

The dangers of drinking with BSJ!

BY STAN GEBLER DAVIES

B S JOHNSON, almost as choleric but not yet quite so large as the eighteenth century Johnson, but sharing some of his attitudes and some of his prejudices (not, however, Toryism. Pity about that) is not everybody's favourite kind of person.

He is not the favourite of certain publishers who resent being told they are parasitical louts.

He is not the favourite of certain literati, who have paraded their ignorance be-

fore him and been rebuked. There are publicans who will certainly not tolerate his presence.

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"Is that your friend, B. S. Johnson?" inquired an inquisitive literary editor, author of a recent, less than rave notice of the latest B. S. novel.

"Pardon me," I said. "There is a man I must see at the other end of the room."

A drink . . .

"Wait a minute," said Johnson, pouncing on the unfortunate literary man. "I know you. You're the silly . . . who wrote that stupid review of my book. A moron like you couldn't read a bus ticket."

The two, I might add, are now the best of friends. Johnson, the diplomatist, suggests a drink after the party in

and international film festivals. "I have never missed a deadline in my life. I know the importance of writing, and I know the importance of getting bloody paid for it. Get that right."

Johnson, irate, bangs on the counter and demands his money back. This being declined, he empiles the contents of a soda siphon on the publican. Laughing in a maniac manner, he leaves rapidly.

I am surrounded by large Irish barmen. It is explained to me that it would be unwise of myself or my friend ever to set foot in this particular place again.

Johnson is collapsed against a lamp-post some way up the street. He inquires: "What's wrong with you? Why didn't you run?"

'Unwise'

"It is unwise," I recollect an uncle of mine telling me once, "to spend time in the company of a Behon unless you are prepared to be assaulted by total strangers."

It is unwise, in my experience, to spend time in the company of BSJ without being prepared for verbal assault of some sort, provoked by himself or merely by his presence, which appears to have an unsettling effect on certain people.

His wife, Virginia, I suppose, knows more about him than any one else, but appears to suffer none of the surplus Johnsonian energy at least does not suffer it in the form of aggression.

He is unfailingly courteous to her, even to the extent of putting frequent references to her in his books, all highly complimentary.

Last year he published a book of poems, one of them containing delightfully skilful invective directed at a lady who had annoyed him, and her mother.

Walking-stick

I thought with dismay, it cannot be that they have quarrelled. "Don't be stupid," he said. "You know if that happened I would cut my throat."

Obsessive habits. The choleric doctor made it a practice to bang ever tree and fence post (among other things some of them being displeasing to him) with his walking-stick.

The present Johnson, walking the streets, maintains animated conversation while studying the ground intently, hands in pockets.

If he breaks pace and stoops down, there is no need to ask what has caught his attention. Johnson has just expanded his huge collection of abandoned paper-clips. "Why?"

"Why not?" A man must have a hobby.

Two workrooms

Johnson, for a Socialist, has a highly developed sense of territoriality.

His house in Islington contains two workrooms, not one. One for the typing out of work and correcting of proofs, the other higher above, a delightful garret suitable for attracting the Muses.

I inherited a flat from Johnson once, and his telephone number (unable to like it with him, he attempted to have it abolished altogether, wiped out, erased forever from the directories.

"Why?"

"Because it's my telephone number."

Deadlines

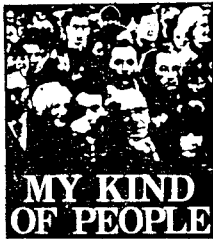
Johnson writes novels as well as anyone in Enochian (Authorities: Samuel Beckett, Margaret Drabble, Anthony Burgess, myself). The latest is called *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*.

The anarchic hero declares the novel ought to be "nasty, brutal and short." Which Johnson's novel might be (as well as being very funny), and Johnson isn't.

"Mention," he instructs me, "that I have published 12 books in ten years, eight from directing films, winning literary prizes



B. S. JOHNSON with his daughter Katie.



MY KIND OF PEOPLE

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Trade Union youngsters—'no segregation'

A LEADING TOWN hall workers' union has come out firmly against special treatment for young people in the trade union movement.

A separate organisation for the young could tend to segregate them, NALGO has told the TUC.

The local government officers' union is also against a TUC youth advisory committee along similar lines to those already established for women, non-manual workers and trades councils.

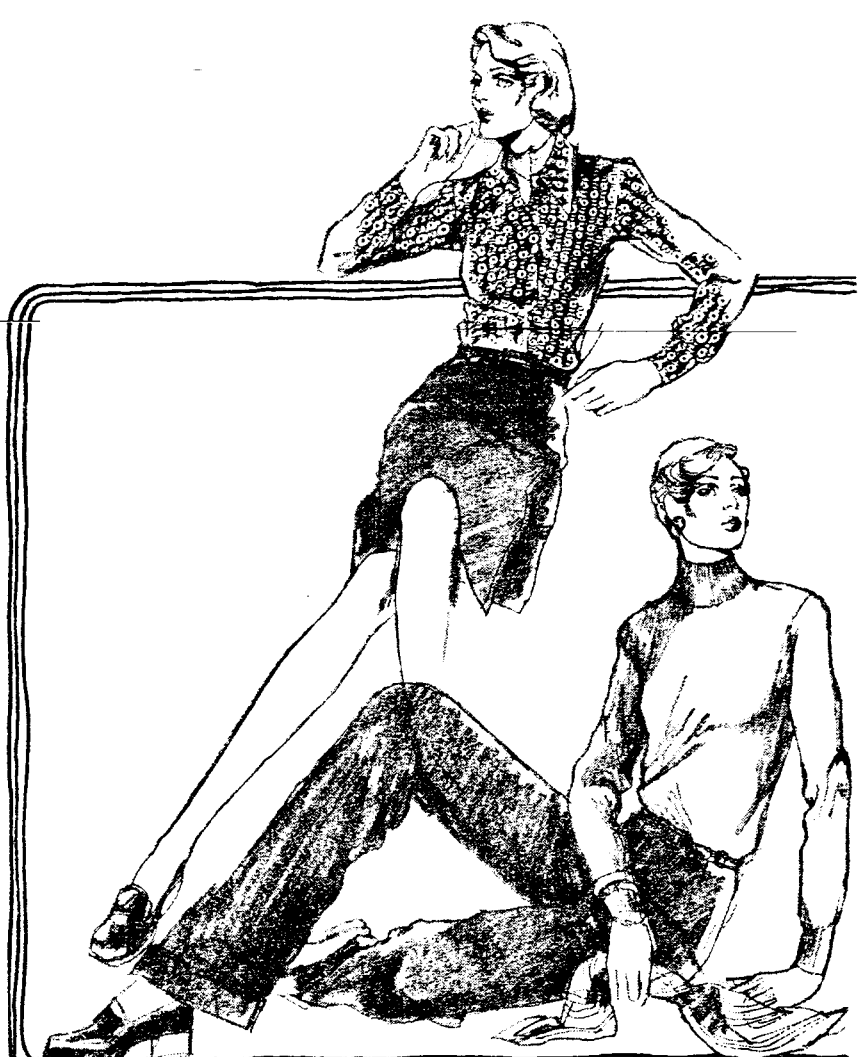
The TUC is currently inviting the views of unions on how to stimulate the interest of the young.

At Congress last year the TUC General Council was instructed to prepare a constitution for an annual conference for youth.

Young members should not be segregated as a category but encouraged to take their full part in union activities as a whole.

NALGO explains its policy in its journal "Public Services."

Youngsters should be encouraged to take branch action office, membership of district councils and full part in all union activities, it adds.



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