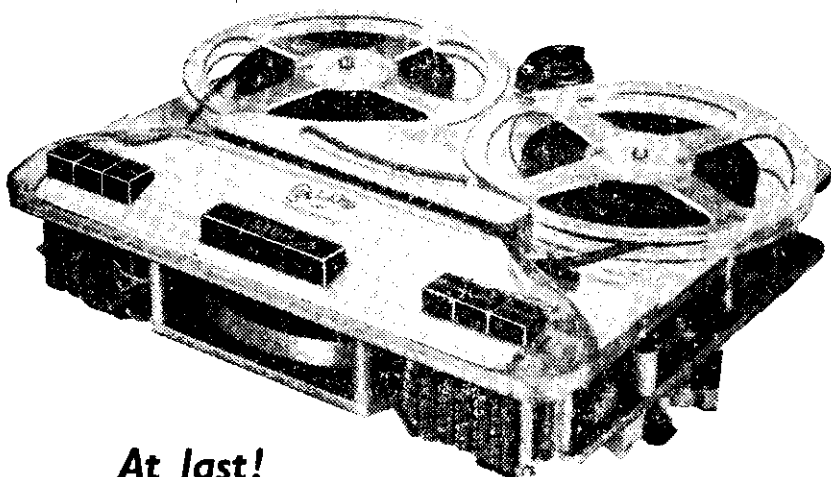


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On the Seventh Day

FROM time to time a body in England known as the Lord's Day Observance Society criticises the Duke of Edinburgh for playing polo on Sunday. It has also been known to criticise the Queen for watching him. And recently, in a flurry of indignation, it was able to point simultaneously at the Queen, the Duke and the Prime Minister: the Queen for watching, the Duke for playing, Sir Anthony Eden for having political discussions with Marshal Bulganin and Mr. Khrushchov, and the Queen once again for receiving the Russian leaders at Windsor Castle later in the day. "We submit," said the Society's journal, *Joy and Light*, "that this was a day when Britain disgraced herself."

These people occupy a peculiar place in the English social scene. Their intentions are excellent, their sincerity beyond question; but their temper is authoritarian, and their methods unfortunate. If they are opposed they become angry as wasps, and cry irreligion—an imputation which can be damaging. Persons who dislike their views are therefore unwilling to expose themselves to attack. It seems strange that there should still be people who fasten upon one aspect of religious observance and confuse it with religion itself. The implication of what is said by the society's spokesmen is that people cannot be truly religious if they indulge in any sort of Sunday activity (not merely pleasure, as the attack on Sir Anthony Eden showed), which is believed to be against the character of the day. It is not enough that the Queen should set a high example in Christian faith and behaviour: they want her also to adopt their own rigid code, and their propaganda to this end is urged persistently.

There is, however, a narrow truth in their attitude: the pity is that, by keeping it narrow, they damage a wider cause than their

own. Sunday should not be as other days. Perhaps there will always be argument on the extent to which the differences should be fixed and maintained. The question is at least partly concerned with national characteristics. There are countries where religious feeling is as deep as, and sometimes deeper than, our own, and where piety is not affected by the sports and pleasures of Sunday afternoon. The example is not likely to be followed in England, where a cautious relaxation has been arranged under laws so complicated that few can understand them. The Victorian Sunday cannot be brought back—if only because the motor-car has introduced a temptation to movement too strong to be resisted. But Victorian attitudes are not the only ones compatible with Christian conduct.

Many people who go to church on Sunday morning feel that in the afternoon they do no harm to themselves or to anyone else if they find recreation in the countryside. Other people, who do not go to church, are expected to refrain from activities which could interfere with public worship, or destroy the quietness that is an essential feature of the Sabbath. If changes come in the future, they are likely to be the result of new social influences, and especially of those already strongly felt from radio and television. In the first instalment of *Christian Question Box*, an impressive programme, Father Agnellus Andrew pointed out that, although only about five million people go to church on Sunday in Britain, another 15 million are listening to broadcast services. This is a fact of much significance. It suggests forcibly that, while the Lord's Day Observance Society is worrying about an external and barren conformity, religion is making headway in its true home, the minds of the people. If that is happening, the observance of Sunday needs no watchdogs.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 20, 1956.