

SNIPPETS FROM TALKS

DR. MORRIS N. WATT (4YA)

It is a common conception that the amount of magnification a microscope is capable of is an index of its usefulness. Now this not correct. Resolution is what counts—not magnification. Any object is capable of being magnified enormously, but without the very best corrected lenses and considerable understanding and skill in manipulating these lenses and the source of light it does not follow that the finer structure and detail of the object will be any better seen. The power of resolving fine detail is the crucial test in microscopy. For the ordinary amateur a low power microscope magnifying from ten to 100 diameters, and preferably a binocular, in which one obtains perfect stereoscopic vision, will provide him with immeasurably more enjoyment than the best high-powered instrument capable of resolving 100,000 lines to the inch, and for the manipulation of which considerable training and experience are required.

MR. LEICESTER WEBB (3YA)

It is a matter for regret that so few of the hundreds of journalists, publicists and students who have investigated post-revolutionary Russia have paid any attention to the political aspects

of Communism. There are enough books about the Five-Year Plan alone to fill a public library. The number of works dealing with the constitution of the U.S.S.R. can be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and not one of them has been translated into English. There are several reasons for this neglect. One is that the Communists themselves do not attach any importance to political forms. The present system of government in Russia is, in their eyes, merely the scaffolding which makes possible the erection of the Communist society. And when true Communism is achieved—the present phase is merely State Socialism—there will be neither States nor governments. So it is said in the books of the prophet Marx. Another reason is that in the Soviet State there is no clear line of demarcation between politics and economics. Many of the political institutions of the Soviet system cannot properly be understood except in relation to the economic objectives of Communism. But perhaps the strongest reason is the difficulty of unearthing facts. Methods of government very greatly in the constituent republics of the union. Moreover, the written constitution and the various codes of law cannot be taken at their face value, since their practical effect is constantly being modified by executive action.

The Soviet political system is a hierarchy erected on the basis of the workers' and soldiers' councils which spontaneously came into existence after the collapse of the Tsarist administrative system in 1917. In the country districts the basis of the soviet is regional; in the towns it is functional, that is, each group of factory workers has its own soviet. The work of the town soviet is both political and economic. On the one hand it elects delegates to the district and provincial soviets and exercises certain local government functions; on the other hand it discusses and criticises the organisation and working conditions of its factory. Although in its political work the Soviet is closely guided and controlled by the local agents of the Communist party, it discusses industrial questions with the utmost freedom and frequency. After watching some of the factory soviets and work Lord Passfield made the following generalisation: "The English working man is free to criticise his government, but is not free to criticise his boss. With the Russian working man it is the other way round."

MISS MONA TRACY (3YA)

That convicts escaped from the New South Wales penal settlement, and runaway sailors, provided the greater number of white men found living on Pacific islands during the early part of the 19th century there is little doubt. One such who lived at the Bay of Islands in 1805 was mentioned by John Savage, a surgeon who visited New Zealand in that year. This mysterious white man shunned all intercourse with Europeans, and on the approach of a ship he would retire to the interior. His country, or the motives which induced him to remain in New Zealand were unknown, and Savage assumed that he had been put ashore from some ship for mutinous conduct. He had a native wife, and his half-caste child was the first instance of such actually seen in New Zealand, though Captain Cook was told of one when he visited Queen Charlotte Sound in 1777. Again, when

Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, of the United States Navy, was on his scientific exploring expedition to the Pacific in 1840 he came across several white men who had lived for many years among the natives of the South Sea Islands. In Fiji he met an old man whose story he obtained. As a record of adventure it would be hard to equal. The man, one Paddy Connel, had been pressed into the army during the Irish rebellion of 1795. After many amazing experiences, including that of being put on trial for his life, he had been sent aboard a ship bound for New South Wales. When he arrived at Sydney his name was found not to be on the register of prisoners, so he was set at liberty. Eventually he drifted on board a ship, and after visiting New Zealand and Norfolk Island he landed at Fiji, where he decided to desert. At the time Wilkes saw him, Paddy Connel had been for more than forty years in Fiji. He had one hundred wives and 48 living children.

In 1804 six convicts working on a road gang at Norfolk Island killed their guard and made their escape in a small boat. They set out for a little island distant about two days' sail from their prison. Rough weather prevented their reaching the island until 14 days had passed, and when the boat got there the six men were only four. Fortunately the survivors found an abundance of food, and for five months they lived a Robinson Crusoe existence. Then a whaling ship turned up. She had lost some of her crew by desertions on the New Zealand coast, and was glad to take the four convicts aboard. They remained with her for three years. Then when the whaler filled up with oil and was ready for her passage to England they were, at their own request, left with a seal party at the south point of Stewart Island. And now there appeared another ship, the schooner "Adventure," which was engaged in sealing. The men were persuaded to join her, and for a time all went well. Their agreement with the captain was that when he sailed for England he was to take them along with him. Instead of that he marooned them on the desolate Snare's Group, giving them a few potatoes, but nothing else; and there for several weary years they dragged out a miserable existence, living on sea-birds, seals and fernroot. One of them went mad, whereupon his companions pushed him over a precipice. When at last the castaways were rescued, they were reduced to skeletons, and were willing to face the vengeance of the convict authorities at Hobart town, whither they were taken, just in order to escape from the dreadful island on which they had so heartlessly been marooned.

MR. B. A. BARRER (3YA)

Comparing the tennis courts of Sydney and Melbourne with our own Wilding Park, it is all in our favour. The White City courts at Rusheutters' Bay are the meeting ground of the N.S.W. champions. Here the pavilion is set on a hill overlooking the arena, which is five minutes' walk away. The pavilion is a particularly good one—hot and cold showers, attendants, tearooms and a bar at which they sell fizzy drinks only; you can get blown up with lemonade squash for sixpence. The courts are used all the year round, so that all the playing area of about 40 grass courts is never being used at once, and about ten courts are rested in rotation.

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