

ADVICE TO A YOUNG LIBERAL

by J. W. Macquarrie.

Look, my boy, I love your optimism but do you realise what you are up against? First we've got to get the Nats out of power, then the U.P.'s. If by that time you are not an old age pensioner, if we are not all slaughtered by Black Power, and if we get a Prog. government, — even that will have to be facelifted a bit before it's quite acceptable to a dyed-in-the-wool liberal . . .

I see. Well, I admire your spirit. Never say die. But if you are really serious about pushing the liberal cause, you'll have to make a few sacrifices. Risk Robben Island? House arrest? Bread and water? Solitary confinement? Voluntary confessions with three-foot (beg pardon, metre) lengths of rubber lie detector to refresh your memory? Come, come, surely not all that. But I'm thinking of something more prosaic and more demanding.

Don't be angry with me if I'm a little personal. For one thing, you'll have to see a barber, see him soon, and see him often. A real old conservative barber. Preferably one who trims the stockbroker fringe. Better still, a man who shears senior police officers. A short back and sides man.

It's no good arguing with me. I know that the length is but the guinea stamp "the man's the gowd for a' that." But I didn't make this world. Beards, side-whiskers, Air Force handlebars, Genghis Khan droops, shoulder-length ringlets, five o'clock shadow at 9 a.m. are, to echo the words of a much quoted Nat paper-back on education, "nothing less than the deadliest danger to us". The man in the street, the voter, takes it as axiomatic that long hair goes with sleeping in until the early afternoon, frousty bedrooms, wife-beating, three-day shirts, drug-taking and way out lunatic political opinions.

The same with clothes. That poncho, those jeans, that jaundiced shirt, that neon tie. They express your personality, do they? Well, wear them and be damned. But for Heaven's sake don't preach liberalism in them or you'll set back the millenium by a millenium. Burn them, I say. Scare the crows with them. Put them on Guy Fawkes. Hand them over to NAPAC or a jumble sale. And that suede hand-bag! Give it to your girl-friend; patch your shoes with it. But don't mix drag with liberalism.

Your spare time activities? What liberalism needs as much as anything is a strong leavening of lawn-mowing, bowls playing Rotarians who wash the family car on Sunday morning and take Fido for a run after lunch.

Bird-watching? Ballet? No, my boy, too risky. They sap confidence in your respectability. Horses now. Breed them, ride them, or back them. Take up polo. No, not water polo, but real gentlemanly polo with real gentlemanly horses. Get a few of your pals interested in fox-hunting and haut école and you'll be worth your weight in voting-papers. Make it jakkalsjag and we'll get you on to the Senate or maybe even the Publications Board.

So mucy for the frills. Now for the real crunch. What job do you mean to train for? To sell liberalism what you need is a good solid bourgeois job. Engineering in all its branches. No, wait a minute, not structural. That's too close to architecture and, to John Citizen and Jan Burger, architecture is too close to the arty-crafty, to the la-di-da. Business, now, big or small. Industry, Commerce. These are safe bets. Accountancy? Yes, that's a good line. The man in the street trusts accountants — neat rows of figures with nothing doctrinaire about them, dark suits, white shirts with cuffs cascading over the hands. The voter is confident that men who support laundries support the status quo. Dry-cleaning and demonstrating, he feels, and for that matter, property and protest, plate-glass and politeness, real estate and third estate, simply don't mix.

So you see your choice seems rather restricted. No novelists, no poets, no journalists, no play-actors, no painters — since Hitler's day, not even house-painters. The public knows just what kind of private lives the scribbling gentry and the mountebanks and the rest of the lowdown high-brow riffraff lead — late nights, wives on the short-term plan, kitchen sinks chock-a-block with burnt saucepans, dirty plates and decaying food, weird ideas, the lot. And no clerical gents. If you're a DRC. parson and a liberal then, to the voter, you must be out of your mind. If you're an Anglican, or Presby. or one of that crowd — well, he asks, what else can you expect? Quite a few doors closed but you've still got a lot of latitude.

So there you have it, my boy. See your barber. See your tailer — one who caters for elderly commercial gents. Get a lawn and a lawn-mower. Get a poodle and a nice lead. Join the Lions, the Masons, the Round Table, the Chamber of Commerce, the bowling club and the Old Patagonians. Set up as an internal auditor or as a manufacturer of macaroni, noodles or non-ferrous nuts and bolts. Then preach the gospel of liberalism for all you're worth. And by 1984, with just a few more like you, we'll have it. We'll have liberalism in our time.□