

COMMENTARY

REMEMBERING HUNGARY. The publication of the United Nations report on Hungary places on permanent record the tragic events of last November which a selective memory, among nations and individuals alike, can too easily forget. The Russian aggression which suppressed a spontaneous national rising (in which no doubt motives were not universally pure) is now so plainly established that it must be a matter for amazement that there are still to be found those even in this country who accept the Communist fable of 'defending democracy against the forces of reaction'. Such blindness, in face of the indisputable evidence of the United Nations Report, is but a fresh reminder of the real power of Marxist allegiance, indifferent as it is to argument from reason or the testimony of simple fact. It is this apparent impossibility of reasoned argument which makes the prospect of any real understanding between the West and the closed world of Russian domination seem so hopeless. But the origin of the Hungarian Revolution is itself an answer to pessimism, for years of implacable oppression had not at all silenced or destroyed the conscience of men who willed to be free.

THE WOLFENDEN REPORT. Newspaper headlines can be deceiving guides, and even an objective summary of the Home Office Committee's Report on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution can give only a partial idea of the substantial worth of a document which deals with the social implications of moral problems of the greatest difficulty. The Committee's recommendations, which naturally received most of the publicity, must be seen against the background of the careful argument which prompted them. The Catholic Committee, appointed by Cardinal Griffin to give evidence before the Wolfenden Committee, in fact recommended most of the changes now proposed—and for the same reason, namely that the existing law on homosexual offences does not distinguish between sin, which is a matter of private morals, and crime, which is an offence against the State. As to the treatment of homosexual offenders, it is fully recognized by the Wolfenden Committee that prevention is more important than cure (which is in any case disappointingly rare), and stress is laid on the need of a healthy home background, the medical guidance

of parents and children and systematic research into the aetiology of homosexuality and the effects of various forms of treatment. Imprisonment is far from ideal as a punishment for homosexual offenders, but the Wolfenden Committee recognizes that the public (and in particular minors) must be protected, and so far no satisfactory alternative has been suggested. But it is idle to suggest, as judges often do, that prisoners will receive psychological treatment during their sentence. Only a small minority can be regarded as suitable for such treatment, and the facilities for it will remain limited. It may be that an extension of probation, with severe sanctions for failure to observe its conditions, could help, if only by reducing the large numbers of homosexuals who at present create a special problem in prisons.

More important than detailed suggestions—and this is equally true of the other subject investigated by the Wolfenden Committee, prostitution—is the long-term education in those moral and spiritual values which are nowadays so ignored by society itself. It is not surprising that we should be witnessing a catastrophic decline in sexual morals when the very concept of a moral law is largely contemned. It is hypocritical to single out homosexuals and prostitutes and to demand savage penalties for their offences when adultery, for instance, attracts no legal punishment though its social consequences can be disastrous.

In assessing the degree to which moral responsibility is lessened we have been recently reminded by the present Pope (in an address to Italian jurists) of the positive value of modern psychological enquiry, though he issues a warning against the sort of determinism which 'holds that the practical possibility of free choice and, therefore, the real responsibility, of a great many men, are reduced to a minimum'. 'Neither do I condemn thee' is not a condonation of sin: it is an abiding reminder that the whole story is known to God alone, and justice and charity alike require—in the context of the Wolfenden Report—the recognition (to quote His Holiness once more) that 'it can happen that, of two specifically identical acts committed, one involves definite guilt, whereas the other does not involve any responsibility on the part of him who executes it. Therefore the judgment and treatment of the act and its author must differ in both cases in their psychological, juridical, ethical and religious aspects.'