

Friends of the Future

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Introduction

“Norman Glaister and Sensory Process Before Braziers” described the thought and action that resulted in the formation of sensory committees in two Movements. The intention behind the project was that the introduction of a sensory approach should improve the exchanges between two types of people who tend to irritate each other in joint decision making. Reviewing the way such committees were instituted in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry and in Common Wealth required highlighting the sensory activity, so less attention was paid to the subjects discussed. The correspondence scrutinised up to that point had offered no the question of what had finally led to the purchase of Braziers Park. This was a formidable gap. The boxes labelled “Friends of the Future” would, perhaps, present the wider scene.

In this paper, therefore, an attempt is made to redress the balance. Repetition will, hopefully, be kept to a minimum.

Founding

The report of the 1948 Sensory Summer School run by the Common Wealth Party contains the following Suggestion for Action, proposed at a session entitled “Positive Plan of Action”

“Glynn Faithfull outlined a scheme, originating from an idea of Norman Glaister’s, called “The Society of Friends of the Future”. This was already in existence, having been provisionally formed in May 1948 – the provisional basis being that no action beyond recruiting would be taken until 40 members had been found. The aim of the “The Society of Friends of the Future” was to rally people prepared to act on the positive criterion of a concern for the future, intervening in any relevant field of public affairs e.g. the matter of the proper use of food resources, or of participation in a war. Philosophically the basis was to substitute positive for negative motives; psychologically it implied a new basis for social discipline, substituting love of children for fear of parental authority as the dominant motive. It was planned to give the “The Society of Friends of the Future” a resistive-sensitive organisation,”

13 people were present who were in general agreement with the idea of the “The Society of Friends of the Future” and agreed unanimously to consider it further. Glynn became the Secretary and Frank Gollop the Treasurer.

Vi Rutter was concerned that: “If Friends of the Future can attract people with great international reputations it might be a tremendous force for good because they would have the power and prestige to implement its ideas. But if it is merely a collection of ordinary people I do not see how it can be any more effective than Common Wealth – it might even draw away strength from Common Wealth and cause another split of the movement-party type.” The subsequent discussion brought out that Friends of the Future should be non- or extra-political.

There is correspondence in late 1948, developing the aims of Friends of the Future, between Norman, Glynn, Bonnie, James and Dorothy Parkes.

A first draft was prepared and Glynn sent it out for comments.

In a letter to Glynn from James Parkes dated 14th October 1948 he makes a number of points on the draft which later developed as Braziers' philosophy:

- We are living in a world in which the waste of natural resources, physical and mental, already achieved or menaced by a third world war, seriously prejudices the life of future generations
- We cannot 'take responsibility for the future'. We can only 'act in such a way as to show a sense of responsibility to the future'.
- There should be expressed the idea that the human species, primarily in its capacity as a gregarious species, has reached a turning point in its evolution, where it must discover new social (herd) forms or sink back into stagnation, to be replaced by a more successful form, or to rebuild its life more intelligently after a long period of delay
- I think one needs, not a blue print of the future society, or a selection of 'beliefs' about it, but a clear exposition of the fact that the problem does not lie in these blue prints, which can be fairly easily constructed and agreed, but in method and techniques by which mankind can find the right mastery of the complexity of his present environment. [his underlining - MR]
- Mankind needs to develop group thinking; in this group thinking it needs to distinguish the executive (resistive) and sensitive contributions, and experiment in their use; in the experimentation of their use it needs to find new techniques of discussion, debate and decision.

A second draft was dated 15th November 1948 and this also was sent out for comments. It made much of the word 'process'. In the subsequent discussion this was objected to by the Christians, but it seems to have stayed in.

The final draft was numbered FF1 and this was further amended to become FF2, which was printed.

A letter from Glynn to Bonnie dated 12th January 1949 suggests that the 1949 Sensory Summer School should be a Friends of the Future Summer School.

A letter from Bonnie to Glynn dated 15th February 1949 refers to the "largest meeting FF has yet had" at Leatherhead, with 21 members.

A letter from Olaf Stapleton to Glynn Faithfull dated 22nd February 1949 gives the date of the inaugural meeting as 26th March 1949. It was held in the Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, Westminster.

At the Inaugural Meeting a Council of Responsible Members was elected: Ehlers, Cobb, Glaister N. Bellerby, Nelsey, Russell B, Russell K, Campbell, Glaister D, Eastwood, Wood, Collins, Lehfeldt F, and Hunt. R G Faithfull was Secretary and F N Gollop, Treasurer. The Executive Committee was Ehlers, Cofman, Cobb, Wood and Nelsey, while the Sensory Committee was Bellerby J, Russell B, Howes N, Hunt and Rutter. Note that, in line with pure sensory theory, the membership of the executive and sensory committees did not overlap.

Statement of Aims

Leaflet FF2, dated 1/3/49, in full:

‘We are living at a time when the depleted natural resources of our world, and the will to live of the people, are further threatened by a third world war; the life of future generations is in jeopardy. Man faces social breakdown, a breakdown which is all the more tragic because it is the very success of his practical achievements which threaten him with disaster.

We therefore propose to make an effort to rally all those who are concerned to save their fellow men as well as themselves from self-destruction, and form a society of people pledged to act on the positive criterion of their concern for the future. It is intended that this society shall represent the interests of future generations in any cases in which they are threatened, as, for instance, in questions of war, of population, of soil fertility, or of the liberation of atomic energy; and that it shall endeavour to direct creative energy towards the securing in good time of the conditions in which our successors will be able to realise the best possibilities of human life. We propose to initiate in our own country a movement which we trust will become world-wide.

Our aims briefly are:

- a) To study the present dislocation of society and the means of remedying it.
- b) To act with a full sense of responsibility for the survival and further development of the human species.

PRINCIPLES

We believe:

- 1) That civilisation is not necessarily destined to decay, and at the present time is capable of further evolution of life on earth.
- 2) That human nature is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, and that the will to serve the purposes of a wider community is as important and as natural a motive as self-interest.
- 3) That all life is potentially valuable, and that any social advance must be universally valid, remaining open to and related to the needs of all classes, states, and races.
- 4) That an advance in social planning can be made if reality can be seen as a process, i.e., the pattern of movement and change in the development of relationships; and that it is equally necessary to recognise that, however great human understanding and achievement may become, we must retain a reverent attitude towards those aspects of reality yet beyond our understanding.
- 5) That the taking of important decisions affecting the future of mankind, either in the formulation of truth or in the field of action, is a matter in which the responsibility of those concerned must be defined and made more fully conscious by integration into a more efficient group organism than the conventional committee.
- 6) That any group of people concerned with matters of social organisation must, in order to be efficient, both make exact and definite statement of its principles for the purposes of action and at the same time provide methods of continuous self-criticism, developing and re-stating those principles in new terms; and to this end we consider necessary a dual organisation of mutually responsible guiding bodies which we propose to call Executive and Sensory.

7) That a new technique of discussion must be found which will obviate the present deadlock, and which will facilitate reaching agreement and the ascertaining of truth.

All those who feel that the above aims and principles can provide an opportunity for the integration of widely differing aspirations into one common effort towards the continual betterment of human life are invited to join us. We ask them to realise that the opportunity can be used more effectively if each member will strive to understand and absorb what is new to him rather than to oppose and destroy it. By such methods we shall be able to work along positive lines to construct a form of society which will replace the crumbling edifice of present-day negativism before it has completely destroyed us. We may hope to lay the foundation of a plan to restore a sense of agreed purpose and value to human life.

Bulletins

Friends of the Future proceeded to issue a series of bulletins. The first, dated 18th February 1949, gave details of the inaugural meeting and reported that the Constitution and General Purposes Committee had drawn up a draft constitution. This included, as its objectives, the statement of aims given in FF2.

FF Bulletin No 2, dated 18th April 1949, was a report on the Inaugural Meeting. About 50-60 people attended and some 20 joined the Friends of the Future after the meeting. The Chairman was Glynn Faithfull and the speakers were Jack Bellerby, Norman Glaister and Freda Ehlers. Most of the points seem to be about how the sensory / executive process could solve the cold war.

Bulletin No 3, dated 12th May 1949 concentrated on how to find more members.

FF9, dated 30th June 1951, gives advice on how to start a local group.

FF20, dated March-June 1953, referred to conferences held at Braziers, and various meetings.

1949 Sensory Summer School

In a letter to Bonnie dated 12th January 1949 Glynn suggested that the 1949 School should be organised by the Friends of the Future, rather than the Common Wealth party, but it is not clear whether this actually happened. (They were the same people anyway!)

Glynn Faithfull, who was the Secretary, reported on the progress of Friends of the Future. A leaflet, FF1, giving the provisional statement of aims, was circulated in December 1948. At a meeting in Leatherhead on 16th January 1949 it was decided to organise an inaugural meeting in the Alliance Hall, Westminster, on 26th March 1949 and this was duly held and the Society duly constituted. The Council of Responsible Members of "Friends of the Future" met and formed an Executive and a Sensory Committee. A revised version of the Statement of aims, FF2, was published.

It was decided to prepare a series of pamphlets and the first had been drafted: "Can the Techniques of Democratic Discussion be Improved?" As a delegate, Norman Glaister attended a conference called "The People Against War". The main aim of contacts was to spread the resistive / sensitive method, and Norman Glaister said that the next task should be to bring into being what might be called a "Sensory Network" in society.

Braziers

In a letter from Bonnie to Glynn dated 2nd October 1949 she said that “I am in process of making enquiries about lecture rooms for Norman’s lectures”. And then “We have seen a house in the Chilterns which seems surprisingly suitable for our requirements.” But it is not clear whether there is any connection with the Friends of the Future.

In a letter to Glynn dated 3rd October 1949 Norman is having difficulty fitting in the many meetings, as both Commonwealth Sensory and Friends of the Future are having monthly meetings and these sometimes take place on the same day, one after the other. It is, after all, the same people.

In a letter to Eva Faithfull dated 1st November 1949, Norman says that “There are increasing indications of a demand for an educational centre, a sort of permanent Sensory Summer School. It might be called a School of Sensory Social Studies.” He says that he and Bonnie have found a suitable place (Braziers).

He says, “I don’t propose to plunge into it as an entirely private venture, but I do want to begin at once the search for people to share it, whether financially or in the matter of the work to be done at such a centre. The rest of the letter is an invitation for Eva and Glynn to join him and Bonnie.

Later History

There are minutes of the Sensory Committee in 1950 which indicate that most meetings of that and the executive committee were held at Braziers.

There are some undated letters referring to joint meetings with Braziers. There are bank statements up to 1957 but with very few transactions and a total of less than £10. An AGM was called for 24th March 1957 at Braziers and one item on the agenda was “Plans for the re-activation of the Friends of the Future organisation”. A letter from Glynn dated 25th March 1957 encloses two subscriptions. The society does not seem to have been formally closed down, just to have lapsed.

The minutes of a meeting of the Braziers Park Sensory Committee on 6th September 1952 lists a number of organisations with similar aims. The Friends of the Future are not included.

A meeting of the BP Sensory Committee on 27th & 28th December 1952 discussed the question of circulating a letter about the effect of the hydrogen bomb and suggested that the Friends of the Future might take responsibility for any executive action arising from this. So the Friends of the Future were still active at that date.