

Friday Night

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The debate about the Inch incident is in essence a simple one: two principles are involved. The Senate uphold the principle of "free speech" which they haven't defined; the students concerned uphold the right to oppose the barbarous institution of Porton Down and the right to question those most intimately concerned with it.

Many people, including Professor Gordon of the Chemistry Dept., share the students revulsion of C.B.W (Chemical Biological Warfare) but deplore the means by which they attempt to change the situation. We ask them how can they change the situation? By "reasoned dissent"? If by "reasoned dissent" they mean that we should invite Ministry of Defence officials down and engage them in debate, then we would reply that this achieves absolutely nothing. It preserves the dignity of 'free speech'; we agree to differ, and gain the liberal illusion that we have done our bit - without dirtying our hands. In fact, we gain precisely nothing and in the time we waste the bio-chemists at Porton continue working on still cheaper methods of wiping out mankind. The American Government applaud 'reasoned dissent' because they know it is powerless. 'Reasoned dissent' in itself is an admirable concept, if it worked we wouldn't have needed to do what we have done, but regrettably - as C.N.D. has shown us - it doesn't.

If not by 'reasoned dissent' what other means do we have at our disposal? Through Parliament? But the question of Porton is raised with ritualistic regularity every year and is blandly ignored.

Confronted with some facts about C.B.W., a senior member of the Chemistry Department suggested that we got them published. But we obtained them from scientific publications. Information is a basis, not a substitute, for action. The information has long existed - nothing has happened.

Dr. Inch of Porton Down came here to talk about the toxic (sic) effects of certain chemicals. He did not talk about this. After students had read out an indictment of C.B.W. (based on information taken wholly from scientific journals) Dr. Inch, though clearly not amused by the proceedings, said 'You 've had your say now I'll have mine'. What did he tell us? Firstly, that he was more ethically pure than we (this was taken to mean that we were impolite - apparently a more serious matter than research into the cheapest forms of mass destruction); secondly, that Porton publishes no less than 80% of its scientific research results (the unsuccessful experiments?) - he would not comment on the vital 20% unpublished and, thirdly, that selling C.B.W. patents to the American Military Establishment was no different in kind to selling them penicillin and that the money so gained was necessary since they had to get research funds from somewhere. At this point the discussion was terminated by a large band of policemen (summoned by panic-stricken chemists) trampling over the sitting students to 'rescue' Dr. Inch.

Looking back on the atrocities of the Third Reich, a generation of Germans have asked themselves 'How could this have happened?'. It happened, of course, because genocide was a Nazi policy. But this policy could only succeed because ordinary men like Dr. Inch (who probably leads an exemplary private life) failed to see their scientific work in its political context.

The University wishes to provide an environment in which there is a free interchange of ideas, but this in itself may not be sufficient. If in the interchange we are confronted with the knowledge of such gross offences to humanity as Porton Down then, if our knowledge is to mean anything, we must act upon it. If we do not act then we become intellectuals of the most pernicious variety. If, having agreed on the necessity to act, we then utilise those means, like 'reasoned dissent' which we know in this context to be futile, then we are dishonest. This is why we feel justified in our actions last Tuesday and this is why we ask you to support us in our stand against the utterly unjust and completely arbitrary suspensions imposed by Dr. Sloman on three of those taking part.

(Issued by individual student)

Student Capt.

Friday 10th May