

Book Reviews

SOLVING DISPUTES

Conflict and Communication

The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations. By John W. Burton. Pp. xvii + 246. (Macmillan: London, June 1969.) 46s.

IT is the essence of the scientific method that, where conclusions are based on experiment, such experiment should be capable of description in such a way that its validity can be tested, either by repeating the experiment or by testing its compatibility with other known facts or principles. It is only when we come to the behavioural sciences that we are asked to take things wholly on trust. We are told here that "representatives" of parties to three international conflicts agreed to discuss their differences in the presence of a panel of social scientists with no specialized knowledge of the issues involved, and that as a result it became clear that this method enables international conflicts to be transcended through the protagonists realizing the subjectivity of their own position, and the desirability of finding their own peaceable solutions.

Because we are not told which countries were involved or the nature of the disputes subjected to this treatment (because of the necessary confidentiality of the proceedings), we have no means of judging the claims made for "controlled communication" as a method of resolving international disputes. We are left with the theoretical approach which underlies the use of such techniques and which involves the assumption that all international disputes are based on misconceptions caused by imperfect communication, and that all "coercive" methods of solving disputes whether through judicial action, arbitration or the institutions of collective security—universalist or partial—are harmful. Other critics of international law have argued that it must fall short of domestic law for lack of certainty and because of the difficulty of sanctions. Burton repudiates domestic law itself in favour of "sociological" methods of dealing with offenders and therefore international law as well.

At first sight, all this might seem simply a method of stating the familiar arguments in favour of permissiveness and non-violence in pseudo-scientific language; harmless enough. But when one comes to the occasional illustration of the argument which is drawn from the real world, one becomes aware that the drift of the book is quite different. The basic assumptions turn out to be those familiar on the extreme left; "anti-colonialism" ("wars of liberation" are all right); anti-Americanism (the relations between the United States and its allies are equated with those between the Soviet Union and the other members of the Warsaw Pact—did someone mention Czechoslovakia? Not Burton); in the Middle East, pro-Arab and anti-Israel. There is an account of what Colonel Nasser allegedly intended by the action that precipitated the June war which omits the central feature of his thinking, the intention to destroy the State of Israel.

In other words, what the West is asked to do in the name of theories supported by unexaminable experiments is to destroy its own defences and its belief in an inter-

national order ultimately subject to governance by law. If this is what "behavioural science" comes to, give me straightforward and overt Soviet propaganda every time!

MAX BELOFF

CHILD DELINQUENTS

Social Class and Delinquency

By Lynn McDonald. (Society Today and Tomorrow.) Pp. 240. (Faber: London, April 1969.) 55s.

IN some American surveys, using anonymously completed questionnaires about delinquency, middle class boys have confidentially reported as many infractions as have working class boys. It could be that the lower incidence of prosecutions among the middle classes is not the result of better conduct but is the result of the middle class parent's ability to circumvent police action. This important book describes a British survey designed to collect data on social class and delinquency of both the self admitted and the officially recorded variety.

Some nine hundred fourth form boys from four grammar and eight secondary modern schools—taken from four neighbourhoods of contrasting social class composition—were asked to fill in a 102 item questionnaire. Most of the questions were concerned with how often the boy had committed various items of misconduct or law breaking, but some asked for particulars of parents' occupation and education from which their social class could be ascertained.

Dr McDonald admits the necessity to "help" the less literate boys to fill in the questionnaire, and also to visit each school more than once in order to pick up absentees. Even so, there was a 6 per cent loss of response caused by absenteeism. For most analyses, the boys were allocated to lower-middle, upper-working or lower-working classes according to the position of their father's job on the Registrar General's Classification (RG III non-manual and IV non-manual were called lower-middle; RG II manual and III manual were called upper-working). Mother's occupation was used where father's was not recorded. The numbers of appearances at juvenile courts of all boys from the survey schools over a two year period were obtained from children's departments. The social class distribution of each school population was obtained from the questionnaire inquiry.

There were increasing proportions of self admissions in response to the questionnaire as social levels were descended. This held true for all categories of offences, but was particularly marked for violence and damage offences. The court appearances also showed significantly increased incidence at lower social levels. Analysis showed that some variation was the result of neighbourhood and type of school, but class membership was the dominant factor in both self admitted and officially recorded delinquency. Once social class membership was allowed for, certain factors commonly thought to be important, such as broken homes, working mothers, number of siblings, club membership and religious affiliation, failed to show any significant association with delinquency admission rates (page 168).

Such findings have obvious theoretical implications, but they need to be interpreted cautiously. Social class, as commonly understood, is a constellation of job, income, status, social attitude, education, manners, and style of living. The class of father's job is a useful index, or point of entry, to this constellation, but the causative factors involved are extremely complex. Social class membership is only partly determined by the accident of birth and economic opportunity, the temperament and ability of parents, and their attitudes to child rearing, are all part of the constellation. It may be just because social class represents an amalgam of many causative factors that it has such a close correlation with delinquency.

A null result, especially one that contradicts previous