

TOWARDS A STUDY OF THE SCOURGE

Minutes of a Meeting at Sutton Courtenay

On November 10th-11th, 1962

Present:

The Honble. David Astor (Editor, The Observer)
Professor Max Beloff (All Souls College, Oxford)
Professor Norman Cohn (King's College, Newcastle)
Mr. Colin Legum (Commonwealth Correspondent, The Observer)
Mr. Andrew Shonfield (Director of Studies, Royal Institute
Mrs. Zuzanna Shonfield of International Affairs)
Dr. A.T.M. Wilson (Adviser to Unilever Ltd. on the use
of the social sciences)

I Definition of objectives

The discussion under this heading covered both the problems of defining the type of manifestation which it is intended to study ("areas of enquiry") and the extent to which the results of the study could be used for future action of a diagnostic and therapeutic character ("application of findings").

- A. Areas of enquiry In order to put on record the extent to which agreement has been reached, the problems of defining the manifestations which are to be the object of study are summarised as follows:-
- (1) are the manifestations to be studied to be confined to those with a "phantasy", paranoid, "irrational" character.*

* Difficulties were encountered with the definitions of the words "phantasy", "paranoid" and "irrational" in this context. The problem of stating them precisely was on Professor Cohn's suggestion postponed. In the course of discussion these terms were being used to describe situations in which the reaction produced exceeds that which is warranted by the realistic physical or economic threat. An alternative formulation lays stress on the out-group being seen as "demonic" and the in-group as having a millenarian or world-reforming character: or when the in-group is not millenarian or world-reforming but on the contrary intent on preserving the status quo. In either case the excessive reaction could be socially or culturally approved, condoned or tolerated.

- (2) should the whole field of group prejudice or only the violent manifestations of this be the subject of study.
- (3) are the studies to embrace only manifestations of an organised (political, social) character or to include all situations arising out of spontaneous expressions of violent mass emotion.
- (4) should one focus on the analysis of situations which have already led to explosions of violence or include also situations of latent explosiveness.
- (5) is it more fruitful, having in mind possible applications of the findings, to concentrate on those situations in which violence, either actual or latent, has been successfully inhibited.
- (6) should specific, easily definable instances of a phenomenon (Notting Hill riots, Oxford, Mississippi) be pinpointed for study or is there another approach, which embraces the analysis of the entire phenomenon (e.g. anti-negro prejudice).
- (7) is it more fruitful to approach the study of the phenomena from a historical viewpoint, elucidating the conclusions by empirical investigations, or to start from the detailed observations of present-day occurrences, checking-up the findings against historical evidence.

In the discussions most of these problems were touched upon and a degree of agreement was reached on points (1) and (3). As a result, the following definition of objectives was suggested by Professor Cohn:-

"A comparative and analytic study of the genesis and inhibition of predominantly 'non-utilitarian' forms of collective violence."

This was later widened by Professor Beloff as follows:-

"An analytic and comparative study of certain outbreaks of mass violence characterised by important elements of phantasy or irrational prejudice* and the social controls by which such occurrences have been averted."

However Professor Beloff did not consider this wording as final and hoped to be able to emend it at a later stage.

It was not thought necessary to define objectives any closer at this stage; however during the discussion about the subjects for study (No. II on the Minutes) it became apparent that there was still considerable divergence of views on all areas of enquiry except those set out in (1) and (3) above. For example the group divided over such issues as the suitability of anti-Yankee prejudice in Latin-America or the treatment of Untouchables in India as subject for analysis within the scope of the "Study of the Scourge."

B. Application of findings

By and large agreement was expressed with Professor Cohn's proposition that had it not been for the assumption that the findings of this type of study could have a practical, preventive application, the scheme would never have been started. The obstacles

* See footnote on p.1.

in the way of "curative" work in a situation in which paranoid mass violence is occurring were touched upon. On the other hand, it was generally felt that the scheme had a practical function which could be described as "arming the sane", by finding out the truth about the causes of the scourge. Foreseeable difficulties were mainly connected with the means of ensuring effective infiltration of the results of research.

The new and growing awareness of motives behind political and social trends shown by the American State Department and the French foreign service was touched upon in discussion and ascribed tentatively to the increasing influence of sociologists over the Civil Service.

The special function of educational work in new countries was mentioned and one suggestion was that the kind of study particularly relevant in this connection would be the analysis of events which lead from irrational prejudice of a non-violent type to an explosion of mass violence. A study of inhibition of potentially violent situations by agencies of social control was also to the point. Examining the stresses involved in quick economic and social change would shed light on the growth of dangerous prejudice in developing societies.

Whilst it was appreciated that books can on occasion change the whole climate of opinion (e.g. Keynes' "General Theory" or Rostow's "Stages of Growth"), it was felt that in the present scheme

there should also be room for more directly missionary forms of communication. It was suggested that one senior member of the staff should make the subject of the dissemination of findings his main concern. A special study might have to be made of the ways by which the result of research could be made to reach the appropriate groups. This function was tentatively coupled with that of an editor who might for example publish a paperback series of important works in this sphere. The compilation of ^abasic symposium of existing literature (on the lines of the reader on sociology by Talcott Parsons) was also suggested.

It was generally held that the communication part of the scheme should not wait for the completion of even the first stages of research: there was an important information function which could be performed right from the start (e.g. by the publication of David Astor's and Norman Conn's articles.)

II Selection of Subjects

A. Pilots

Agreement was expressed with Professor Conn's view that if pilot schemes were intended to result in completed studies which could serve as samples of what the entire project would eventually achieve, the idea was impracticable: not only would this take too long but, he thought, to do pilots competently one would require almost the whole apparatus of a main study. There was however a legitimate function for preparatory studies to show on what lines the work in a main study ought to proceed.

B. Phenomena to be studied

In view of the areas of disagreement which emerged during the discussions on the definition of objectives and also later in the meeting, no definitive list of subjects for study was produced. However, it was generally felt that the study of the causes of antisemitism should be one of the major objectives of the scheme and Mr. Elath (President of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem), who joined the group for this stage of the discussions made a plea for starting with the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich.

An outlined approach to the study of antisemitism through the investigation of the fantasies concerning Jews in 11th to 14th century Europe had been prepared by Professor Cohn in his November memorandum, "On the Investigation of Paranoid Tendencies in Social Life". Professor Cohn now explained that the eight phenomena which he had listed in this preparatory paper exemplified three major categories of irrational prejudice:

(1) The hidden conspiracy of enemies of humanity:

Witches in Europe - 15th-17th century
Jews in Europe - 11th-14th century
Jews in Europe - 19th-20th century
Freemasons in Europe - 19th-20th century

(2) The chaos-monster from down below - (an out-group which can be contained, but which cannot be eliminated):

Africans in South Africa - 19th-20th century
Negroes in U.S.A. - 19th-20th century
Untouchables in traditional Indian society

(3) The masked world-tyranny before the Millennium:

Monopoly-capitalists as seen by Communists

In addition to these eight subjects suggested by Professor Conn the following themes were discussed or touched upon:

John Birchism (as one manifestation of anti-Red prejudice which ought to be studied if anti-capitalism becomes one of the major phenomena to be analysed).

Latin-American prejudice against the Yankees

The Hindu-Moslem riots in the Punjab

Racial riots in Ceylon

The extermination of Tasmanian aborigines

As an alternative approach, some more specific, comparatively short-lived and geographically contained, situations were suggested (e.g. Oxford, Mississippi or the Notting Hill race riots).

Two general principles found considerable support in the discussion:

- (a) that it would be desirable to include an example from Britain in the list of subjects for study, although no strong candidate appeared to offer itself.
- (b) that manifestations from Asia (and Africa?) should be included and that these should preferably be studied by a parallel team set up on that continent, possibly in Japan (because of the quality of Japanese research work) or in Ceylon (because of the possibility of studying inter-racial conflicts in that country). It was felt on the other hand that the choice of Asian subjects should if possible be left to the Asian scholars whom one would hope to co-opt into the scheme.

The idea of establishing a parallel institute in the United States kept recurring throughout the discussion but the alternatives of (1) having an independent unit working there, or (2) drawing American scholars in an advisory capacity into the work done by the London centre, were not resolved.

C. Staffing and Academic Affiliation

No names of candidates were put forward in the discussion. The recruitment of a senior core of research workers (a minimum number of 3 or 4 was anticipated) combining a proved high degree of scholarship with the creative imagination required for the scheme was regarded as crucial for the success of the entire project. It was recognized that the choice of subjects for study would to a large extent be governed by the scholars available to occupy the key positions in the team. It was expedient to look for scholars who were already thinking on our lines; one might write to universities both in this country and abroad to find out who was working in this field. The view was expressed that one might have to turn to the United States for the sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists to take part in the scheme. In this connection it was suggested that Professor Meyer Fortes might be consulted and that a renewed approach should be made to Professor Edward Shils who had been sent a letter and documents outlining the scheme in October.

It was felt important that, with such a revolutionary project, one of the leading staff members should hold a chair at a University. This would impart to the scheme the aura of academic repute needed for

fund-raising, make recruitment of staff from academic circles easier and ensure access to the intellectual facilities available in the universities.

On the other hand the dangers of becoming dominated by an academic body were recognized. It was important that the scheme should retain its separate administrative and financial identity, otherwise delays were likely to ensue. Also, a traditional academic approach might put obstacles in the way of some of the activities aiming at the dissemination of the findings of research which it was hoped to undertake. After a discussion of the advantages offered by a possible link-up with University College London - such as interest in the scheme on the part of Sir Ifor Evans (who is however due to retire before long), the fact that the Wiener Library is connected with U.C.L., the advantages of London as a centre for the scheme - and a short inspection of the possibilities offered by Nuffield, and more particularly by St. Anthony's in Oxford, the suggestion of an exploratory approach to Sussex University was considered. It was agreed that Professor Beloff should make an informal approach to Professor Lisa Briggs. Of the other people in Sussex, it was thought that Professor J.P. Corbett would be most likely to be interested in the scheme.

D. Sources of Finance

Mr. Astor mentioned that he was already in touch with Shepard Stone of the Ford Foundation and hoped to see him when he was in London this month, November. Other sources mentioned were the Nuffield Foundation (L. Farrer-Brown) with the reservation that the Nuffield

Foundation always insisted on their name being attached to a project they sponsored thus making it difficult to tap additional sources. This difficulty could however perhaps be overcome by giving off part of the project and giving it a Nuffield label. The 20th Century Fund (Heckscher) was mentioned and Mr. Astor agreed that if a suitable letter was drafted he would be ready to sign it. Other sources mentioned were the Asia Foundation (Chester Bowles), the Carnegie Endowment for Peace (particularly interested in promoting publications), the World Brotherhood (Lester Pearson and Paul Hoffmann) and in this country such potential benefactors as Isaac Wolfson and Israel Sieff. Professor Beloff also mentioned the existence of a list of some 7,000 American Foundations. There was an overriding hope that at least some of the money might be raised in this country. It was to be borne in mind that finance raised should not be allowed to go into the general funds of any university with which affiliation might be achieved.

III Timetable for Preliminary Stage

As the idea of a preliminary pilot stage was not favoured (see II A.) this agenda item was not applicable.

IV Collection of basic data

(a) Liaison with organisations and scholars working in allied fields. Some of the group's views on this subject have been reported in II B. and II C. above.

It was also agreed that names of people who might be interested in the subject and who could act as advisers (particularly American scholars working in the fields of sociology, psychology and allied disciplines)

should be sent to the organizing secretary so that appropriate information about the scheme could be forwarded to them if thought desirable.

Some anxiety was expressed about the danger of people outside the group anticipating the work (it was said in particular that foundations had in the past been known to appropriate research programmes originated by other bodies); the suggestion was made that at this stage information about organizational matters, such as proposed affiliation to any particular university, should not be broadcast indiscriminately.

- (c) Compilation of library, bibliography, etc. It was decided that if the hope to establish the centre of study in London was realised there would be no need to duplicate the facilities offered by academic bodies, and especially the material available at the Wiener and Parkes Libraries.

V. Composition and terms of reference of Working 'London' Committee

It was decided to substitute the word 'Group' for 'Committee'.

It was decided that it was too early to define the terms of reference closely, but the feeling was that, when they came to be defined, a pyramid of councils and committees should be avoided (i.e. no separate bodies of patrons, sponsors etc.), and that the alternative of a working nucleus plus a panel of advisers would be preferable.

VI Draft brief for first meeting of advisers and sponsors

No decision was made about the date of such a meeting.

It was decided to prepare a report of the weekend meeting in two forms:-