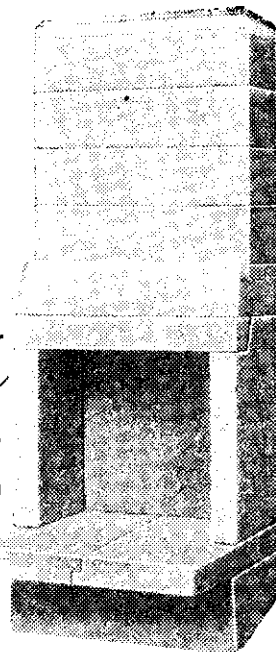
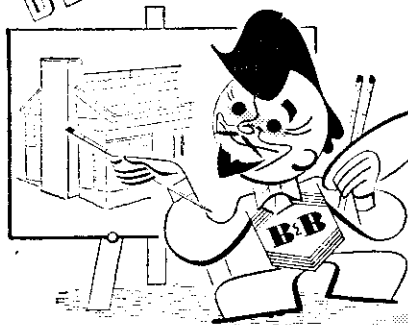


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A Week for United Nations

SPECIAL programmes for United Nations Week, described on page 15, may be more persuasive than a direct or plain treatment of international themes. Music can be local in character, especially when it preserves the songs of the people; but it moves easily across the frontiers. No other art can reveal more plainly the common interests of humanity. While men are singing their old and true songs they give no offence; it is only when they speak in prose and express opinions—including ideas about music—that the barriers go up. Songs from other lands may have a superficial strangeness; but somewhere, in some way, they touch our own experience. The United Nations programmes are therefore suitably designed for a week in which people are invited to reflect upon the unity of the human race.

Folk music can, of course, be heard at many other times during the year. There is perhaps no special value in this practice of setting aside a single week for good works. Devotion to an ideal is like religion, in that it requires states of mind which cannot be put on and off like clothes for a festival. The converted need no reminders: they see the truth whenever they open a newspaper and read the cable messages. If the hard facts of the world situation cannot turn people into supporters of UN, no other treatment is likely to be successful. Admittedly, the best results of United Nations Week are to be looked for in the schools, where an imaginative approach to the subject can be expected to impress young minds. Yet even there the response depends on attitudes which must be a slow and balanced growth through all the years of

schooling. An annual celebration can become as it were the summit of the year's teaching. But most teachers realise that the whole conception of United Nations is extremely difficult to put before the young: it leans too much on ideas and principles that have no force outside adult experience.

The difficulty is to make ideas come alive. To speak of human dignity, on which all else rests, is to use an abstraction; but the history of slavery, a long and terrible story, even now not entirely ended, can give it point and meaning. And the meaning takes its strength from the humanitarian outlook of the community. United Nations Week, like all other "weeks" of the same kind, cannot change this outlook, or strengthen attitudes which are already formed. The most it can do is to provide opportunities for people to come a little closer to the mood of international co-operation, and perhaps to learn something of its forms and methods. Even in this, however, the decisive influence must come from ordinary living throughout the year. People who hear voices from the International Children's Village at Trogen, in the Swiss Alps, will feel again the tragedy of the displaced and homeless. They will feel it with sympathy and insight, not only because the songs of children have an added poignancy when they are sung by war orphans, but because they have convictions about the needs of youth. These beliefs have been shaped by personal and social experience, by the mere business of living in a civilised community. In such an environment a United Nations Week should be superfluous. If it is not, we may need to look at what is undone at home, as well as at what needs to be done abroad.

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 15, 1954.