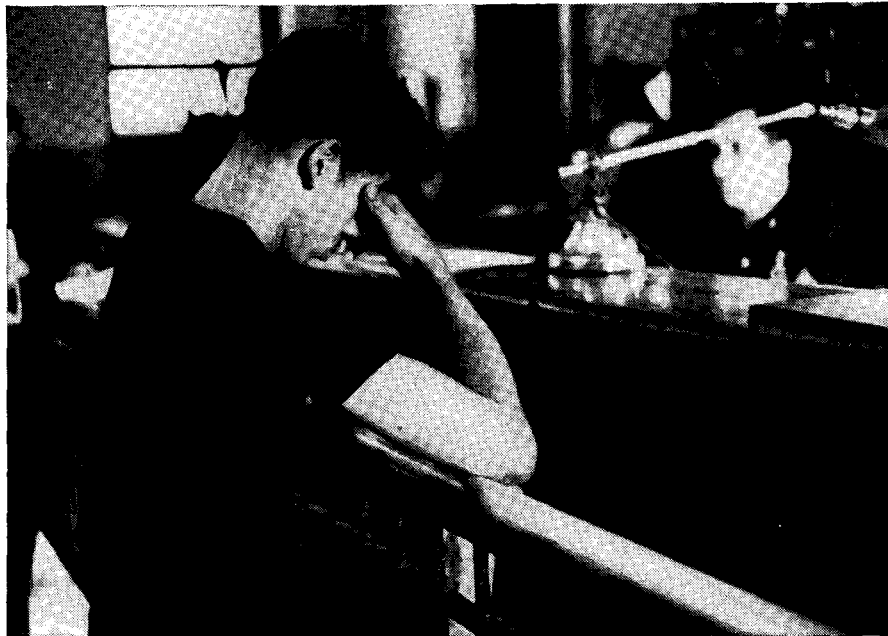


West Side Story: Moscow to Cairo



"Being a delinquent is an uncomfortable business."

—Wide World.

"The Troublemakers: Rebellious Youth in an Affluent Society," by **T. R. Fyvel** (Schocken Books. 343 pp. \$4.95), and **"Kids, Crime and Chaos,"** by **Roul Tunley** (Harper. 198 pp. \$3.95), concern juvenile delinquency, and its remedy, both here and abroad. Robert M. MacIver has been director of the City of New York Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation Project since 1956.

By ROBERT M. MACIVER

AMERICAN publishers are sometimes moved to change the titles of English or other foreign books, and by no means always for the better. For instance, in its British edition Mr. Fyvel's book was called "The Insecure Offenders." It is a thoughtful and quietly probing study of "rebellious youth" in West European countries and has interesting comparative comments on American and Russian conditions. The author finds a common problem in them all, that of adjusting the education and upbringing of the young to an age of growing prosperity, which has its own special tensions and bad influences.

The thesis is well stated and well

supported. It is one that properly finds considerable acceptance today. The increase in the number of confirmed delinquents is not due to natural depravity, certainly not to the attractiveness of a lawless mode of life. Being a delinquent is an uncomfortable business. It is an existence without incentives or aspirations, with considerable periods of boredom. These in turn promote nervousness and lead to excitations, to stimulants, and in some areas to dope. Violence provokes obsessing fears, fear of the police, fear of the neighboring gang. Sex becomes mostly fleeting associations with pick-up girls, cheap, shifty near-prostitutes who offer no real companionship.

Such delinquency, as Mr. Fyvel points out, has common features whether exhibited by the London teddy boys, "young hooligans" of Moscow, or the turf guardians of New York City's slums. And no doubt we can broadly attribute it to the weakening of established traditions, to the loosening of family ties, and to the tensions of modern society, complicated by the disrupting effects of an age inured to violence and massive preparations for war. But to lay emphasis on the fact that we live in a relatively "affluent society" may be misleading without considerable interpretation. While there are

salient instances of delinquent groups in well-to-do areas, the great majority who are responsible for the swelling of our delinquency statistics come from the most congested and deteriorated areas of our great cities.

They live on the wrong side of the tracks, and the near-presence of affluence is at most a bitter reminder of the opportunities they are denied. They are the frustrated youths who find themselves, for one reason or another, ill-adjusted, rootless, without status. So they rebel against authority, feel themselves alienated from the society they live in, and resort to the poor substitute—the satisfactions of a small teenage gang. Their appetite for status is witnessed sometimes by the names they give to their little, loose-knit groupings, such as Nobles, Knights, Dragons, and so forth; by the elite names, such as war lord, that they give to their leaders; by their defiance of authority, or by the manner of their dress: the teddy boys' long jackets and tight Edwardian pants, the zoot suits of earlier Californian gangs. They are those who fail to find an entry into the upward-striving race of the competitive "affluent society"; they are the "alien" incomers, the disprivileged, the victims of ethnic discrimination.

Mr. Fyvel has excellent ground for asserting that the situation demands the "adjustment of education to new realities of a changing society." He calls for a thorough exploration of this need. One of his suggestions, however, seems to this reviewer somewhat doubtful, viz., that young people stay in school through their sixteenth year. This is the law in New York State, and we find that, most particularly in New York City, there is a considerable proportion of pupils for whom the last year or two of schooling proves very unprofitable, since they have already become anti-conditioned to the academic curriculum. If such pupils must remain in school, the best we can do is to provide them with a work-experience training better adapted to their qualifications and above all to their prospective future. The problem is now receiving considerable attention, and some steps have been taken in this direction. But in addition to the development of more intelligent schooling and of more adequate guidance programs—toward which some progress is already being made—other changes are imperative if we are in earnest in seeking to cope with this very serious problem of our times.

In the first place we cannot effectively curtail delinquent tendencies unless we remove the conditions that breed them—the slum conditions of overcrowding, promiscuity, and the

utter lack of the amenities for decent living—by far-reaching urban renewal programs that do not consist merely or mainly of massive housing developments. And, secondly, we must in the meantime direct far more attention to the youths on whom these conditions press the hardest: the susceptible, the misfits in school, at home, or on the playground. Even under the worst conditions a majority of the young are able to attain some kind of respectable equilibrium, though still suffering serious handicaps that better conditions could alleviate. But the others, the more vulnerable ones, need early care and direction and protection and training, and much more of our resources should be directed to them. It would be most salutary if in this way the numbers now consigned to state “training schools” or “residential treatment centers” and their counterparts in other countries could be considerably reduced, for even the best institutions too often confirm the evils they are intended to remedy.

Roul Tunley's book, in contrast to Mr. Fyvel's, is less concerned with an analysis of delinquency; “Kids, Crime and Chaos” is mainly occupied with the remedy for it. During the course of this survey, sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Movement, the original director died. Asked to take it over, Mr. Tunley went on to “study our American problem in such unlikely places as Moscow, Bangkok, Tokyo, Tel Aviv, Cairo, and other foreign cities.” The result is an eminently readable and stimulating book. A discriminating reporter who knows how to ask the right questions, Mr. Tunley writes with a strong sympathy for the troubled youth who pass through the limbo that begins with the police and ends with the institution. He is by no means inhibited in his criticisms of the system and, while at times, the serious student of the subject would like more documentation, Mr. Tunley can always cite qualified authorities in support of his position. All in all, he has written a book that could render important service in enlightening a public that entertains so many wrong notions about the delinquency problem.

“Kids, Crime and Chaos” is fertile in suggestions, all of them deserving of consideration. This reviewer was particularly pleased with the stress laid on “trying probation instead of institutions.” It is true that our courts do put considerably more youngsters on probation than they commit to institutions, but, with rare enough exceptions, probation is still a perfunctory affair that fails to live up to its purpose of being a guardian of the youngster's welfare, through guidance and timely help.

FICTION

The Sins of a Good and Pious Man

“The Slave,” by Isaac Bashevis Singer, translated by the author and Cecil Hemley (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 311 pp. \$4.95), set in seventeenth-century Poland, projects the reality of both good and evil. David Boroff teaches English at New York University.

By DAVID BOROFF

BY ONE of those charming accidents in which his own fiction abounds, Isaac Bashevis Singer writes in Yiddish—and gives luster to Yiddish literature—at a time when that language is virtually moribund. But it is often overlooked that he has diverged from the mainstream of Yiddish literature in his preoccupation with the demonic, the nocturnal, the rampageously evil. And this is precisely what has endeared him to the contemporary literary mind, focused as it is on nihilism and disorder. (The Jewish tradition, on the other hand, is inclined towards the rational, the orderly, and the moral.) It is interesting to note that some of Singer's stories have appeared in sophisticated magazines like *Esquire*, *Mademoiselle*, and even in *Noonday 1* (which publishes “beat” literature), while other stories, full of familiar Jewish bitterness, have turned up in *Hadassah Newsletter*.

In “The Slave,” Singer is still demon-haunted, but this remarkable new novel presents some striking departures from his earlier work. It tells the story of Jacob, who becomes a slave in a benighted mountain village in Poland as the aftermath of the Cossack massacre of Jewish villages in the seventeenth century, during which his wife and children were destroyed. Jacob leads a primitive existence as a cowherd, but this life is not without its simple pastoral satisfactions. Moreover, there is Wanda, a lovely young peasant woman who desires him. Night after

night they talk when she comes to bring him food and take away the milk from the cows. Jacob is a good man, a pious man; but ultimately his tormented flesh capitulates to her entreaties. With a sense of doom, he cohabits with Wanda, knowing the terrible burden of sin he must now bear.

Unexpectedly, he is ransomed by a group of Jews from his village, but when he returns home he discovers that he cannot endure separation from the woman he loves. He steals back to the mountain village—“a slave returning to bondage”—and runs off with Wanda. Now his problems begin in earnest. He cannot abandon his ancestral faith, nor can he convert her, since conversion of a Christian is punishable by death. Jacob and Wanda—now called Sarah—go to an obscure village where no one knows them. Because she speaks little Yiddish, Wanda pretends she is a mute. For a while they prosper. When Wanda, in an effort to save her husband from the anger of the town's overlord, cries out in Polish, townspeople regard this as a miracle rather than evidence of her duplicity. However, tragedy falls upon them when she is delivered of their child, and Jacob enters upon his final agonies.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's virtues are



—From “The Woodcuts of Jakob Steinhart.”
“One way or another we are all slaves.”