

Commentary

REDUNDANCY. We are stuck in the mud of our inheritance from Victorian industrialism, not merely the poky decaying buildings and out-of-date deteriorating equipment, which are being replaced gradually, but the inherited attitudes of government, management and labour. Despite the advanced policies of some employers and the enlightenment of some leaders of labour, almost every step of progress towards a technical efficiency suitable to the century in which we live still causes unrest among one or other section of our society; and rightly, since no problem seems ever to be thought out at the highest level and with a regard for the totality of the interests involved. Dr Beeching's proposals for the railways have met their strongest criticisms from this angle, a criticism directed less at him than at the government which did not make his investigation part of an overall survey of the communications of this country and the possibilities for their reconstitution. But a more serious failure was that so little account was taken of the future of the redundant railwaymen. To announce that 70,000 men at least, most of whom will still have years of working life in front of them, will have to find or be found other work, without at the same time announcing practical, detailed and, if possible, welcome plans for making this possible, will seem surely to a future generation almost as callous as the attitude of early industrialists to the conditions of labour in that age.

Many thousands of men, not merely railwaymen, are going to find themselves classed as redundant in the next few years. There is therefore an urgent need to consider what is involved in the re-training and re-deployment of those whose livelihood vanishes through no fault of their own. On a practical level, a man needs to be assured that he and his family will receive the necessary support during the period without hurt to his pride, without having to fight it through bureaucratic unwillingness and petty tyranny, then that he will be able to find employment without surrendering too much of what he has already built up. Some may be glad of a chance for a fresh start, but others may be unwilling to give up the home they have made, to leave the neighbourhood into which they are integrated, to risk their children's advancement by a change of school. A real understanding of the human situation which is hidden by the word redundant—much as the reality

of slaughter could be concealed by the word expendable—and a practical and detailed plan which took into account the human dignity of the men rendered redundant would help to allay the anxiety and insecurity which are the cause of so much unrest. Some hardship is inevitable, but it will be bearable if it can be shown that there is security at the end of it.

PEACE. The announcement that the Pope is to give the world an encyclical on peace—which should be available by the time this appears—and the possibility that the second Vatican Council will include a discussion of nuclear warfare in one of its schemes may bring comfort to those who are inclined to be dismayed by the apparent reluctance of the Church to commit herself to anything very definite. We have to live all the time with the politics of the nuclear age—the American attempt to force the Canadians fully into the jolly nuclear club, the sick comedy of the independent British deterrent which is partially dependent on America, the French alienating one lot of Africans with their tests in the Sahara while German technicians help another lot to build rockets which may be used against Israel, and so on. Though the horror is disguised by the new language, the possibility is still there that one day we may find ourselves a small percentage of a megacorpse. Perhaps the encyclical will help us to stay a small percentage of a megabody, enjoying the benefits of overlife instead of being overkilled.

BLACK BEAUTY AND THE WHITE BEAST. It was reported recently that the South African censors had been on the point of banning Anna Sewell's classic *Black Beauty*, when they discovered that it was about a horse and laid in the irreproachably white English countryside. Even if this were not true, it would be *ben trovato*. There is no end to the surface absurdities to which the underlying tragic absurdity of racism can lead.