revolutionaries we must learn and profit from the possibility of a real professional knowledge. The only revolutionary situation is when the people from below demand a better way of life and employ professionals to help them build it. Today an International of abusive technology and management is opposed by an International of the young — I only wish, said Goodman, concluding his talk, that this revolutionary youth would learn the need and the use of the true professional.

Question Time

When the discussion moved out into the audience various people got up and were given a microphone and made statements or asked questions or did something of both, and Goodman commented. Laing asked for more specific leads on how to break the authority-obedience system and on how to distinguish between true professionals and links; Goodman suggested that if the school of humanities at Harvard University were a truly and conscientiously professional body, its professors would come out with continual denunciations of the television, the thing, which is debauching the public and making their job of teaching the humanities impossible: even they would begin to build an international organisation to speak and to demonstrate in this way. Another questioner cited Jacques Ellul's demonstration of the way in which technological development is making impossible the sort of decentralisation of power envisaged by anarchists; to which Goodman replied that Ellul is mistaken in thinking that technology is a dominating force: it depends upon the application of moral philosophy, and thus is under the control of human prudence: it is not an autonomous absolute, as is science, or romantic love, or social justice. An American negro defended the political necessity of SNCC's decision to exclude white students, and Goodman conceded the right of the American negro to seek to establish his identity and autonomy, while pointing out that this constituted a dilemma. He (Goodman) declared himself, not a politician but a populist, against any theory of revolution by conspiracy, in favour of all disintegrations and decentralisations of power, including both student power and black power and Stokeley Carmichael. Afterwards John Mackay, who occasionally writes for FREEDOM, suggested to me that Goodman is a bit soft on Carmichael, partly through a sense of guilt and partly perhaps at sheer envy at someone who perhaps looks more revolutionary than he does: which is perhaps at least food for thought, and possibly ties in with a carefully written and read but nonetheless enigmatical statement from a German (in English) which seemed to be to the effect that Goodman's talk was welcomed by the Roundhouse audience because its intelligence and coherence assuaged the guilt complex of the liberal bourgeois intelligentsia thankful to have their social usefulness reaffirmed. In conclusion to the morning's proceedings a Christian with a wavering apocalyptic voice asked for a society in which men would be able to accept and to come to terms with the agony and the tragedy of human life; in reply Goodman agreed with a lot of the state-

ment but expressed suspicion of any attempt to build any theory of the tragedy and agony of human life into a political scheme: he for one would make his own tragedy for himself — only he would prefer to make it in a society where it would be more interesting than it can be today. That was the end of Wednesday morning's proceedings, the moral of which seems to have been that political immodesty is the great enemy of revolution, and that humility, amounting even to sheer pragmatism, is indispensable.

The only other session of the Congress that I attended was on Friday morning, July 28, when Herbert Marcuse was introduced, to a much larger audience than had heard Goodman, as 'one of the greatest thinkers of our age'. Marcuse said that he was glad to see so many people wearing flowers; but flowers have no power in themselves, and their beauty has to be defended by men against aggression. What he had to say was in the tradition of philosophical Marxism and interestingly contrasted with what Goodman had said — indeed the latter was often specifically mentioned by Marcuse. We must discuss, not merely an intellectual liberation, but a liberation of the

mentally in the present society, and it cannot give men those needs, it will have to be constructed by men already possessing these new needs: thus Marx was right in describing the proletariat as the revolutionary class, because, in his words, 'it is free from the aggressive and competitive needs of the bourgeoisie'. There is a difference between the demand for more things, and the demand for a better way of life: the one may be satisfied by reform, the other only by revolution; but the desire for quantitative change may be transformed into the desire for qualitative change, and it is this transformation which we must now set about achieving.

Primary Aggressiveness

The characteristic of capitalist society is the mobilisation of primary aggressiveness and its almost complete monopolisation of the field of human motivation; in face of the enormous possibility of human freedom today, capitalism is still involved in the myth — and the reality — of the struggle for existence, still requiring the consciousness of an enemy as a stimulus to action; thus, the subjects of capital are engaged in defending their own servitude and its perpetuation.



whole existence of man: to be brought about by the application of forces within the already existing social system, forces generated by the contradictions within that system; liberation is a biological necessity, 'a socialist society is required by the very nature of human life' (Marx). Today we are seeking liberation from a rich and relatively well functioning society: not a disintegrating or even particularly terroristic society: a society which 'delivers the goods' more and more; thus liberation is deprived of its mass economic base, while the techniques of manipulation ever more subtly incorporate the voices of criticism and opposition into the establishment. We have been too modest: we have not said that a socialist society will be the complete negation of the present society, that it is an utopian scheme, a total rupture, a leap into something entirely new: what it is, what that will be, is suggested or dimly outlined in the shooting at the old church clocks which Walter Benjamin reported taking place in Paris at the time of the Commune in 1871.

The new society will be lived in by men who have entirely different needs from those felt by men living con-

Liberation requires the opening up and the activation of a human dimension underneath — not above — the sheerly material with which alone capitalism has concerned itself. What is required today is an unashamedly political and liberating psychology. Industrial society has provided the conditions of liberation; but to achieve it a new anthropology is necessary: the theory and the practice of a new man who rejects the performance principle of capitalist society, who has rid himself of its brutality and competitiveness, who is biologically incapable of waging war or of causing pain. The technology of the liberated man will be a technology guided by the creative imagination and not simply by the narrowly rationalised performance principle: it will play with the hitherto blocked potential of man. His sociology will be at once revolutionary and aesthetic: it will see society as a work of art: it will plan the restoration of nature, the creation of internal and external space necessary to the development of individual privacy, autonomy and tranquillity; it will plan for a life without fear, without brutality, without stupidity. The hippies are partly mere masquerade and clownery; but they also exemplify a

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