

December, 1964.

No. 9

TALKING POINT

Towards an East African Culture?

The East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs is becoming a vital force in the field of education. It is education for adults who are already engaged in various social and scientific services and need to keep abreast of developments in their respective areas of work in East Africa. For this function the Institute is conducting a programme of seminars to study problems that cover all departments of national life. It publishes a monthly journal called East Africa Journal.

Of the interesting seminars the Institute has run recently, the latest, just recently concluded in Nairobi, is perhaps the most crucial because the most urgently needed. This was the one on Racial and Communal Tensions in East Africa which lasted 5 days. In order to resolve these tensions which are often to be found in mixed societies, the seminar has recommended the increased participation by Africans in business, technology and the professions; assistance of Africans by the government in the setting up of businesses and in their entry into agriculture and other industries. It was further recommended that all non-Africans who wish to live in East Africa should become citizens of Tanzania or Kenya or Uganda and take part in self-help and "National Service" projects and in trade unions. This seminar urges that non-Africans should join in these national projects not necessarily as teachers but as people who want to share and learn. The achievements of Tanzania women's organization, Umoja wa Wanawake, was specially noted in this regard.

The seminar insists that expatriates who come here to serve the governments of East Africa should receive accurate and relevant instruction about the East African way of life; they should also be encouraged to take out guest membership of Umoja wa Wanawake.

Aspects of cultural integration

Education: This being a very important medium for the continuation of culture, the seminar recommended in no uncertain terms that there should be a common system of education in each East African territory: uniform fees, standards of food and equipment in all schools run by the government, which it urged should control all schools. "It is noted," the recommendation goes on, "that integration of the minority groups only with the children of a small African elite can be entirely illusory and dangerous and equally harmful both to the elite and to non-African citizens."

The seminar states that if this process of common education is to fulfil its function it must be a fully African education, so planned that it will be closely related to the needs of the new East Africa. As far as possible, it is proposed, the educational system should be staffed by East Africans. Governments should take

steps both to improve teaching conditions and to bond university students using public bursaries so that they should undertake a period of teaching when they complete their studies.

Language: On the question of a common language, it was emphasized that Swahili should be taught in all schools in East Africa.

On the kind of integration East Africa should strive for, the seminar does not support either a multi-racial or non-racial solution to racial tensions if these mean that a compromise society has to be evolved or engineered in order to give a special place to elements from minority cultures. Minority groups have to live within an explicitly African society. But the seminar also asserts that this necessity involves no hardship for these minority groups. "The notion of an African personality does not mean that there is some rigidly definable, static way of life which is to be imposed upon all citizens of East Africa. The African personality is made up of all the past and present experience of Africans and of their future hopes. In this way it has taken in and assimilated all sorts of influences from other cultures in the past. The difference today is that Africans are no longer in a situation where they can be compelled to adopt other ways; they will now take what is useful to them voluntarily. But the African way of life in East Africa will continue to be developing, open, dynamic and humane. Minority groups will live within this developing culture, respect it, learn from it, and where possible contribute to it. This will be in fact a great advantage to such groups which have in the past lost and would in the future lose a great deal of intellectual and spiritual vitality from within their limited resources. Asians, Europeans and other groups in East Africa can only benefit by opening themselves to the developing African life of that area."

The National Theatre: The seminar recommends that the Kenya National Theatre "should be handed over to the University College, Nairobi, which must emerge as the leading force in the evolution of a national culture," and that "more modestly conceived and sensibly sited theatrical and other projects" be set in motion.

Argument: Throughout this seminar, it was quite clear (and gratifying) that the participants, who came from all the three territories of East Africa, were prepared to explore the encounter between races and know it for what it is. Mr. P. Ghai of Dar es Salaam also summed up the fears and prejudices of the Asians: their clannishness, their deep religious sensibilities, their position as victims of history, i.e. as people who often received preferential treatment from the colonial administration; their inclination towards a society in which various races accommodate one another rather than that in which one group is assimilated into another.

Mr. Ghai's suggestion was that we should wait and see what degree of admixture there could be.

Mr. Paul Fordham, principal of the College of Social Studies in Kikuyu, stressed in most concise terms that "events all over the world have shown that this notion of trying to achieve equal co-existence of separate communities is a myth. Either you have some form of discrimination and/or segregation or, if you have equality, the outgroups begin to disappear and to merge with the majority." (Outgroups: those groups whose culture, or way of life, sets them apart from the mainstream of national thought and action e.g. Europeans, Asians and even some minority tribes).

These two arguments were most representative of the main currents of opinions present at this lively seminar.

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### Music and Drama

Under the able directorship of Mr. Joseph Kariuki, Chemchemi Music Makers, our little band of two guitars, drums and vocalists, have built up a repertoire of six African tunes - Kikuyu and Luhya. They thrilled the packed audience that had met at Chemchemi on November 23 to celebrate the end of "year one" and the opening of our new premises by the Hon. J.D. Otiende, Minister of Education in Jeevanjee Street.

Thanks to the leadership of Jacob Thuu of Delamere School who has been organizing the band players and teaching the dances, the Music Makers were also able to play at the Fahari ya Kenya Exhibition at the City Hall, December 1 - 5. On one of the two occasions they performed in the presence of the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Mr. Tom Mboya, who was greatly moved. The band also played on a variety programme organized at the National Theatre for the Republic Celebrations; On the same evening, Chemchemi's African Theatre Company staged one of its plays, The Return of Motalane.

### Art

Mr. Louis Mwaniki's exhibition in our Gallery has now come down and in its place is a group showing of paintings by members of the Community of East African Artists (Secretary, Elimo Njau). The Community was formed in association with Chemchemi and at the art workshop we conducted in our premises in April 1964. Some of their pictures had a stand at the Fahari ya Kenya Exhibition. The artists on view at Chemchemi (till January 1965), are: Brother Anthony, Uganda; James Bukhala, Kenya; Mordecai Buluma, Uganda; Eli Kyeyune, Uganda; Francis Musango, Uganda; Louis Mwaniki, Kenya; Asaph Ngethe, Kenya; Elimo Njau, Tanzania; Win Obed, Tanzania; O. Simule, Tanzania.

Workshop, 5 - 14 January, 1965: Professor Julian Beinart of the department of architecture, at the liberal University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is visiting Kenya for the month of January. He will run an art workshop at Chemchemi on the above-mentioned dates, as one of several that he has conducted with remarkable success in various parts of Africa, including Nigeria, Zambia, Bechuanaland, and South Africa. Professor Beinart works with a group of people of 14 - 30 years of age and helps them to use wire, grass, newsprint, hoop iron, bottle stoppers, wood, paints and any other common materials that can be collected by the participants to construct shapes and to paint. He has always succeeded in getting creative work of a high standard out of the people he has led. The work thus produced was exhibited at the end.

You are invited (14 - 30 years of age) to this workshop. If you are interested, please send in your name, collect what materials you would like to try and turn up on Tuesday 4th January at 9 a.m. for preparatory work. Selected work will be exhibited at Chemchemi at the end of the workshop.

### Writers' Workshop

We had most responsive audiences (average 32 persons) at each of the four lectures we held at Chemchemi to close our year's session of the writers' workshop: J.C. Sharman: The Problems of Translation from the Vernaculars into English and vice versa; Joseph Kariuki: The African Writer - What Tradition?; Edgar Wright: African Literature: Trends; Ezekiel Mphahlele: The Fabric of African Cultures. We are in the process of editing these lectures with a view to publishing them in a small volume.

Please stand by for news of our 1965 workshop.

### Anniversary One

On Monday November 23 we were greatly honoured by the presence of the Hon. J. D. Otiende, Minister of Education, and his Permanent Secretary, Mr. Kenneth Matiba. Mr. Otiende came to open our new premises in Jeevanjee Street, which was also an occasion for us to celebrate Chemchemi's first Anniversary. It was the Minister who also launched Chemchemi for the first time in November, 1963.

Mr. Otiende made very stimulating remarks in his guest-of-honour speech. He urged African historians to reconstruct the history of East Africa in general and of Kenya in particular in order that our children should receive the correct interpretation of the origins and development of their own people. As a former choir master himself, the Minister urged that African music should be performed more and more in and outside schools, so that we may know ourselves the better and able to control its development instead of leaving it to chance.

### From the Director's Diary

During the last three months the Director has visited the following schools and groups to lecture:

- (1) Central Teacher Training College, Nairobi: The Theme of African Writing in the Light of Culture Change.
- (2) St. Paul's Theological College, Limuru: The Encounter between African Culture and Christianity.
- (3) East African Power and Lighting Training School: Same subject as above.
- (4) Lutheran Secondary School Arusha, Tanzania: A four-day workshop in short-story writing organized by Mr. Frederick Longan; Arusha Secondary School, Arusha: The Basic Elements of the Short Story.
- (5) Visitors to the Reading Room of the Christian Council of Kenya, Nairobi: A lunch-hour talk on the experiences of a writer. This is one of a series of such talks being organized by Mr. Peter Pillsbury of Limuru Conference Centre.
- (6) Finalists from Kagumo Teacher Training College, Nyeri, came to Chemchemi in November where they listened to a talk on the basic elements of the short story. The group was brought by Mr. Robin Fawcett who teaches English and has compiled an anthology of East African stories for publication. A scheme was proposed by the group whereby Chemchemi could run a vacation course in Nairobi on writing for the benefit of students who live outside the capital. Chemchemi welcomes this proposal and will set it in motion early in 1965.
- (7) College of Social Studies, Kikuyu: The Functions and Power of the Press.

### Membership

If your membership subscription for 1963 - 1964 has expired, this is just a gentle reminder that we shall be grateful if you will renew it.

### Please Note

If by chance any member has not received our report, Highlights 1963 - 1964, please let us know and we shall send it.