

Convention

Ellen Sostman

IMAGINE, please, the large room with its rows of chairs neatly arranged to face toward a raised platform. The chairs are closely packed with men of all ages, interspersed with women and children. These people are from all stations in life and from all places on earth; in short, they are a heterogeneous group which represents most of the ideas extant in the world. They are facing five machines which stand on the raised platform, computers of coldly analytical and mechanically objective minds. One of the computers is slightly larger than the rest, and one can distinguish the initials N.A.M. on the front, probably standing for the company of which this machine is a representative product. People and machines together make up a forum to promote tolerance. The task of the machines will be simply to review the philosophies expressed by the people. In this way, everyone will have a chance to be heard.

From the mass of people, a small, dark man stands up. There is nothing outstanding about him; he is rather indistinguishable from others. His voice is quiet, his manner humble. "I am a Jew," he says. "Have I the right to speak?" Lights flash as the computers take in his words. The slightly larger one answers by projecting on its large screen, "Speak." The others do likewise. The man describes his beliefs with quiet emotion, but before he resumes his seat he explains that he is not trying to persuade or convert. He just wants to make others understand why he believes as he does. There are angry mutters from the dark-skinned men with the hawk-like features of the desert races. One can hear their curses against the man just finished speaking. They are silenced by the official flashes from the computers. Words are projected on the screen of the larger one and repeated by the others. They proclaim that inasmuch as this man has presented his ideas logically and in an orderly, inoffensive manner, injuring no one and being open-minded toward all, his ideas should be thought over carefully, and bigotry should cease.

The next man to stand is tall and pudgy with a smooth, bland face. He speaks in a powerful voice which fills the hall. "I am a Communist. Have I permission to speak?" The answer comes again on the larger machine; again the others follow suit: "Speak." The man is powerfully persuasive. He proclaims the glories of the proletariat in eloquent tones. His words fill the room with pictures of happy, carefree workers, all doing their part for the state. An invitation to rise and overthrow the capitalists ends his discourse. The room is in an uproar. People are calling the man vile names or praising his wisdom. Some are shouting that he should be thrown out, while others cheer him. All are silenced by the buzz from the computers which transcends the cacophony. Then the answer is presented. "This man has placed his ideas before us in an eloquent

manner. He has facts to back up what he says. Furthermore, he is entitled to his opinion as an individual. You should not be prejudiced toward him."

The next speaker is a young man with an intense, intellectual manner. His voice is sympathetic, but not overly-emotional. "I am a researcher attached to the Unemployment Bureau. It is my job to keep files on the unemployed and to institute re-education programs for those people whose jobs have been absorbed by automation. The greatest part of the unemployed fall into this category. Many of them haven't the education necessary to take advantage of re-education programs. There is nothing, or almost nothing, they can do except live out their lives on Unemployment Compensation and their wives' earnings while this nation slowly turns into an army of automatons. They call this progress, to take bread out of people's mouths. I say do away with machines and give men their jobs back. Get rid of those cold, mechanical bolt buckets and rehumanize this world! Let's not turn into a race of robots. Let's . . ."

The man is interrupted by the ominous flashings of the lights. The largest computer furiously projects obscenities on its screen. It buzzes incoherently, and one can see that all five machines are trembling. Finally, coherent sentences appear on the screen which read, "You have not been given permission to speak! Sit down! People, close your ears to this man. He obviously is simply raving. Nothing he says is logical. He is a dangerous subversive! Don't listen to him." The people fearfully repeat the epithet to one another. One can hear the undercurrent of fear as the voices grow louder and angrier, and the crowd advances on the researcher. In the background is a quiet hum like a hive of secure, contented bees.

Man Is the Measure

Barbara Newberry

FIRST MAN: God is Nothingness.

Second Man: I cannot believe this.

First Man: Do you agree that if a syllogism is valid and the premises are true, then the conclusion must be accepted? If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal?

Second Man: Yes.

First Man: Do you believe that the argument is valid if the conclusion follows the premises by logical necessity?

Second Man: Of course.

First Man: And can not the premises be true by definition, even as man is defined as mortal?

Second Man: Yes, it can be so.