

# Editorial

## The Communication of Ideas

How ideas are passed from one person to another, or to a group of others, is a subject which is by no means so clear as would seem at first sight. It is of course obviously of prime importance in many walks of life, from the teacher to the politician; and (it is to be devoutly hoped) all concerned are prepared to study the subject scientifically. Less obvious, but equally vital, is the problem of communication between different groups and different interests in our society and between the races of mankind. We have improved in our technical skills, beyond all expectations, but our social skills, in particular our skill of communication, have lagged a long way behind them. Elton Mayo's view on this (1945) is forcible, and may be quoted once more. "If our social skills had advanced step by step with our technical skills, there would not have been another European war."

Possibly the occasion when communication needs most skill is in bringing about change. Change is necessary in any living organism, or organisation, and the healthy individual has constantly to change and adapt himself to the demands of his environment. This must be balanced against a natural human tendency to resist change: a tendency which is often observed to a greater extent if the change is being imposed from without.

Scientific study in this field is therefore very welcome. It is not yet very common but recently there have been several significant publications. A small pamphlet "*The Worker's Point of View*"\* has emphasised the difficulty of passing factual information across to a group of miners. Certainly the Mining industry is not unique in this respect. A more important volume is "*Three Studies in Management*,"† by J. F. Scott and R. P. Lynton. This is an objective study of a coal mine, and two factories, of their methods of day-to-day management and, in one instance, of the methods used to introduce a new firm into a small town. The authors insist that in general a study of the obvious is of more value than more abstruse research, and their conclusions bear this out—but are not so often acted upon. They are worth quoting:—

"When people do not participate in the recognition of the need for change, they resist it."

"There is convincing evidence that a sense of function and belonging to a group is essential."

"Social organisation has been largely neglected in the surge of technical development."

\* Anonymous; published by the Acton Society Trust. † Routledge & Kegan Paul.

We may pretend to ourselves, and others, that we accept this in general, but do we act on it in any concrete example, and study how the situation can be controlled? or do we take the much easier course, and blame any difficulties on somebody else's mistakes or lack of co-operativeness?

This is all very pertinent to our Association, whose avowed aim it is to do pioneer work, that is to initiate desirable change. As Dr. Hargreaves reminded us in his most stimulating address at the Annual Conference, research workers can seldom do more than make facts available. It is for others to get these facts accepted or applied. He also reminded us of the reaction we should meet, (quoting the General's reception of Florence Nightingale's reforms with, "And what, Ma'am, might the soldier want with soap?"). It is surely then for us to study the means of communicating these ideas, and of understanding and so overcoming this resistance. Of course if we do it well enough, others may believe the idea their own; which (however galling for us) will ensure that they act upon it more wholeheartedly.

Many readers of this journal, and many concerned in mental health, have information which is worth while communicating; are they expert at doing so? Or have we still much to learn? Mr. Scott and Mr. Lynton have some lessons for us all.

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The tragedy of regimented man, even, perhaps above all, of well-regimented man, is that so much which is most profoundly and inherently human is incompatible with the regimented existence. The most successful planned societies are to be found among the insects. Man to be man, must be free and responsible, responsible not only for himself, but also for others whose bracing dependence on him provides one of the most stimulating aspects of his experience. The span of his consciousness must be broad and deep enough to enable him to know and recognise himself as he is, to be aware of and to foster his own spirituality, to see himself as a forceful and vigorous character in an eternal drama rather than to pose pitifully and irresponsibly before his own eyes as the helpless victim of a process, as a mere cog in a vast piece of machinery, as a shouting drop in an ocean of tumultuous cheering, as one tiny throb of anger in some hysterical mass protest.

J. V. LANGMEAD CASSERLEY, *The Retreat from Christianity  
in the Modern World.*