the cartoonists—the Napoleon complex or paranoid grandiosity. Despite its music-hall popularity, it is a relatively rare condition, but more deep-rooted and therefore more severe than persecutory paranoia. Cruelly, it is almost unknown for someone with delusions of grandeur to achieve anything worthwhile.

One might suppose that in an age of computers and elaborate personal record systems, of paternalistic government and ubiquitous mass communications, that the incidence of paranoia would increase sharply.

However, psychiatrists tend to doubt this. Someone without paranoid tendencies is unlikely to be made so by event. People can survive the most horrible experiences at the hands of interrogators virtually unscathed. When tired, cold and hungry, several mental states will occur, but in the normal person they will withdraw as soon as conditions are normal again.

Said one psychiatrist: ‘It is true that some paranoiacs do attack television sets, believing they are being got at. But without the TV they would attack something else. Like all mental disorder it is the growth of the large urban area and the breakup of the extended family that is likely to increase its prevalence, not the big brother era.’

Forward into the Seventies! screeched the social work advertisements at around the turn of the year. Countdown to the 1969 Act! Child Care in the Seventies! Blast-Off!

Indeed, in retrospect, one of the features of the year seems to have been the increasing stridency of the advertisements for staff. Perhaps 'stridulation' is a better word. Display advertisements—unknown five years ago—became commonplace. The posts being offered, right down to junior assistant nursery nurse level, all seemed to be 'exciting', 'challenging'—or even 'mind-blowing'. When you got right down to the small print, the most challenging thing about some of the jobs was how to live on the salaries offered.

It was a curious thing that when the advertisements for Directors of Social Work began to come along in the early summer they were fairly restrained in their wording. They were all ‘displayed’, of course, often with black borders that looked rather funereal and adorned with pretty emblems. (All the ‘with-it’ authorities have emblems nowadays, I don’t know why, unless it is because of increasing illiteracy amongst the applicants for top jobs, which would not surprise me. I don’t know how you design an emblem for a place like Merthyr Tydfil.)

Anyway, when you got down to the small print in the Director ads., there were no such adjectival aneurysms as ‘challenging’, ‘exciting’ or ‘mind-blowing’. In fact, the small print was a bit weary somehow: a reference or two to the new Act, a word about the salary and the address to which to write and that was about it. Indeed, as the summer wore on and the Director ads. poured in, the name of the authority (and its emblem of course) seemed to get larger and larger, as though it was all a sort of race or scamper, with a mêlée at the starting-gate in which the colours of the owners’ silks were more important than the hazards of the course.

By accident, one authority put out its Director ad.
undisplayed, and that half-inch of grey print, totally unchallenging and unexciting, provoked more interest and a wilder volume of gossip than any of its strident neighbours; which only goes to show, I suppose, that for the best-paid jobs you don’t have to advertise very hard, but for the humble, lowly, dirty and dedicated jobs you’ve really got to pull the stops out.

So the ads. came out, and soon afterwards the appointments were made and soon after that the air of social work became thick with sulphurous gossip. Messengers used to fly down the corridors of power saying: ‘Have you heard? A lady Children’s Officer has been appointed in Midshire!’ It was like, in a general election, hearing that the Liberals had held Orpington. For it was soon clear that lady Directors (? Directoires) were to be as scarce as primroses in November. All over the country, or so it seemed, little grey men were toddling forward to take the crowns with unprecedented salaries (and comfortable pensions).

At about this time the Institute of Local Government Studies in Birmingham appealed for documentation of the changes that were taking place. One of the social work journals, when printing this appeal, gave it the headline: History As it Happens. Well, I don’t know what sort of history the Institute will eventually write for us, but I bet it will be the sort of story Sir Thomas More would have written about Henry VII: that is to say the events will be in roughly the right order but there will be no hint of the jiggery-pokery.

That there have been some curious manoeuvrings going on behind the facades of appointment and re-advertisement is indubitable. The full stories will never be known: they will perhaps be furtively swopped in the corners of smoke-filled Conference lounges. Unhappily, manoeuvring is now in full spate at second and third-tier levels; there are lots of people to say ‘Oh, I wouldn’t want a Director’s job for anything—I don’t want ulcers, ha ha!—but’ (and here they speak rapidly out of the corners of their mouths) ‘I always have taken a great interest in across-the-board residential care.’ The Homes Supervisor’s is a cushy job.

The whole process of setting up the Social Work Departments has been a bit tasteless so far. Every now and then a head will rear up from the trough and speak: ‘Of course all this is for the benefit of Johnny Smith and his family’ or ‘Never let us lose sight of our objective, which is to enrich the community we serve.’ But such things are usually said only after a good dinner.

Perhaps a little worse than the distastefulness, however, is the insipidity. Where the majority of employees wanted the Act to bring in something radical and adventurous, the majority of employers wanted to play safe. From the advertisements to the interviews, from the appointments to the plans, there has been a waried air of: ‘Oh, it’s just another Act’. Yet one more Act I suppose we’ve got to do something about. Who’s the man most likely to keep the rates down?

And when the dust has settled and the sulphurous clouds have dispersed, and those who have gained the trough have put their trotters into it, and it comes to be seen that of all the Directors of Social Work those who can positively enhance the quality of life in this country—which is what Freddy Seebohm wanted, what the Act was framed to produce, what social workers want—can be counted on the fingers of one hand, then it may be seen that what we’ve ended up with, after all these strident advertisements, is just a chromium-plated Public Assistance Service.

So it doesn’t really look at the moment like Forward into the Seventies! (except of course for the humblest, lowliest and dirtiest jobs). It looks more like Backwards to 1601.

Dymphna

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