



# MRA INFORMATION SERVICE

Entries for our competition for the best 250 words on 'What is Britain's role?' must reach the Editor by 16 December. First prize £3.3.0; second prize £1.1.0

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## THEATRE TO 'RESHAPE NATIONAL CHARACTER'

By PHYLLIS KONSTAM \*

### 'The Diplomats'— London première New Year's Eve

AS STATESMEN from Europe prepare to step into transatlantic jets for New Year conferences, an up-to-the-minute play comes to the London stage.

*The Diplomats*, by Peter Howard, is a comedy which has its setting in the world of diplomacy. It opens at the Westminster Theatre on Tuesday, 31 December. It follows the same author's *Through the Garden Wall*, which ran for 252 performances, and is likely to prove as popular.

Directed by Henry Cass, the cast of nine will be Bryan Coleman, Richard Warner, Peter Illing, John McLaren, Phyllis Konstam, Brian Hawkesley, David Cole, Fern Warner and Pauline Loring. The setting is by Hutchinson Scott.

*The Diplomats* will have an out of town opening in Darlington at the Civic Theatre from 9-14 December.

The following week, from 16-21 December, it plays in the famous Festival Theatre in Malvern.

In *The Diplomats* the author suggests with shrewd insight how the ambassadors of Russia, America, France and Britain might well behave when left in each other's company without the intrusion of press and TV, and with no records taken of their conversations by unconfidential secretaries.

No thinking man or woman can but have been deeply shaken by the events of the past weeks. The tragedy of President Kennedy affected every one of us. People all over the world felt a deep sense of personal loss. Everyone felt they knew and loved him and his wife and children.

Television had brought them into every home; whereas before the advent of television the President of the United States was a vague figure, far away, now he becomes a personal friend. Our sense of loss over that brave and courageous young man was our own bereavement.

We in our age have entered a new phase in the history of man and especially in the history of the entertainment world. Whether we like it or not, the entertainment world has become a mighty force to contend with. From that small box in the living room night after night pour forth ideas which condition the concepts and conduct of a nation.

#### Pace-setter

The theatre, though it reaches a smaller audience in numbers, is a mighty force in the land. It is a pace-setter. It starts a trend. With automation will come far more leisure. What we do with that leisure is going to have a tremendous influence on the society in which we live.

George Bernard Shaw said, 'For this writing of plays is a great matter, forcing as it does the minds and

affections of men in such sort that whatsoever they see done on the stage they will be presently doing in earnest in the world.

We are told by a very powerful and vocal group in the theatre that unless we applaud and approve of blasphemy, homosexuality, fetishism, adultery, incest, sadism and every form of fornication and perversion, we are neither adult nor civilized. Personally, I do not think that returning to the barnyard can be called civilized. It is completely the reverse. Neither it is adult. It is adolescent. To have smelly drains and to live in dirty houses is not a civilized way to live, so why should we think it awfully clever and advanced to have dirty minds?

If the millions of parents, feel the way I do, and I speak as a mother as well as an actress—they must begin to speak up if they really love their children and their country.

Miss Rosemary Anne Sisson in the *Daily Telegraph* of 17 May said: 'For, in the end, in spite of all I've said, audiences receive the plays they deserve. If London playgoers really cared, if they were tired of dirt and formlessness and cruelty and anarchy

\* From an address to an Assembly for National Character, Cardiff, 30 November.

*Continued over*

they would make their feelings known somehow—if only by marching up Shaftesbury Avenue with placards.'

It is one thing to hate what is wrong, but we have got to love what is right, and some of us have begun to create a theatre which answers the things I have been talking about.

I have had long experience in the theatre and have appeared in plays by some of the greatest dramatists of this age, but I can honestly say that it is a thrilling experience to take part in plays which are truly relevant to the hour in which we live and which have a profound effect on the living and thinking of the country through the audiences who come to see them.

Make no mistake, Peter Howard is the dramatist of the true avant garde. He is more revolutionary than Bertolt Brecht, and it is not a revolution of form but content. He is both a realist and visionary.

We at the Westminster Theatre feel we must have an intelligent, vital, forward-looking theatre, dealing with the burning issues of our day. I agree with the director of the Moscow Art Theatre, who said in an interview that the theatre of the West is mostly irrelevant.

### 'Factory of thought'

George Bernard Shaw, describing the aims of the theatre, also said, 'It must be a factory of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armoury against despair and dullness and a temple of the ascent of man.'

Sir Laurence Olivier, speaking of the importance of an actor as a member of the human society, says, 'His office or his art lends him, as occasion provides, the importance of the philosopher, the psychiatrist or even the preacher.'

Let us in Wales, Scotland and England raise up theatre, television, art and festivals which put an end to cynicism and defeat, re-shape the character of Britain and create the new society for which the whole world longs.

## Teenage unemployment tackled

TEENAGE UNEMPLOYMENT in Wales can and must be ended, a Methodist minister, Rev. John Burden, said in Cardiff last weekend.

'We cannot leave this just to the appointed authorities,' said Burden. Last week he set in motion a programme for Port Talbot described by the *Herald of Wales* as 'a bold new plan to help the unemployed youth of his town.'

Mr. Burden has called for fifty public-spirited men and women to come with him to the employers and ask them to give a start to the young people in the town.

He said the local council had decided to take on more young people,

even if it was not economic, as a contribution.

'We pay a large price for remaining indifferent,' said Burden, who is working with the Divisional Youth Employment Officer, Mr. E. Gilbertson.

'What greater tragedy could there be in an enlightened age than an army of disillusioned, dismayed youth wasted when the world cried out for skilled craftsmen?' asked Gilbertson.

Speaking as a minister, Rev. Burden added, 'The task of the Church is to face the problems of the community realistically. Whatever the problem we must be in the vanguard to solve it.'

## New 'Quit India' campaign begins

A NEW 'Quit India' campaign was launched by Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma, at the opening of the Moral Re-Armament Assembly of Nations in New Delhi on 24 November.

'It is not now British imperialism that has to quit India,' said Gandhi, 'but the forces of corruption, callousness, blackmail and black marketing.'

The Assembly was opened by Dr. C. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor General, and is being attended by one thousand delegates from 25 countries.

Dr. Rajagopalachari pointed out

that formerly, there was 'a presumption that what was old was right, having been tested for so long. In present days what is old is presumed wrong and in need of replacing. But moral values, though old, remain unchanged.'

Gandhi outlined his plans to: 1. Enlist 10,000 revolutionary workers; 2. Launch a programme of every man paying his taxes; 3. Ensure that every employer pays his workers a living wage and that every worker does a fair day's work for a fair day's wage; 4. Campaign that no government servant takes a bribe.

## 'Magical' Muriel Smith to give concerts

WESTON TAYLOR writes in his review of new records in *News of the World* on 1 December: 'Christmas is here with a bumper burst of special discs. A great cluster of stars is queueing for a place on the turntables—everybody from Bing Crosby and Chuck Berry to Secombe and Sinatra.

'But the famous names are out-classed, in my opinion, by a girl called Miss Smith—Muriel Smith, whose heartwarming beauty in "I Wonder As I Wander" must be heard to be believed.

'Miss Smith's magical mezzo-soprano is bound to make every man and woman her slave. I duly give another warning. The effect of "I Wonder As I Wander" is multiplied a dozen times over on the LP from which it was taken, "The Glory of Christmas" (Philips).'

Miss Smith is to give two concerts including Christmas music, spirituals and songs by classical and modern composers at the Freemason's Hall, Edinburgh, on 8 December, and at the Westminster Theatre, London, on 22 December.

# 1964—WHY NOT A NATIONAL HOUSING DRIVE?

By ALFRED STOCKS\*

**O**NE THIRD of the population of Britain is badly housed.

Tens of thousands of our fellow countrymen still live in damp, dark, insanitary and over-crowded conditions. Many have given up all hope of ever knowing anything better.

For most of us a bathroom and indoor sanitation, adequate light, heat and ventilation are amenities we take so much for granted that we forget these realities.

Yet few people would deny the need of every family to live in a home which is large enough for its wants, which is wind and water tight and which contains certain basic essentials.

It is a public scandal that this state of affairs should persist when taking the country as a whole the resources of land, of finance and of industrial capacity are completely adequate to provide homes in which every family can be housed in decency and dignity.

## Half million target

The root of the trouble is that we as a nation do not take responsibility for what needs to be done. The population is growing by 125,000 families a year. Each year 250,000 dwelling units become obsolete. Thousands are on waiting lists for houses. Our target should be half a million new homes per annum. This year, up to the end of October, 237,247 houses and flats were completed, compared with 249,284 in the same period in 1962.

A further factor is that the slums of Britain are highly concentrated in a small number of areas, upon which the full brunt of slum clearance and redevelopment has fallen. These areas are: London, the Liverpool-Merseyside concentration, Manchester, Birmingham, the Edinburgh and Glasgow area, the North East.

## Need pulling down

The reasons for this are historic—the rapid industrial growth of cities and towns in the last century when houses were put up very quickly and are now in large numbers sub-standard and need pulling down.

These areas have to find and pay for the land they need for new housing. They must finance big capital building programmes and they must encourage building contractors to undertake the work.

Heroic efforts have often been made to deal with the situation, but progress has lagged behind need as local land shortages, rocketing prices and high interest rates have sapped the resources which are available.

Liverpool is typical of the large areas which have this problem. In 1955 we took a survey of housing. We

found there were 88,233 sub-standard houses. If you reckon four people to a home that means 352,000 people. This equals the whole population of Oxford, Cambridge and York put together, living in sub-standard homes. In addition we have a waiting list with the Council of 40,000 people who have applied for housing.

Add to that the fact that Liverpool is built up almost to its city boundaries in every direction and a large part of the boundary happens to be the Mersey. We are in a state of constant crisis because of the shortage of land.

## Liverpool programme

In order to answer a housing situation like this you need a combination of three elements—land to build on, money to build with and either private enterprise or a direct labour force sufficient to meet the building needs.

Earlier this year in Liverpool we prepared a ten-year building programme. It is a programme to build 50,000 houses at 5,000 houses a year.

At the end of this ten-year period, the housing account will have a deficit of seven and three-quarter million pounds a year. That means that our rates for this one local authority service only would have to be increased by 50 per cent.

There are many places in England where there are no housing problems at all. But there are a few places, half a dozen perhaps, which have an almost crushing situation like this. This is a national problem which we need to tackle on a national basis.

## The first step

The first thing is to rouse the conscience of the nation so that the resources of land, finance and industry are made available to do the job.

Why not start 1964 with a National Housing Drive? Why not a national programme to harness the resources of industry, of new building techniques, of land and finance, behind a programme big enough to free this country from the legacy of 19th Century slums?

In this way the burden could be lifted from the areas where the need is greatest and shared by the nation as a whole. Capital could be made available for house-building at reduced rates of interest, the present inflated land prices could be nationally controlled and adequate land could be made available to housing authorities. This, in turn, would mean that continuity of employment could be guaranteed to the building industry.

The nation must choose. We either decide to go on as we are, inflicting intolerable living conditions on large numbers of people, or we decide to give housing priority and to be done for ever with the filth and degradation which bad housing involves.

\*Mr. Stocks is a senior administrative official in the Housing Programme of Liverpool.

# PURITANS: PROGRESSIVES OR REACTIONARIES?

By ALAN FAUNCE

**T**ODAY 'puritan' is a dirty word. To most people it means 'square', reactionary, not 'with it'. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as strict or scrupulous in religion or morals. To be against 'strictness in morals' is thought by many progressive and even religious.

But those who thought morals out-of-date have proved, more than once in history, to be the gravediggers of democracy and forerunners of dictatorship.

Whilst the Puritans of English history started a revolution which spanned the Atlantic and left a legacy of liberty in both the Old World and the New.

Who, then, is on the side of progress and who is the reactionary?

Puritanism was 'a cyclonic, shattering storm of the spirit such as that by which we have been beset in our own time,' writes Professor Haller of Columbia University in his *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution*. 'Before it had run its course it had transfused in large measure the whole of English life.'

The Puritans of Seventeenth Century England overthrew the Establishment of their day—an Establishment they felt to be corrupt, dictatorial and to have dragged England's name low among nations.

Though their own revolution collapsed politically, they ensured that Britain's form of government would be parliamentary and not absolute monarchy.

## America's inheritance

They founded the New England States of America, whose democratic spirit set the pattern for the nation to be. In his Proclamation for Thanksgiving Day this year President Kennedy recalled his country's debt to those pioneers.

They stirred up an intellectual ferment unparalleled in Britain's history. The twenty years' Puritan ascendancy was a time of strenuous public debate, intense political experiment, of scientific progress and of literary genius. It was the age of the philosopher Hobbes, of the Levellers, precursors of communism, of the scientist Boyle and of the poets Marvell and Milton.

The faith that set Cromwell's Ironsides on their conquering march, the Mayflower Pilgrims on their historic voyage and that won the allegiance of a towering intellect like John Milton, was concerned with this world as well as the next.

Christopher Hill, Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, writes in his *Century of Revolution*, '... the essence of Puritanism as a revolutionary creed lay in the belief that God intended the betterment of man's life on earth, that men could understand God's purposes and cooperate with Him to bring them to fruition.'

This was, says Hill, 'a doctrine which gave men the will to fight tenaciously, if necessary alone. It appealed

to men with social consciences, to those who felt the times were out of joint (as they were) and that they could and therefore must help to set them right.'

Not all the Puritans did was good; they were sometimes cruel and often intolerant. But their vigour swept the English-speaking people into a new age. They were ready to give their lives, under God, to 'set the times to rights'.

To some people of our own day, 'puritan' is anathema. For they have chosen other gods. Such are the people who propagate perversion and call it progress; advocate moral licence and label it 'love', and practise a soft-centred materialism in the name of 'good living'.

## Path for jack boots

The corrupters of morals, whether in mass-media, arts, publishing houses or elsewhere, are the reactionaries of today. Germany learnt that fact, to her own and the world's cost, in the Thirties. The path for Hitler's jack-boots was paved by the destructive satirists and the moral breakdown of the Weimar Republic.

In a series of articles on the downfall of democracy in Germany before the war, Constantine Fitzgibbon writes (*Spectator*, 16 August, 1963): 'There was a marked decline in public morality, not only financial, but also sexual, particularly in Berlin and the Protestant north. The government believed that tolerance was automatically democratic, and Berlin soon acquired a reputation as the modern Sodom and Gomorrah, comparable to the reputation Paris had enjoyed during the Second Empire and that London enjoys today. The flashy new rich set the public tone. Sex was brutally commercialized, and it is said that great crowds of prostitutes of both sexes paraded nightly through the principal streets. Pornography was easily available.'

## What Milton wrote

Fitzgibbon continues: '... there is a horrid omen in all that flesh-peddling along the Kurfürstendamm. Is it too far fetched to suggest that if human beings are mere objects to be bought, enjoyed and dismissed, then it is no great step to conclude that if they are not wanted at all they might as well be gassed and burned?'

To Milton, a participant in the English Revolution, the connection between morals and freedom was plain. 'Know that to be free is the same thing as to be pious, wise, temperate, just, frugal, abstinent, magnanimous and brave; so to be the opposite of all these is to be a slave,' he wrote in his *Second Defence of the English People*. '... If you think slavery is an intolerable evil, learn obedience to reason and the government of yourselves, and bid adieu to your dissensions, your superstitions and your lusts.'