

The Never Again Association

N. A. A. GENERAL SECRETARY

WHEN THE N.A.A. was first mooted, my reaction was that, as an instrument of penal reform it was ideal, providing authority, local and upper, did not obstruct; but as time progressed I found my ideas were changing, my original motives getting secondary consideration, my outlook getting broader and despite an understandable reluctance, I found myself growing more in alignment with authority's ideas on group counselling. I fought what I now realise is an evolutionary phase in any organised group having behaviour study intent, but as the secretaryship of the N.A.A. involved a moral responsibility, I found myself having to equip myself with far more honesty than of wont and as a result the group counselling began to take a firmer hold until it has now reached the point in my thinking where it is paramount.

It is interesting, from a study point of view, to follow the processes of my mind as it led me from what can only be described as a deliberate calculation to

undermine authority by amalgamating all the P.D. elements into a fused solid body with its focal point on the alleviation of all sentences and prison conditions. The first step was taken and 42 men joined the group on its first meeting, a reasonably good proportion of gaol total. A promising start one would imagine, but we were dealing in fickle criminal minds so I was not over-convinced of any early success.

To talk to a group of P.D.s and tell them what they want to hear is comparatively easy, but if no results are forthcoming the criminal mind rejects it all as a dead loss and it takes a logical step by resigning. This logical behaviour was what started my mind off in search of pastures new. Why, after so many weeks, did so many remain to hear what was practically parrot-wise learned by now? Loyalty no doubt played a part: hopes were apparently still undiminished of some great change coming about as a result of our weekly talks; entertainment value

was there after a fashion; a chance to let off steam no doubt contributed in some small measure to their continued membership, or was it perhaps the natural gregariousness of the "beast"?

All these possibilities apart and taken into account, I realised slowly that there was something else that kept the group together. I began to quest around until I had fined it down to their deep-felt hope that this would be their last sentence; they reiterated this privately to me so that I had no doubts on that score. Also, in some unspoken thought they felt that the group could bring about something that would help them to keep out. Of course the latter cannot be taken for granted because it is merely conjecture on my part, but that is what I now believe has kept the continued membership going. Allied to this thinking was my observance of the gradual change in the group's attitude. I felt they wanted to participate more orally, for up till our last meeting they had taken a more or less passive part in the proceedings. I discovered a growing interest myself in the behaviour of the individuals in the group and began to speculate on what their answers and attitudes might be to given questions—would it be resentment; would they compensate like mad; would they hide behind a retaliating attack? I began to get so many questions

in my mind and no answers to them that a sense of frustration enveloped me for a period. However, with me, thinking is acting, so I took the bull by the horns and went to authority with not only my problem of the group's future, but my tacit admittance that the liaison had been right from the beginning and I and the group had been wrong.

The way is now clear even if rocky and I feel sure that the N.A.A. has struggled through despite many explosions to a firm policy that will and must bring satisfactory results in the long run.

PERSONAL FEELINGS

When I began this group I never realised fully just what trials and tribulations I would encounter. I knew I could expect some ribbing, some ribaldry and a little malice and spite, but what has followed almost overwhelmed me. I was vilified, slandered and shunned, the majority of it behind my back; friends of long standing did not quite know what to make of me in my new role—was I a charlatan, out for gain? Had I gone even more cranky? Or perhaps I had got religion? They couldn't make their minds up so they compromised by avoiding me as much as possible. Even now after so long they are embarrassed when we converse, but after a terrible feeling of rejection, which still persists from time to time, I adjusted to this

and now confidently take it all in my stride even though I still get tremendous urges to run amok.

I find now that crooked talk has strangely lost its savour, but criminal behaviour—or more fairly, human behaviour, absorbs all my waking moments. It fascinates me when the man with the hump on his back, when asked pointedly about his hump, always retaliates with an attack on his questioner's physical deformities instead of simply giving a lucid reply. He merely shuts his eyes to his hump's obvious ever proximity. I have got to the pitch now where I seek the reason for behaviour and can look for the underlying buried reasons in those that scoff and jeer at the N.A.A. and me, and find excuses for that behaviour. This is the measure of my progress

towards maturity that I can forgive instead of fight.

If this is the pitch that N.A.A. has helped me reach, I am certain that the only answer to the rejection of crime is continued membership in N.A.A., with its new (for the group) experiment in group counselling.

I am as sure as night follows day that all in the N.A.A. have benefitted in differing measures from their attendance at the weekly session. Some are still using N.A.A. for a variety of reasons; some will use it but profit not. I am fully convinced that success, a measurable success, could come on discharge, if a concerted effort is made by most members.

I feel that a voluntary group as the N.A.A. will command more respect than any similar group started by authority.

The issue of January 1967 includes

● FEATURES

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GRADUATES AND THE PRISON SERVICE

LETTERS