

BOOK REVIEWS

People Not Psychiatry by Mike Barnett.

George Allen & Unwin.

(the price is given as about £3.50 - and pub. Date November 8.)

'I felt like the original ice-cream man. I had rung a bell to an avalanche. The phone rarely stopped ringing, many arrived unheralded at the door, mail poured in.' The 'bell' was a short article, entitled *'The Sick Scene'*, that Mike Barnett wrote for the International Times in July, 1969. It contained a fierce attack on conventional psychiatry, a plea for the State to set up sanctuaries where those in mental distress could work through their experience in a caring environment, and a proposal for immediate action - to set up a network of people 'to help each other, to help others who need help, not by doing things to them, but by opening themselves to them, offering care, perhaps a little understanding and concern.' The suggested name was to be 'People for a New Psychiatry' later changed to 'People not Psychiatry.'

In the next few weeks Mike saw some three or four hundred interested people and subsequently he estimates upwards of 10,000 joined in PNP networks which were set up in London and several other towns. The bare figures indicate the huge felt need for alternatives to the mental health care provided by psychiatric establishments and by other institutions such as the church and the social workers.

The bulk of this book describes the setting up of PNP. It describes, in a vivid and candid way, the people who helped to get it going. It tells the stories of some of the people who were helped by it. There are many anecdotes I could choose from but the one I like is the story of Jeff who wrote from a town where there was no PNP network telling of his extreme loneliness, alienation, inability to make friends and cope with life. He was put in touch with two people who had written in from the same town offering to help with PNP and through friendship with them initially he blossomed out, and within a year wrote for and was accepted for a university place. Any chance encounter with a feeling person might have helped him. But the point is, despite his obvious intelligence he had gone through life not finding anyone whom he felt accepted him as a person.

This was the key to the PNP Network meetings. Despite the different ideologies of many of those involved, all were concerned to make the effort to treat each other as human beings, however bizarre the behaviour might be. Their zeal was fuelled by their dissatisfaction with existing institutions, so many of which have a dehumanising influence. Some felt it was due to the political system. Others put the blame on the medical scientific hierarchy who see the sick human being as a mechanism to be put right by drugs, electric shock therapy, brain surgery or psychotherapy, of the adjusting kind.

PNP was noticed by some of the existing institutions and their reactions often clearly illustrated the need for it. At a mental hospital, one doctor who was bold enough to invite PNP's men along to talk to the staff, and another who suggested they were worth listening to, both lost their jobs. Many critics asked how the unqualified could help the sick. What do you do about violence? Mike Barnett says he never came across a serious problem with violence. How much violence in the mentally sick is generated by the violent way they are treated, by the helpers' fear of being attacked and by the helpers' fear of their own violent tendencies? In our fear we all sometimes forget the Androcles and the Lion story.

The more serious problem encountered in PNP was the wear and tear on the helpers. Staying with someone going through a schizoid phase is a tremendously draining experience. Sometimes there are people like George, who accepted the loan of a flat for a couple of nights and then refused to move out. There comes a point in the acceptance of another person when one has to say 'No' and that point is often not easy to find when the people concerned have received so much rejection already in life.

Strains also appeared as PNP grew larger, with an influx of people convinced they could help others and convinced that they knew how to reorganise society, but without the commitment to a free exchange of feelings which seems to have kept the pioneers open to their own human-ness.

Despite these shortcomings PNP stands for something very valuable. It stands for people doing something themselves. It stands for a concept of help which means offering a hand to help a man stand on his own feet. It represents a faith that everyone can stand on his own feet combined with the awareness that to someone who is down it is often just the ability to stand on his own feet which seems so unattainable.

In his book Mike Barnett also relates his own personal odyssey sometimes in a very moving way. In eight years of self-searching before PNP he struggled to be a writer, he went through a schizoid phase, he went to India and Japan and meditated. He had some therapy, mainly with Laingian therapists. He left PNP in late 1969 and has since gone on to become deeply involved in humanistic psychology and the encounter movement. Through that he has found a personally satisfying way of life and a group of theories and practices which fulfil more effectively some of the aims of the PNP network, particularly bringing out the humanness in human beings. He is now the director of Community, one of London's personal growth centres.

Bob Jones

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THE SCIENCE & IDEOLOGY HASSLE

A meeting was held on 13 October under the title - Race, Class, IQ, Education and Pseudoscience. A group has now been set up to produce popular literature, speakers' notes, etc, to deal with what they claim are the current distortions of Jensen, Shockley, Eysenck, etc. A paper entitled Science, Racism and Ideology (by Steven Rose, John Hambley and Jeff Haywood) is available from the first author at Brain Research Group, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA. Enquiries about joining the group should go to the same address.