



Secretary William E. Sanborn guards the City Club's portals—but not against argument or debate. He is instead on the lookout for those who would do in free speech.

Argument, Anyone?

You Can Get it at the City Club

"I have found you an argument. I am not obliged to find you an understanding."

THAT quotation from the spoutings of the argumentative Dr. Samuel Johnson hangs framed in Cleveland's City Club. One reads it just after he pays his lunch check in the dining room. It is food for afterthought because an argument is easily found in the dark, ancient-before-its-time club at 712 Vincent Avenue. But an understanding arrived at after an argument is a different matter.

It would be unfair to say the City Club is founded on a solid base of argument, but that is a near the truth as any other City Club generalization. In the last year or so the club has been

making a drive to attract younger members. Dr. Samuel O. Freedlander, the immediate past president, had a member-age survey made during his tenure. It was discovered that the average age hovered around the 53-year mark.

"Too old," muttered Dr. Freedlander, himself a sprightly septuagenarian. It was also discovered that of 1,300 odd (some are odder than others) members, only about 60 were 30 or younger.

And you are hereby notified that the younger members stake their reputations as argumentators each time they push open the old oak door off Short Vincent and enter to battle the entrenched seniors.

Some of these gaffers are not above

excusing themselves from a hot lunch-time debate pleading an important phone call. They dodge upstairs, but not to the telephone. No, no. They are off to the club library, there to look up facts and figures. Rearmed, they descend again to the dining room, resume their place, and blast the opposition with ammunition.

Some of the younger types have caught on, and it is rare today to find a junior member who has not thoroughly prepared for whatever arguments he may find with his sardine salad.

William E. Sanborn, the club secretary and first registered Democrat to hold the post in modern memory (the club is 51, or two years younger than its average member of the Freedlander Survey), found something for the children, the Socratic Group. This was a reflection of the wishes of the younger members for more discussion of local issues and less concentration upon the troubles of the whole globe.

THE SOCRATISTS meet at approximately noon on a day early in the week in the club's large upstairs room, there to hear some public official discuss his problems and prospects off the record.

Although most newsmen resent anything with an "off the record" label, they have been known to attend merely to gather background in special fields.

Certainly not off the record, and

with a much more solid history behind it, is the famed City Club Forum, which convenes each Saturday noon in session, which is to say all the time except summer.

Strong men who have mounted the slightly raised speaker's rostrum in their prime to lunch, speak and then answer questions, have left the hall two

By Russell Kane

hours later old, bent and white-haired. Gov. Jim Rhodes, who debated ex-Gov. Mike DiSalle there just before last year's election, was in a distinctly sullen mood when the smoke had cleared.

It is a fact that he won the election handily, but I suspect without checking that the City Club must be high on his hate-and-never-again list. When he referred in a choking voice to his humble beginnings, then told of bad guys who seemed to be shadowing his children, the DiSalle partisans hooted and sneered. Rhodes, sensing that he made a tactical error, and that these were not county fair attendees, switched to current events but never recovered his platform poise that day.

DiSalle, who had little else to comfort him in the coming weeks, at least had warm memories of the only debate he had been able to swing with his Republican challenger. It was, of course, cold comfort, but better than none at all.

Back before television and paperback books began to occupy larger shares of thinking men's time, the City Club Forum was a more potent political platform than it now is. In those days, such a gubernatorial debate might well have meant that its loser would have lost Cuyahoga County and maybe the whole state. Such is now the local human condition that attention is not properly focused on the Forum and the losers there can win elsewhere and by other means. But it was not always thus.

A dandy example of otherwise is furnished by the long and detailed memory of Philip W. Porter, now Plain Dealer executive editor and then its day city editor. He was also at the time the City Club's program arranger, later its president.

"Absolutely Machiavellian," he chuckled the other day recalling the part he played in arranging the Maurice

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V. K. Krishna Menon, then defense minister of India, was one of the most venomous City Club Forum speakers when he appeared in 1957. Photo by MORT EPSTEIN

City Club CONTINUED

Maschke-William R. Hopkins debate that eventually ended the Cleveland city manager form of government and got our mayor back. It wasn't really a debate, because Hopkins hollered about Maschke one Saturday and Maschke lashed back the next. The dimensions of public interest can be easily calculated in the fact that the Maschke reply to Hopkins attracted 1,500 persons to the Hotel Hollenden grand ballroom, which was then the Forum headquarters. A foundation now has \$120,000 toward an unlimited goal designed to ensure the Forum's future as a free speech focus.

The crockery throwing in the cartoon accompanying this story is strictly mythical. There are now, and have been for years, two large tables of members who agreed to disagree with each other only slightly but with the other table mightily. The cartoon depicts pioneers, some of whom still live—and argue.

The Soviet Table is the elder, and its name does not indicate that its members are Communists, although that is one of the charges leveled at them during the dim, dark McCarthy days of the 1950s. They adopted the name shortly after the Soviet revolution and they consider themselves pretty radical. Peter Witt, an iron molder turned fiery orator, was their leader.

He was so fiery that each year he hired Music Hall, sold tickets for \$1 a head, and for two to three hours raved against local politicians to the immense delight of a packed house. It is a monument to those times that he was never sued for slander. It was a one-man counterpart to the Anvil Revuers, which still roast a ton of local political flesh annually but have casts of what seem like thousands.

SEVERAL years after the Soviet Table assembled to battle the dragons, the opposition group, the Sanhedrin Table, sprang, or perhaps stalked, into being. It took its name from the Biblical Great Council of Jews, and the image of Solomon-like wisdom was greatly sought after. Not that the actual political views of the Sanhedrins were greatly different from those of the Soviets, but that the Sanhedrins expected to counterbalance the influence of the Soviets.

"There was a good deal of glaring back and forth," said Porter, a Soviet Table boy in the old days, "but no actual fighting. We were pretty good friends in public."

The arguments that have raged around the City Club have not always been genuine. Only recently at a Friday table mysteriously dubbed "The May-

or's Traffic Misinformation Committee," the talk turned to money, particularly to how the English shilling got its nickname of "bob."

"Simple," said a senior member after several explanations had been offered with the soup, salad and the fish (it was a Friday and the club's Friday fish dishes are outstanding). "The English discovered right after the Industrial Revolution that a shilling was just perfect for poking the thread into the bobbins of the then new power-driven looms. So naturally they started calling shillings bobs."

"Amazing," said one of his listeners. "Is that true?"

"No," admitted the author of the fiction, "but it certainly sounds plausible." His listeners agreed.

That's the way it goes at the City Club, citadel of bombast, fortress of free speech, cauldron of caustic comment, receptacle of reprehensive (dependable on what side you're on) views.

Talk, Talk Saves Club

The question is occasionally asked why Cleveland's City Club has survived a movement which has seen the death of similar City Clubs in other large metropolitan areas.

The answer, from a local talker: "Cleveland is a great town for talking. We would rather talk than act, usually. For example, there has been much more civil rights picketing in other big towns. Here, we talked our way through most of that."

A little known fact about the City Club is that it is in no sense an exclusive establishment. A man who thought it ranked just below the Union Club as a place hard to get into was amazed when the young lady with the cash box handed him an application blank with his change after he ate there with a member.

He was also happy to find that he did not have to figure out a tip to go with the lunch check. Years ago City Clubbers decided they couldn't waste valuable talking time in calculating tips. So now a service fee is figured in and added to your check.

It's little touches like this that speed up the flow of free speech and free ideas. Only occasionally does anything come along to hinder this flow. Recently a conservative member wrote in The City, weekly publication of the club, that the liberals were getting mighty thick around the premises. A number of the left answered him in the next issue.

"We're ready to argue with you any old time," they said in effect, "just as soon as you mend your own views."



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