

REPORTS

OXFORD MEETING

A meeting of local contacts was held at Oxford on 5th January to discuss future activities and organization of the movement. About 20 people attended. We began by discussing the issues which had been raised in the insert in *Radical Philosophy* 3, about the 'political' nature of the movement, its relation to existing political groups, etc. We more or less agreed that Radical Philosophy could not undertake practical political work of the sort which would make it a rival to the existing activist organizations and groups on the left, but that it should make greater efforts to draw on the practical experience of these groups as a source of contributions to radical theory. The only real point of contention seemed to be whether the institutional basis of the movement should or should not be primarily in colleges and universities, and this led into a long and heated debate about organization.

Jonathan Ree had produced a paper which began by emphasising the need to clarify what kind of organization the movement ought to have. There seemed to be a widespread feeling that active participation in the movement was in danger of being confined to a small group of individuals. Jonathan's paper went on to argue the case for a formal centralised democratic structure, and set out detailed proposals for a national committee comprising two elected officials from each local group numbering ten members or more. Some people supported these proposals, but others criticised them, on two main grounds: (a) that they presupposed at the local level a degree of formal organization which did not in fact exist; (b) that this kind of procedure, involving sharply defined criteria for membership offices, was over-rigid and would have the effect of excluding people when what we wanted to do was to draw them into the movement's activities. In the end we agreed that a less formalised kind of organization would be more desirable. We decided to try and arrange regular Open Meetings which would be held at least in every academic vacation. These meetings would be open to anyone and would be announced in the journal; local contacts (sellers of the journal, and local group organizers) would be specifically circularized and asked to come or to get someone else from their locality to come.

There was a lot of argument about whether the Open Meetings should have a chairman, and whether they should have any standing orders. The only way of resolving these disagreements was by voting. The votes went in favour of having a chairman and convenor, and having one standing order ("Motions proposing next business, or proposing a vote, are to take precedence.") As it wasn't clear how representative the meeting was, and therefore wasn't clear just what these votes could be taken to mean, it was understood that any of these arrangements could be modified by a subsequent Open Meeting or by a National Conference.

What was left unclear was how the running of the journal should fit into this. A suggestion was made for electing the editorial board at Readers' Meetings, but other people wanted to put more emphasis on circulating the work among local groups. By this time the meeting was getting rather acrimonious and divisive. It was obvious that the discussion would have to be continued at the Open Meeting at Easter, hopefully in a more cooperative manner. The question of the journal is obviously of great importance, and we hope that people will come to the Easter Meeting and so ensure that the meeting is a representative one.

Finally it was agreed that there should be another National Conference in the summer, to be held in London early in the summer vacation. An attempt would be made to involve other radical groups, such as radical psychologists, sociologists and economists, and more activist groups such as radical teachers, social workers, 'prisoners rights' and claimants groups etc., and to focus the conference on the philosophical issues arising out of the practice of these groups. The London R.P.G. would organize it, and Roger Harris undertook to be responsible for getting things going.

OPEN MEETING

There will be a Radical Philosophy Open Meeting at University College Philosophy Department, 19 Gordon Square, London W.C.1 at 11.30 a.m. on Sat. 31st March. Matters to be discussed will include the journal, and plans for a conference in London in the summer. For further details see above. The meeting is open to anyone.

USA

American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division)
Annual Meeting. Sheraton-Boston Hotel 27-29th December.

The convention is called "the slave market". It was estimated that 1200 people were being interviewed for 70 jobs. The interviews are conducted at desks ("Have you a card for the interviewing room? Proceed to desk 25 please."), or candidates may have their wits briefly explored at cocktail parties, bars or hotel bedrooms. It is very valuable for an applicant to be pushed by someone who knows a member of the desired department. Some applicants exhibited their conceptual teeth by raising nice questions at one of the many sessions where those aiming for higher things were on display. But the consensus is that such sessions are a peripheral bore. The meeting, like any decent market, is a place for buying and selling, for making and reinforcing contacts, for the (in the main) fellas, freed awhile from yuletide domesticity, to get together for a reunion over lots of booze.

Politics is accepted as part of the "business" of the business meeting. A motion condemning the U.S. bomb onslaught on North Vietnam and calling for an end to the war was overwhelmingly carried (it was reported in the press). Racist ideologies of the Jensenite type were narrowly condemned. (Many believe the U.S. ruling class is very deliberately fostering racism at this time as a divide and rule manoeuvre). But, like true academics, those present rejected motions closer to the practical bone: e.g. to unionise and fight job cut-backs in the humanities, or to condemn political sackings of philosophy teachers, e.g. Kenneth Megill at Florida ("Until we know all the facts...")

The initiative for these motions came partly from the liberal Philosophy and Public Affairs group (Vietnam) and partly from the Radical Caucus (racism, jobs). Strikingly, both these groups show no signs of questioning professional philosophy as a going concern but see their concern as being with ideological/economic issues.

This narrow perspective was transcended in two meetings. A large number (the original room was small) got together to discuss women in philosophy. The

meeting was very together and alive. People, largely graduate women, spoke of their alienation from academic philosophy which they characterized as "male-dominated and male in character" - aggressive, competitive, with an "external" stance towards problems conceived of as soluble simply through advanced conceptual technology. Throughout the meeting they were trying to get away from feminist careerism ("why no top jobs at top places for women?") and towards a way of working which was co-operative, critical, and concerned with issues of real human concern. Groups outside the straight structures were proposed. Marsha Homiac, of Philosophy Dept., Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, can give information.

On the last afternoon a well attended meeting (maybe 70 people) moved towards setting up regional "radical philosophy" groups (one suggestion was to call them "progressive philosophy" groups!). This meeting was "inspired" by the British thing, and there was a lot of enthusiasm for the *Radical Philosophy* magazine. Although a national newsletter is planned, people felt there was not the same point or possibility of a national magazine at this stage, given geographical spread and the much greater diversity of philosophy in the U.S. compared with the U.K. The main drift came from a general feeling of isolation among (largely 60's movement) radicals and from awareness of the bad split in peoples politics between professional straightness and week-end agitation. At the moment, since the convention, 3 groups have met in Cambridge, Mass. and one in New York. Those who want more information about American developments should write to Richard Schmidt, Philosophy Dept., Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA. The Americans are anxious to work with British groups.

Two good papers and discussions came off marginal to the official programme. Richard Lichtman from Berkeley (where he is supported by the students' union, having been sacked) spoke about the way ideology is embedded in the guts of social practice from birth on, so that "consciousness" is far from being a function of explicit doctrines or media propaganda. In another paper Mike Lerner argued that Marx was not a moral relativist. The discussion of Lerner's paper was very good and co-operative.

I had to do some interviewing to earn my plane fare. It was painful to participate in this oppressive game ("I see you've done some work on Wittgenstein and Criteria. Do you think he's a behaviourist in disguise?") (answer in not more than 50 words - we're very busy)).

Tony Skillen

SYDNEY

For the past two years the philosophy department at Sydney University has been the scene of intense conflict. The issue is the democratisation of decision making.

During C B Martin's tenure of one of the chairs of philosophy (roughly 1969-71) there emerged an embryonic form of democratic practice in departmental affairs which came to be discussed and decided, with increasing frequency, at meetings of staff at which proposals were put, argued, and voted upon. The decisions so reached, whatever their formal status, acquired practical finality even when - as sometimes happened - one or both professors were outvoted.

D M Armstrong, the other professor, so far from obstructing or opposing these developments participated in them fully and freely. He appeared to all the world to be in favour of the new dispensation. This period of cooperation also saw the extension of the franchise at departmental meetings from full time permanent members of staff to part time and temporary staff.

This democratic trend changed abruptly when, early in 1971, two members of staff offered a course (for 72) on Marxism-Leninism. Armstrong decided that this offer represented a 'political challenge' to him. When after extensive discussion staff voted overwhelmingly in favour of the proposed course, he used his professorial power to veto the decision. (The vote was 10-3.) After a struggle involving national media publicity Armstrong backed down and the course was accepted with minor amendments.

Martin resigned in June 1971 to go to Canada. The question of his successor occasioned the next round of the battle. There were two candidates in the end: Associate Professor G C Nerlich, of the Sydney department, and an American philosopher of religion of no great distinction who happened to be a narrowly fundamentalist Christian and a right wing conservative in politics. In ordinary academic terms it should have been no contest at all, but Armstrong managed to delay Nerlich's appointment for five months by the full use of his professorial weight. (His moves included that old authoritarian trick of threatening to resign.) The overt objection to Nerlich, who is a left-liberal, was that he favoured democratisation of the department. This meant that Armstrong couldn't work with him.

In the end the matter was resolved by Nerlich's appointment while Armstrong permanently resigned the administrative headship of the department, and reserved the right to appeal 'to the University' against departmental decisions on an unspecified range of matters.

The first test of this obviously unstable arrangement came in August 1972 when an appointment was made to a one year tutorship. A meeting of full time and part time staff plus postgraduate students and one (!) undergraduate representative voted overwhelmingly for a particular candidate (Armstrong's the only vote against). When the recommendation went forward, Armstrong objected to the Vice-Chancellor. The candidate was a radical activist, prominent in the anti-Vietnam movement. Armstrong's objections were to the candidate ('not the best') and to the method of selection ('academically improper').

The ensuing struggle was complicated by a private note from a left wing staff member to Professor Nerlich. The note was stolen from Nerlich and came into Armstrong's hands. He claimed it to be evidence of a plot to discredit and oust him from the university. Armstrong published the note and the hue-and-cry spread to the national press, parliament, and the annual conference of Australian philosophers. In all these quarters it served to divert attention from the central issue of educational self-management.

The tutorship issue was resolved when the candidate Armstrong tried to promote withdrew, whereupon the department's choice was appointed. Although that battle is over, the war still goes on. At the end of last year the department approved a scheme for full student participation in all decision making. It is confidently expected that reactionary elements in the department will oppose the implementation of this scheme.

What is the importance of these goings on?

I do not believe that any movement for educational liberation can succeed if it confines itself to what goes on within universities. And it is quite certain that a movement initiated by staff together with a few senior students will remain too narrow to achieve anything if the mass of students cannot be involved in it. This has been the case in Sydney. During the period of radical activity among students (68-70) the staff were tame and conservative. Now that student activism has died down completely, a few staff show signs of pulling

their finger out. The meaning of the struggle of these radical academics depends heavily on how the mass of students relates to it. Self-management cannot be brought to people by a revolution from above. If students remain indifferent to the trend of departmental conflicts, the end result can at best be only a realignment in the relative weight of sections of the elite: a substitution of a 'god department' for the 'god professor'. That is not a result I would enthuse about.

On the other hand it is possible that the initiative of the academics will find a mass response among students, in which case the struggle for educational self-management will have to broaden still further, to find its connections with other struggles against the basics of authoritarian culture.

W R

GLASGOW CONFERENCE

Glasgow University RPG has arranged a conference for Weds-Thurs April 11-12th. The programme will be:

Wed. 11th April:

5.00 pm: "The Concept of Class Consciousness: Marx & Lukacs" by David Miller (Lancaster Univ.)

Thurs. 12th April:

10.00 am: "The Morality of the Market" by Pat Shaw (Glasgow Univ.)

2.00 pm: Another paper to be arranged.

Sleeping bag accommodation is being provided. Further information & enquiries: M.R.Scollen, Dept. of Logic, The University, Glasgow, W.2.

OXFORD RPG

The Oxford Radical Philosophy Group continued to hold regular meetings and small group discussions, as begun last year. We also exploited the machinery of the regular lecture system, placing a weekly Radical Philosophy seminar on the official lecture list. This meant that we could reach more people more effectively. This is always a problem in Oxford; its especially difficult to reach undergraduates because of the fragmentation brought about by the college system.

The aim of the seminars was to formulate our dissatisfaction with orthodox philosophy, as well as to try to introduce new ways of doing philosophy. Many of the papers dealt with the "subjects" of orthodox philosophy, such as philosophical logic, ethics, etc. and criticised the way in which Oxford philosophy tackles the problems that are held to be central to these fields. A common concern emerged in several papers in a dissatisfaction with the orthodox model of rationality and the need to formulate an adequate model which would be practically orientated.

We arranged a meeting with Mary Warnock to discuss her views on Radical Philosophy, following her article in "New Society". She began, disarmingly, by renouncing all that she had said in her article - explaining that it was directed against the "ethos" of "New Society" - and claimed complete ignorance of Radical Philosophy. The explanation seemed to confess a prejudice against all that she conceived of as "Marxist", but she was now ready to agree that the nature of philosophical reason was an important issue for discussion. In the event the meeting was very friendly. She was particularly sympathetic to issues of course reform. However many of us felt that she was too eager to tell us what we ought to be doing, at the expense of really trying to grasp what we are trying to do.

Geneva. Pupils at the College de Geneve, a sort of high school, have got up a petition calling for philosophy to remain a compulsory subject. In a letter to the President of the Department of Public Instruction, the pupils' spokesmen state that the vast majority of the pupils at the college opposed the measures to do away with compulsory philosophy. In spite of the fact that many pupils were unable to be contacted because they were taking exams, 1063 had signed the petition. The spokesmen added: 'Philosophy provides us with a method of reflexion and a way of picturing the problems that we confront. We think it is essential to keep it, since the reduction to one year of such a vast subject would mutilate our intellectual development and our critical spirit.'

Professor of Philosophy at the Universite de Geneve, Rene Schaefer, commented: 'To suppress philosophy is to oppose the trend of the future. In order to combat increasing specialisation, young people want to rediscover the fundamental points. Often discouraged by what the future seems to offer, they abandon themselves to extremism or drugs. This is where philosophy can help them.' (*Tribune de Geneve* June 19, 1972)

★★

"The logic now in use serves rather to fix and give stability to the errors which have their foundation in commonly received notions than to help the search after truth. So it does more harm than good."

(Bacon: *Novum Organon* XII)

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SALES IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Copies of *Radical Philosophy* may be obtained from the following:

- ABERDEEN: Alison McNaughton (Craigpark, Wellington Rd.)
- BANGOR: Stewart Smith (4 College Road)
- BATH: Michael Rose (Hum. and Soc.Sci.)
- BELFAST: Bob Eccleshall (Dept. of Pol.Science, Queen's)
- BRADFORD: Paul Walton (School of Soc.Sci.)
- BRISTOL: Keith Graham (Phil.Dept.)
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