

EDITORIAL

VAN DIE REDAKSIE

Violence by Proxy

Someone who wants to commit violence in the conventional fashion, has to take into account the possibility that his victim might retaliate. The duellists of the eighteenth century knew this and were prepared to take the risk in order to satisfy their honour. Even the pugilist or the latterday mugger accepts the fact that his opponent will try to hit back. For the coward the only way to avoid such retaliation is to plan a surreptitious attack by means of remote control apparatus that leaves him safe and far away at the time of the assault. Such violence requires careful planning to ensure that the correct victim is struck down, and it involves study of habits and movements of the individual and his associates. It is a cowardly and reprehensible act to attack in such a way that the victim cannot defend him- or herself.

But if the actual victim need not be carefully chosen and anyone will do as the receiver of the onslaught, many of the organisational problems automatically disappear. One plants a bomb, somewhere—anywhere—and all that is necessary is that the timing mechanism must be reliable enough to allow the attacker to remove himself from the scene of danger. Who gets it in the neck is unimportant, and therefore the only consideration as far as the place of attack is concerned, is that there should be an adequate supply of victims at the time, no matter who.

We like to avert our eyes in horror when some film brings to life the barbaric customs of our forbears of centuries ago and we read with aversion of the cruelty and callousness of people of the middle ages. We realise with shame that the mass murders of the Hitler era are not ancient history and that we must not complacently assume

that civilisation has passed the stage of barbaric slaughtering. But compared with these past atrocities the present trend of bomb-plantings in crowded places, totally disregarding the identity of the victims, outstrips the worst that has been perpetrated thus far. 'I want to kill and maim in order to further my cause. Whom I kill and maim and whether they agree with my cause or even know about it, is immaterial, as long as someone is killed and maimed.' Hitherto even the worst criminal has chosen his victim. Now the only decision that is necessary is that there should be a victim, or preferably, several victims.

Every citizen lives with the assumption that if he or she is attacked, it is for some reason: too much gold, a different political view, a half-forgotten insult or a threat to the attacker's future. We adjust ourselves to such dangers and try either to avoid them, or to safeguard against them. We lock our doors, keep our jewellery in safes and rely on predictable, civilised behaviour. If we are attacked, one of the reasons that makes some sort of sense can be found. It may be irksome or criminal and grossly unfair, but there is a semblance of logic. This is no longer so. A good lock on the door does not safeguard against a bomb in the basement of the apartment building, placed by someone who wanted to plant a bomb—anywhere.

We talk glibly about anarchy and the breakdown of law and order. This is it. This is its worst possible form, for it is totally without logic and there is no redress. If ever in the history of medicine the psychiatrists have been faced with a problem of momentous importance, it is now. 'All the King's horses and all the King's men' are powerless and only the psychiatrists can help.

Die Nuwe-Middel Verskynsel

Iedere klinikus is vertrouwd met die probleem van die nuwe middel wat sulke wonderlike resultate afwerp en dan met verloop van tyd skynbaar minder doeltreffend raak. Allerhande verklarings is al vir hierdie verskynsel aan die hand gedoen, vanaf ongeregverdigde vingerwysings na die fabrikante met die suggestie dat die standaarde van vervaardiging verander het, tot sielkundige bespiegeling oor die geesdrif van die behandelende dokter wat 'n belangrike rol sou speel. Soos in so baie gevalle, beteken die veelvuldige verklarings maar net dat ons die regte antwoord nog nie gevind het nie.

Nou het 'n nuwe-middel verskynsel op 'n heel onverwagte terrein sy kop uitgesteek. Jare lank kla almal al steen en been oor ons hoë padongeluksyfer, en toe kom die Arabiere met die korrekte oplossing: 'n verpligte spoedbeperking. Sommer oornag het die aantal noodlottige ongelukke dramaties verminder en diegene wat nog altyd volgehou het dat spoed met die dodesyfer op ons paaie min te doen het, moes druiptert die aftog blaas. Die spoedbeperkings van 60 en 80 km/uur word steeds streng toegepas en die landdroste slaan hok met meedoënlose strengheid—en die ongeluksyfer begin geleidelik weer te styg!

Die gesnuffel na 'n verklaring vir hierdie verskynsel is net so rigtingloos soos die teorieë wat aangebied word om die nuwe-middel verskynsel in die geval van medikamente te verklaar. Die een sê dit is die bestuurders wat nou te houtgerus geword het en dus nie meer dieselfde aandag aan die pad bestee nie, en 'n ander beweer dat die nodigheid om gedurig na die spoedmeter te kyk, daartoe lei dat die oë nie meer so voortdurend op die pad gerig is nie. Miskien is daar nou weer meer verkeer op die paaie nadat die eerste skrik oor die brandstofbeperking wat ritte ingekort het, weer verby is.

Wat ook al die rede, die ongelukke is aan die toeneem, en ons behoort intensiewe aandag aan die probleem te skenk, want die morbiditeit en mortaliteit wat ons verkeersomstandighede skep, is een van die grootste enkele volksgesondheidsprobleme waarmee ons te kampe het.*

Geneeshere kan met trots daarop aanspraak maak dat die spesiale vergunning wat hulle in noodgevalle geniet, nie misbruik word nie. Ons het die owerhede van die etiese benadering van ons kollegas kon verseker en ons uitspraak is bewaarheid. Ook die publiek gehoorsaam die spoedbeperkings, met net hier en daar 'n uitsondering. Wat egter nou nodig is, is 'n voortgesette ondersoek na alle ander ongeluksoorsake en die handhawing van 'n ope gemoed sodat ons nie selftevrede terugsit nie en sê: 'Die spoed was die probleem en nou is die saak opgelos'. Daar is nog steeds baie wat verkeerd is, sowel aan die kant van die bestuurders as aan die kant van diegene wat met die beveiliging van ons paaie belas is.

Onsinnige padtekens is nog oral langs ons hoofweë te sien—tydelike spoedbeperkings wat 'n skilpadgang van 5 km/uur probeer afdwing; padoppervlaktes wat na opgrawe vir die neerlê van 'n elektriese kabel weke lank onversorg gelaat word; tekens wat jaar na jaar, ten spyte van ooglopende ondoeltreffendheid, nie verander word nie. Wat die publiek betref, slenter voetgangers steeds heen en weer oor ons snelweë en dink boere blykbaar nog dat hierdie duur paaie vir hul beste bedoel is. Sitplekgordels word maar so nou en dan vasgemaak (selfs dokters is nie in dié opsig nougeset nie) en remme en kopligte kan maar so-so wees.

*Ons publiseer binnekort artikels wat die morbiditeitsverandering met die instelling van spoedbeperking analiseer — hopelik sal hulle ons stelling verkeerd bewys.

Questionnaire re Contracting out. Due to unexpected delays in the delivery of the questionnaires in connexion with contracting out, the closing date for the return of these has been postponed until 6 September 1974.

Vraelys i.v.m. Uitkontraktering. Weens onverwagte vertraging met die aflewering van die vraelyste i.v.m. uitkontraktering is die sluitingsdatum vir terugsending uitgestel tot 6. September 1974.