

## A SLOW EVOLUTION

IN *The Greek Way*, by Edith Hamilton, first published in 1930 by Norton, the author gives Herodotus' account of "the glorious fight for liberty in which the Greeks conquered the overwhelming power of Persia." They won, Herodotus said, "because they were free men defending their freedom against a tyrant and his army of slaves." But Miss Hamilton asks: What about the slaves those free Greeks owned? The victory of the Greeks at Marathon and Salamis did not set them free. Then she says:

The question shows up, as no other question could, the difference between the mind of today and the mind of antiquity. To all the ancient world the freeing of slaves would have been sheer nonsense. There always had been slaves. In every community the way of life depended on them; they were a first necessity, accepted as such without a thought—literally; nobody ever paid any attention to them. Life in Greece as everywhere else was founded on slaves, but in all Greek literature up to the age of Pericles they never come into sight except as individuals here and there, the old nurse in the *Odyssey*, or the good swineherd, whose condition is accepted as naturally as any fact in nature. . . .

From time immemorial that was the attitude in all the world. There was never anywhere a dreamer so rash or so romantic as to imagine a life without slaves. The loftiest thinkers, idealists, and moralists never had an idea that slavery was evil. In the Old Testament it is accepted exactly as in the records of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Even the prophets of Israel did not utter a word against it, nor, for that matter, did St. Paul. What is strange is not that the Greeks took slavery for granted through hundreds of years, but that finally they began to think about it and question it.

Euripedes, Edith Hamilton notes, was the first to condemn slavery, "by its nature evil, forcing submission from a man to what no man should yield to"; and Plato remarked that "A slave is an embarrassing possession." Aristotle spoke of those "who consider owning slaves as violating natural law because the distinction between a slave and a free

person is wholly conventional and has no place in nature, so that it rests on mere force and is devoid of justice." Miss Hamilton comments:

That is the point Greek thought had reached more than two thousand four hundred years ago. Less than a hundred years ago America had to fight a great war before slavery was abolished. The matter for wonder is not that Herodotus saw nothing odd in slaveowners being the champions of freedom, but that in Greece alone, through all ancient and almost all modern times, were there men great enough and courageous enough to see through the conventional coverings that disguised slavery, and to proclaim it for what it was. A few years after Aristotle the Stoics denounced it as the most intolerable of all the wrongs man ever committed against man.

But much as we might like to think, the Civil War did not finally settle the issue of slavery. A reader has sent to us the copy of a paper that appeared in the *Massachusetts Review* (Summer, 1987), "The Re-birth of the Nation," by Howard N. Meyer, author of *The Amendment that Refused to Die*. In this paper Mr. Meyer explores "the conventional coverings that disguised slavery" after the Civil War, taking off from the famous film, "The Birth of a Nation," which was, he says, both an "innovative masterpiece of the art of the cinema, and a notoriously offensive showpiece of racialism." David Wark Griffith, who made the picture, believed with Thomas Dixon, author of "The Clansman" on which the film was based, that the "American nation . . . was born only after the white race regained total and undisputed control . . . nullifying the proclaimed emancipation (on paper) of the blacks:"

Meyer says:

The film is an explanation, of a sort, of that tragic period of nullification of the Constitution's "freedom" amendments. Its popularity offers direct evidence of mass acceptance and the era of Reconstruction after the war. It neither jarred dominant public opinion nor offended the national leaders who attended its opening [in 1915]. Much of its point of view could be found in school histories half a century later, and elements surfaced in that

noted man of letters Edmund Wilson's "Patriotic Gore" (1962).

Too few now know the connotation of the film's title. Further thought should be given to the gross misuse of the "birth" metaphor of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address that commemorated a battle fought July 4, 1863: "brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty." Now, following the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and at the Bicentennial of the framing of the original Constitution,—an alternate national birthday—it is worth taking another look at Lincoln's call for "a new birth of freedom." The Gettysburg Address, because of its eloquence and brevity, has been declaimed many times but hardly anyone thinks about whether, when, and how that "new birth" took place.

In speeches Lincoln made it clear that he dated American Freedom from the Declaration of Independence, affirming that "all men are created equal." Meyer adds:

Lincoln was not the first to commemorate the anniversary of the Great Declaration by calling for a re-birth of our nation. On July 4, 1845, *New York Tribune* columnist Margaret Fuller regretfully observed, while the nation had become "rich and strong" since 1776, the "noble sentiment of the Declaration had been tarnished." Moved by the impending annexation of Texas as a slave state, she mourned that our name was "no longer a watchword for the highest hopes of the rest of the world." She pursued the birth metaphor to its logical beginning: we need, she wrote "new Fathers of the Country. The Country needs to be born again."

Echoing Fuller's words, Lincoln in 1860 insisted that the Revolution had not been limited to "the mere matter of separation of the colonies," but that it gave "hope to all the world." The promise of the Declaration, he said, was "that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." The key to his approach was the qualification "in due time," which he explicated on another occasion in defending Jefferson's generation for failure to take immediate action to implement equality:

"The assertion that 'all men are created equal' was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain and it was placed in the Declaration not for that, but for future use."

By reason of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) the abolitionists placed their faith in the Fifth

Amendment, which declared that no person should be "deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law," but in 1833 a ruling by the Supreme Court, in a case not involving slavery, had held that the Fifth Amendment "was a limitation on national government action only." As Meyer says:

As far as the federal constitution *and* the Bill of Rights were concerned, if state authority continued to define human beings as lawfully acquired property, there was nothing that Washington could do about it. This was also true if states or towns (or mobs of lawless individuals with, in effect, state sanction) prevented anti-slavery speech or association or inflicted "cruel" punishment on slaves or abolitionists.

The Civil War had a transforming effect. As Meyer says: "Lincoln was a minority President when inaugurated, but his views became those of the majority."

Revulsion against slavery developed as the conflict wore on, and widespread race prejudice abated (for a few years at least) as Black Regiments were allowed to join the Union Army and help turn the tide. This was but the first of three phases of increasing support of the unconditional egalitarianism expressed in the Declaration's announcement of inalienable rights. Each phase produced a higher and broader sense of support and each accounted for a further constitutional amendment. Each of the two latter amendments would not have won enough support when its predecessor was first proposed by Congress.

Then came an unpredictable disaster:

As the war was ending, and as a result of the first great swing of sentiment, slavery with it, there occurred the tragic events that brought on the second. The assassination of Lincoln, the leader who saved the Union, at the hands of a slavery sympathizer, created a mood that was to react strongly against the policies of his successor, Andrew Johnson. During the long Congressional recess, April-December 1865, Johnson rapidly restored Confederates and their sympathizers to power in the former rebel states, without any safeguard at all for Union sympathizers or the ex-slaves themselves, or even the former soldiers, principally black who had helped save the Union of which Johnson was now President. His actions were seen as reversing the outcome of the war.

The effect of Johnson's policies, as reported by Johnson's own emissary, a Union ex-General and future statesman, Carl Schurz, was that by December 1865, Southern Blacks, if no longer the slaves of individuals, were becoming "the slaves of society." This and other such reports persuaded many to join the abolitionists in acknowledging that the termination of slavery was not enough, that affirmative action was needed to remedy its effects and guard against its return in another guise.

Mr. Meyer now turns to the key amendments to the Constitution in relation to slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment declares: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." The Fifteenth Amendment says: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The Fourteenth Amendment, Meyer says, has the greatest magnitude and scope. It says:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of its laws.

This amendment, Meyer says, was diverted from its purpose until about 1940. He adopts the view of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was Colonel of the Black regiment that fought with the Union Army. Higginson's viewpoint was given in 1854 before a women's rights convention:

We men have been standing for years with our hands crushing down the shoulders of woman, so that she should not attain her true altitude; it is not so easy, after we have cramped, dwarfed and crippled her, to get rid of our responsibility by standing back and saying: "There, we will let you go; stand up for yourself." If it is true, as these women say, that we have wronged them for centuries, we have got to do more than mere negative duty. By as much as we have helped to wrong them, we have got to help right them.

Then, speaking of the Fourteenth Amendment, Meyer says:

The very first sentence defines citizenship and is a terse reversal of the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision that barred citizenship to persons of African descent. But it was meant to be far more. It creates a new national status that contrasted with that prevailing during the republic's first 75 years, when the state was the primary source of citizenship and relation to the country derivative and secondary. "United States" citizenship had existed and was understood to require allegiance and to entitle protection *abroad*. The new definition was designed to enable the claim to protection at *home*, that is, within our borders. Civil Rights laws were passed to enforce this that were not successfully applied until the murders in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 of civil rights volunteer workers Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. Meanwhile, what we have called "death squads" in this century, in other lands, were active at home under other names. The Ku Klux Klan and unorganized successors inflicted 10,000 or more lynchings in our land in the 19th and 20th century. Early on, one former Union General bemoaned the fact that the United States could protect its citizens anywhere in the world except at home. The Klan was the initial terrorist group, glorified as heroes in "The Birth of a Nation."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ledger, the women's suffrage movement was making progress, both in the states and nationally. In 1972, Meyer says, the Supreme Court recognized "gender generality" in the reference to "any person," who was not to be denied life, liberty, or property without due process of law. "Women," says Meyer, "whom the founding fathers of 1866, libertarian as they were, might have not had within their contemplation as 'persons,' were now found to have the right to be free from irrational discrimination."

Then, speaking in the present, Mr. Meyer adds:

One can say that what is especially to be celebrated about our Constitution on its 200th birthday is the extent to which it has been humanized by the Fourteenth and its sister amendments. In the coming months and years, when consciousness of constitutionalism among the media will be rising to a high pitch, the opportunity to assist an under-informed public should be utilized to stress the growth and evolution of the Constitution rather than

to stick to bland self-congratulations at "having lasted 200 years."

Yet the authors of the 1787 Constitution, Meyer says, "did not do so badly," in consideration of the conditions of their time—"in which 4 million people lived in a coastal region with primitive communications and transportation." In conclusion he quotes a paper by Harold M. Hyman in which we are reminded of E.L. Godkin's remarks at the first Centennial in 1887:

The Constitution had been partially "provisional," "experimental," and "defective" as it came out of Philadelphia a century earlier, Godkin believed. Its defects had made possible the strains set up by slavery's extension and perpetuation and by worshippers at the shrine of primary state allegiance. . . . Godkin asserted in 1887 that the heroes of 1865 completed the task left unfinished by the too timid framers of 1787 and concluded with the suggestion that those who celebrate the next centennial of the Constitution will be disposed to put the date in 1865, rather than in 1787, or will at all events hesitate between the two years.

The progress we have made in race relations has been gradual, and almost entirely through a slow change of mind in the white population. Our record is in striking contrast with that of Brazil during the years of its national formation. As Waldo Frank says in his *South American Journey*:

The history of Brazil—its colonization, its slavocracy, its independence, its bloodless gradual freeing of the Negro, its easeful shift from Empire to Republic—has been amazingly distinct from the processes of Spanish America and the United States. . . . There were sporadic slave rebellions and insurrections; in some cases the runaway blacks even set up temporary "republics" called *quilombos*, in the jungle. . . . They were led usually by black Moslem intellectuals, freed craftsmen of the cities. . . .

Comparative lack of strain was the coefficient of the difference from our own slave South. We too bred with the Negresses; but fought the pass on and ostracized its children. Hence fear, which is the fruit of the denial of human feelings.

Fear marked the growth of our world, fear of different kinds, north and south. Want of fear marked the growth, through the first three centuries, of Brazil's mixed population. There was food for every child; there was at least one woman for every man. Of course, there was theft, there was cruel

exploitation, there was murder: these at times are natural expressions. There was no rape, almost no case of it is known in Brazil's history.

In the census of 1890—the first final emancipation—the Brazilian population was divided as follows: white, 44 per cent; Negro, 14.6 per cent; Indian, 9 per cent; mixed 32.4 per cent. However, many of those listed as whites had small amounts of Indian or Negro blood. So "color," in Brazil, was never the problem it became in the United States. Men of color occupied places of honor in all the professions. At a ball, Frank relates, a lady refused to dance with a colored engineer, but then the Empress Apparent, Princess Isabel, "gave him her hand in the next mazurka."

When the Princess regent, Isabel, signed the Congressional Act freeing the last slaves, she smiled into the face of the Prime Minister. "We won the fight," she said. "Yes, your Highness," he replied. "You have won the fight and lost the throne." This Prime Minister was the Baron de Cotegipe. He was a mulatto.

So, it has taken modern man from the time of Herodotus to the present for the common consciousness to recognize the evil of slavery and to abandon it in our customs and our law. Yet it is still possible, by reason of the differences among human beings, for some to take advantage of others and to subject those others to conditions that come very close to being slavery, although not so called. The only real remedy for this exploitation is the practice of the brotherhood of man. It is difficult indeed to make the law anticipate very far the condition of human development. Legislation which does this soon collapses in failure, producing conditions in which pretense and hypocrisy prevail, until revolt and revolution come to attempt a new beginning, and again we are obliged to see that the attitudes of mind of the common people will eventually rule, whatever laws we make. Progress, we must conclude, is very slow, yet we also see that it does take place. Our real growth is in attitudes of mind, even as today, mind, even as today, in America, we see men and women and children of all races beginning to take part, without prejudice, in all the activities of the country. This is the evolution which counts for us all.

## *REVIEW*

### A SIMPLE IDEAL

IT often happens that material in current journals seems more important for review than the books which have become available. This week, for example, we want to give attention to a discussion, "Citizenship and the Land Ethic," by Donald Worster, author of *Nature's Economy*, published by the Sierra Club in 1971. His talk, "Citizenship and the Land Ethic," was given last May at the 1987 Prairie Festival of the Land Institute in Kansas, and is printed in the Summer 1987 *Land Report*. He begins by remarking that nowhere in the Constitution of the United States is there any mention of the land.

One would have thought [he said] that this was a subject worthy of some attention from the men gathered in Philadelphia, thinking about the future of this country, its principles and requirements. But they did not think about it. They thought about elections, roads, taxes, armies, free speech, separation of powers, bail and bribery; and their successors who added the constitution's amendments thought about race, gender, elections again, and booze, but never about the land as part of the fundamental law of the nation. Why was that?

One reason, he suggests, was that people took it for granted. Another was that the framers of the Constitution did not regard the land as a proper subject for the federal government. "It was strictly a private and local matter." In England the land had all vaguely belonged to the crown and, except for the commons, was gradually given to the nobility. We call this system, Worster says, *feudalism*, which was abandoned in the New World.

Now in the rising, independent nation of the United States, the feudal past was escaped, the king repudiated, and henceforth the citizenry took on itself the power of parcelling out the land to individuals. They did not want to see any new figure of authority emerge to reassert control over them. They did not want any state to stand between them and their land. Reflecting that changed way of thinking, the men in Philadelphia carefully avoided any mention of the word land in the Constitution. They dared not

suggest that the federal government might be designated the new owner of the farms and forests of this country. Nor did they insist that citizens, in possessing and using the land, owed any duties of stewardship or care.

One suspects, however, that the question of stewardship and its responsibilities never occurred to them. They were most of all safeguarding the idea of private property. However, Worster adds:

The Constitution does not mention land, but it does mention private property in the sixth Amendment, which reads that no citizen shall be deprived of property "without due process of law, nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." Note in those words that there is still something recognized as "public use," a use defined by and for a public, not reducible to private interest. But the amendment was deliberately added to the Constitution to make as explicit as possible that the land belongs first and foremost to individuals, not the state, and that their rights to possession are not easily to be set aside.

Worster quotes Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman who acquired a large estate north of New York City, who wrote in his *Letters from an American Farmer*,

The instant I enter on my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence exalt my mind. Precious soil, I say to myself; by what singular custom of law is it that thou wast made to constitute the riches of the freeholder? What should we Americans be without the distinct possession of the soil?

Worster quotes this to show the power of the idea of property over the American mind. "Owning some of it in fee simple gave them, as it still gives many today, a feeling of utter independence and freedom from powerful, arbitrary forces."

In Crèvecoeur's book we find two distinct ideas about the land emerging, and both were part of the cultural milieu of the Constitution-makers. Both are still part of our thinking these days. Taken together, they explain our deep devotion to private property.

First, to keep America a virtuous nation it was felt that the land ought to be owned by as many individuals as possible. Second, to make the nation

grow in riches and power, the land and its products should be treated as a commodity for sale to the highest bidder in the marketplace.

Much of our country's history deals with the unfolding of those two ideas, their shaping of a land policy, and their increasing conflict to the point that one had to give way to the other. If we examine this story in more detail, we can appreciate better the situation we are in at present.

The idea of having a nation of farmers, raising their own food and free of any dependence on others, was of course the theme that we owe to Thomas Jefferson. Worster quotes Jefferson at some length on this idea, then proposes:

From the very beginning of settlement, the dominant view was that land is a form of capital that ought to be made to turn a profit. It was at times Jefferson's own view. After all, he owned several hundred acres of Virginia farm land, worked them with some two hundred black slaves, and sold tobacco raised by their labor in the ports of Europe. He was a sincere man but, like the rest of the nation, he had confused and conflicting ideas about what the land should be expected to do. It was his hope that it could both free people from their vulnerability to vice *and* augment their bank accounts. But the land cannot serve both ends. It can only do one or the other. This is a very hard fact to face.

After a long account of what our people chose to do, Worster says:

The economists are probably right about the most efficient method for harvesting money; they have all the expertise on that matter. What they have not realized is that maximizing wealth in this way may lead, indeed must lead in the end to endangering our democracy and ravaging our land. That is surely what has happened in the two centuries of our national existence. . . .

You may want to argue that all the wealth was worth getting and therefore, despite the costs, the land has been put to good use. But you cannot, nor can I, maintain in all honesty that we have left the environment in as good shape as we found it. Privatizing the land and putting For Sale sign on it has nearly worked its ruin. And by many measures, it has nearly worked ours too.

But then, beginning about a century ago, the conservation movement came into being. In 1872

Congress set aside Yellowstone National Park, affording sanctuary to the last of the buffalo, and in 1891 it withdrew an additional thirteen million acres for forest reserves. More forests and parks were added, and today "an astounding forty per cent of the land in this country is designated as public land," which means managed by some governmental agency. The conservation movement, Worster says, came from "a set of land policies that grew out of a discontent with the workings of the privatized economy. It is an effort to define and assert some broader community interest in the environment than traditional American thinking allowed."

We say that individual land ownership is our ideal, and as far as a family homesite is concerned, it is; but all the same we acknowledge the *limits* of that ideal when we demand or expect or tolerate the evolution of a county-system of government ownership.

The conservation movement is far and away the chief reason why this reversal of land patterns and land attitudes has occurred. It has given us, without our quite realizing it, an entirely new kind of commons. For that is precisely what the public lands constitute—a commons that belongs to all of us, where individuals may collect resources but which no one can take into his own exclusive possession. What is unique about this American commons is that there is nothing feudal or hierarchical about it: at least in theory it is the achievement and patrimony of a democratic nation. Indeed, it may be the only way our democracy can bring itself back from near extinction at the hands of the holders of great private wealth. The conservation movement has been, in its finer moments, a movement to conserve our threatened democracy, and it has done so by reinventing the idea of the common.

Donald Worster now turns to Aldo Leopold, born a century ago, who would "devote the whole of his professional life to that movement, first as a forester on the public domain in the Southwest and later as a wild-life scientist in the state of Wisconsin." Leopold is best known to the reading public through his wonderful volume, *A Sand County Almanac*, published a year after his death by the Oxford University Press in 1949. It was Leopold's view that private owners should "quit

thinking about decent land use as solely an economic problem." Worster says:

Thus was spawned the single most important new idea about land we have had since we adopted the institution of private property, even more important than the idea of the American commons. It grew out of the conservation movement but required an imaginative leap beyond anything conservation had heretofore meant. Leopold called his idea "the land ethic." Briefly, it says that we belong to the land as much as it belongs to us. It is our community—all the trees, insects, parasites, waterfowl, the whole collective organism. And the prosperity and health of this land community ought to become our concern, just as the prosperity and health of that small part of it called the human community is our concern. We have obligations and duties here, as well as opportunities and advantages.

Worster regards this as a purely "voluntary practice of conservation," and fears it will not work, our history showing quite contrary habits. Yet there are already a few individuals who embody the temper that Leopold recommended—Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson are examples. And Worster puts briefly the requirement of this way of life:

. . . people must first be trained in the habits of thinking collectively about the society in which they live before they can be expected to think collectively about their place in nature. It is that simple.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **SIMPLE BUT NOT SIMPLE**

THE concluding paragraph in this week's review is a quotation from Donald Worster's talk last summer at the Land Institute Prairie Festival in Kansas, in which he said:

. . . people must first be trained in the habits of thinking about the society in which they live before they can be expected to think collectively about their place in nature. It is that simple.

But it is really not simple at all, since we must ask: Who will do this "training"? Fortunately, we have books by men like Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and a few others, and the study of these books is the closest we can come to "training," although it is not really training at all but rather a way of thinking.

To attempt to do this by "training" would be no more than indoctrination, which is the way to set up an orthodoxy, and that is certainly not what we ought to attempt. Gandhi gave an example of how thinking differs from indoctrination. When Gandhi came across an idea that seemed to him true and good, he adopted it and made it a part of his own life practice. This was the result of his *thinking*, and no one could train him to do this. It was a capacity that he had somehow developed in himself. People who live in this way—men like John Muir, women like Simone Weil, extraordinary individuals like Henry David Thoreau—and no doubt others we haven't heard about because they were not or are not writers—are the ones who are needed, since they have as part of their natural endowment the qualities that Worster would like us to acquire.

Yet we can only say that they acquired those qualities by free decision—as a result of an inward sense of self and their natural relationship with the rest of the world. Yet they do exercise influence—call it inspiration; what else can you call it?—making it important to study their lives in order to find out what we can of how their characters were shaped.

We shall never have any finality about matters of this sort. An element of mystery remains in all authentic human decision, and we may be thankful for this since in that mystery lies the explanation of free will. The acceptance of this mystery lies at the root of all real education. It is, to borrow from Mr. Worster, that simple.



# CHILDREN

## ... and Ourselves

### JOHN HOLT ON SCHOOLS

AT the end of John Holt's *Teach Your Own* (Delacorte, 1981), we got involved in reading a section that was little short of fascinating. It begins:

The law in many states allows for instruction outside of schools, provided that it is "equivalent" to what is given in schools. But what does "equivalent" mean? Schools tend to say that home-schooling families must have as many hours of formal classes per day and per week as the schools themselves. But do the schools really give that much instruction, and is that much really necessary? We find interesting answers to those questions when we consider what schools do about children who, for reasons of sickness or injury, can't come to school.

Well, what do they do? Holt learned of the case of a boy who broke his leg and had to wear a hip cast, which kept him home from school. The school authorities told his parents, affluent suburbanites, that this was no real problem. They would send a tutor to keep the boy from falling behind in his school work. And, Holt says, "they did, every week,—for an hour and a half! It was enough."

Perhaps we should simply say that this is not remarkable at all, but to be expected. Schools are institutions, most of them *big* institutions, and are prevented by their size, organization, and the complexity of their tasks from doing anything at all with what would be regarded as real efficiency. Just in order to keep going, the schools make a lot of rules—totally unnecessary for some children and some teachers, but absolutely required for others, or so it seems. The tutor, happy man or woman, is relieved of all this, and simply applies common sense. After Holt printed in his paper, *Growing Without Schooling*, the story about the boy with a broken leg, a Baltimore reader wrote in:

I made a telephone inquiry with the Home Teaching Office of the Baltimore City Schools and

was told that if the student was to be absent, for reasons of sickness, for six weeks or more, a teacher would, upon the signing of a form FH 19 by a doctor, visit and tutor the child at home every day (presumably Monday through Friday) for one hour. I did not inquire about expelled students, only sick ones.

#### Holt comments:

Other readers in different parts of the country have asked their schools how much tutoring they would or do give to sick or injured children. Answers so far have ranged from two to four hours a week. The one hour a day quoted above is the largest figure yet reported. Yet students so tutored keep up with their school classes—that is, after all, what the tutoring is for. If the schools' own tutors need to teach only a few hours a week to keep children up with their classes, why should parents need to or have to teach more than that?

Holt couldn't see why parents who teach their children at home "should be compelled to do five or ten times more teaching than the school's own tutors do," and beyond that he points out that "since children in schools are getting at best only a few hours of effective instruction per week their own home education will be much better than that of the schools."

A simplistic logic might declare that if the facts are as Holt recites them, the thing to do is abolish the schools. But Holt had no such intention. He was fighting, not to obtain a totally uninstitutionalized society, but to prevent the rules of institutions from frustrating the parents who don't need them. This situation calls for some reflection about how cultures may become over-institutionalized and how to guard against this effect. There are many, many children in this country both of whose parents work and many other parents who would refuse to try to teach their young. Schools, therefore, are to some degree a necessity. But does this mean that we must gear our national life to the weaknesses of the majority? Of course not, yet the legal struggle of home-schoolers for recognition of their right to teach their children still goes on in some areas. *Growing Without Schooling* keeps track of the

laws in the various states and gives advice to home-schoolers. The difficulty arises from the psychological fact that public institutions inevitably gravitate to hiring bureaucrats to run them, and bureaucrats always want authority to run things in a way that will give them the least trouble and embarrassment. Hence the ridiculous legal requirements imposed on home-schoolers. Fortunately, the courts are inclined to see the justice in the home-schoolers' claims, and the situation is slowly changing in their behalf. *GWS* keeps track of this, too. The school executives have their share of bureaucratic human nature, but they, too, often see the light. It might be said that the more progress the home-schoolers make, the better the schools will become—and the smaller the schools and the classes, which will delight everyone.

Holt ends this chapter with some counsels on court strategy, saying—

As Justice Cardozo pointed out in his enormously valuable book, *The Nature of the Judicial Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), judges, in making their rulings, take into account a number of things—legal philosophy and principle, legal precedent, the will of the legislature as expressed in statutes, and *the possible or probable social effects of their rulings*. Thus, as we have shown, parents who have sued the schools because their children did not learn anything there have so far been turned down by the courts, on the grounds that this would very quickly lead to a rush of lawsuits that would bankrupt the schools. We may take it as certain that the courts will not in any foreseeable future make rulings which they think will lead to the quick destruction of the public schools or the end of compulsory schooling. If we ask for such broad rulings, we will be turned down.

Beyond that, either in asking for narrow rulings, or speaking of any we may be able to win, we must be careful not to make large public boasts and outcries to the effect that "this means the downfall of compulsory schooling." In the first place, such boasts would be silly; even if the courts were by some miracle to strike down compulsory schooling, a furious majority of the people would quickly re-establish it, by constitutional amendment if they had to. In the second place, even making such boasts would greatly reduce our chances

of getting even narrowly favorable rulings from the courts. In the third place, such boasts tend to terrify the schools, who are already more terrified than they need be, and whom it is in our best interests to reassure.

This seems a good place to add some of John Holt's final musings in *Teach Your Own*—a book everyone curious about home schooling should read. He said in one place:

Teaching fifth grade, I finally learned that my hardest and most important task was to help my students become enough unafraid of me, and each other, to stop bluffing, faking, and playing testing games with me. Only when they were enough at ease in the class to be truly themselves could they begin to reveal their true interests and strengths, as well as their fears and weaknesses. Only then could I think about how to build on the strengths and overcome or avoid the weaknesses. All this took time and patience. Some of them would not for a long time tell me that they did not understand how to do a problem, or something I had told them or written on the board. A few never told me, their masks never came off.

If only to learn to do our work as teachers, we need students who are not afraid of us, and so not afraid to tell us what they think, or what they know and don't know. There may be a few such students in our schools right now, but not enough—we need many more. And we will have more as more and more children who are for the most part learning outside of schools come to school for special classes and activities they are interested in.

John Holt was in his way a genius. The best way to reward him is by reading what he has to say about both children and grownups. This will make our country a better place for both children and adults.

The paper Holt started, *Growing Without Schooling*, has thirty-two pages and comes out six times a year. The address is 729 Boylston Street, Boston Mass. 02116.

## **FRONTIERS**

### **A Matter of Accounting**

IN the *Ecologist* for March/June, 1987, the editor, Edward Goldsmith, addresses an open letter to Barber P. Conable, President of the World Bank, questioning the sincerity or the legitimacy of what Goldsmith calls the Bank's "new concern for the environment." He calls into question the Bank's support and financing of projects termed "environmental disasters." These projects include dams that wipe out productive soil and oust thousands of people from the lands on which they have lived for generations without harm to the environment. Mr. Goldsmith says in his letter:

If Third World people are poor today, Mr. Conable, it is not that they suffer from a shortage of transistor radios, plastic buckets, tinned petfoods and the rest of the rubbish that development is making available, at least to the richest among them, nor is it even that their villages remain to be electrified or that they have no access to piped water. If they are poor it is above all because their environment has deteriorated, because the rivers from which they derive their fish and their drinking water are now contaminated with agricultural and industrial chemicals, because loggers have cut down their forests causing their rivers to become torrents, their streams and springs to dry up and their weather to change, because their land has been eroded and desertified by large export oriented agricultural undertakings.

Turning to the Green Revolution, Mr. Goldsmith says:

The Green Revolution may well have been a bonanza to the World Bank, Mr. Conable, and also to the dam builders and the agro-chemical industry, but it has been a disaster both for the environment and for the rural people of the Third World. As your Bank itself admits in its 1982 "Focus on Poverty" report, your so-called "rural development programmes" which involve spreading the Green Revolution technology to areas where traditional agricultural methods still prevailed, "have provided few direct benefits for the landless, for tenants unable to offer collateral for loans, and for the 'near landless' farmers who find it hard to borrow required inputs and take risks." Yet as John Loxley at one time economic advisor to the Government of Tanzania, notes, "these

are the very sections of rural society least able to meet the basic needs," whose satisfaction you have committed yourself to assure.

A bank is, after all, the last place to go for help for the impoverished millions of the world, since a bank must allocate its loans to those who have a fair chance of repaying them, and this, for the time being, is wholly beyond such people as landless farmers. Goldsmith's letter is doubtless intended to get Mr. Conable to stop pretending that his bank's policies are meant to serve the interests of the poor, when the ultimate goal seems to be to wipe them out. On housing programs financed by the Bank, Goldsmith says:

The fact is that a large and ever increasing proportion of the poor cannot and never will be able to pay for upgraded housing any more than they cannot and never will be able to pay off the inputs required for technological agriculture. More than half of the inhabitants of the Third World, in fact, live outside the market system. There is no way in which their lot can be improved by bank loans for there is no way in which they will even be able to pay the interest on such loans let alone repay the capital. All you can do is further impoverish them by financing projects that must deprive them of the basic resources such as the natural forests, the fertile land and the uncontaminated water on which their welfare, indeed their survival, depends and for which the fruits of modern development, even if they could really be made available to them, are no substitutes.

At the end of this long letter, Mr. Goldsmith says:

The fact is, Mr. Conable, that the only way to avoid the terrible destruction caused by the development schemes that your Bank has so irresponsibly financed over the last forty years is to *stop financing them*. . . .

You told the World Resources Institute in May 1987 of new policies and new concern for the environment. Will you now signify your genuine concern by immediate cancellation of financial aid for indefensible projects such as the Narmada and Bodghat Dams and the Great Carajas Project and at the same time reappraise all other World Bank projects using a yard stick which measures the needs of humanity, our children and the biosphere on whose preservation life itself must ultimately depend? Only

then will you be able to persuade the world that your new concern for the environment is a genuine one.

This is a demand—more than a request—that the World Bank go out of business. No doubt it should. Yet it takes no argument to make us realize that a vast reeducation will need to take place before any such change can come about. Altruism will need to become the prime motive of human life, instead of the pursuit of self-interest. This is a change that will have to begin in the cradle, be thoroughly explained by parents and the schools, and fulfilled by the example of adults. At root it calls for an understanding of how to help others, in order, in the long run, to make life tolerable for ourselves.

An article in the Summer 1987 *Food First News* (145 Ninth St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103), "Brazil: A Paradise Lost?" drives home the point of Mr. Goldsmith's letter. The writers, Judith Hurley and Kevin Danaher, begin:

Brazil is by far the wealthiest country in the Third World, with an annual gross national product twice that of Saudi Arabia and four times that of South Africa. It is the world's top exporter of coffee, orange juice, and soybeans; the number one sugar producer; the second largest producer of cattle and cocoa; and the third largest grower of corn. It is also a major producer of iron ore, aluminum, steel, autos, and weaponry.

Yet amid this great wealth, two out of every three Brazilians go hungry. An estimated 1,000 children die from hunger-related causes every day. The government estimates that there are 30 million "needy" children, seven million of whom are orphans. Nearly half of Brazilian school children never get beyond the first grade.

A major cause of this impoverishment is the landlessness created when ownership of land is concentrated for large-scale agriculture. A mere one per cent of landowners controls 48 per cent of the arable land. In the past two decades, more than 24 million small farmers have been pushed off their land.

Brazil, we learn, is the World Bank's largest client.

The country has a foreign debt of \$108 billion. Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga said recently:

To pay the foreign debt is a sin. The only just thing is to ignore the debt. I say this for many reasons. First of all, the debt was not contracted by the people. Secondly, the debt has already been collected. It was collected by taking our natural resources and our super-cheap labor. It was collected in our infant mortality and in the blood, the deaths, of our people. The debt has been more than collected.

This is the larger system of accounting to which we must now give attention.