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RICHES OF OUR TIME

E F. SCHUMACHER captured the attention of the world for several reasons, but mostly because of how he combined moral and practical reason. The moral thinking and appeal of his work gave it enduring strength and depth. The application of his ideas to practical problems—the satisfaction of human needs—had visible validity. People could recognize the sense in what he said. And many people felt the larger meaning behind the practical ideas. His appeal had another facet. He began his humanitarian labors in behalf of people who really need help—the multitudinous poor of the underdeveloped countries who are, in large measure, the victims of the industrial system.

There is now another book by Schumacher, the posthumously published *Good Work* (Harper & Row, $9.95), with an introductory preface by George McRobie, his close associate in the Intermediate Technology Development Group in London, and a concluding essay by Peter Gillingham, who began working with Schumacher in the United States in 1974. Because of its comparative brevity, *Good Work* may be a better companion than *Guide for the Perplexed* or *Small Is Beautiful.* It is luminous with the author's purpose, along with splendid examples of his persuasive common sense. He says some things that we all know and puts them together to point to other things we need to know; and once we have recognized them, they seem plain as day. There is this early in the book:

> Modern industrial society is immensely complicated, immensely involved, making immense claims on man's time and attention. This, I think, must be accounted its greatest evil. Paradoxical as it may seem, modern industrial society, in spite of an incredible proliferation of labor-saving devices, has not given people more time to devote to their all-important spiritual tasks; it has made it exceedingly difficult for anyone, except the most determined, to find any time whatever for these tasks. In fact, I think I should not go far wrong if I asserted that the amount of genuine leisure available in a society is generally in inverse proportion to the amount of labor-saving machinery it employs. If you would travel, as I have done, from England to Burma, you would not fail to see the truth of this assertion. What is the explanation of the paradox? It is simply that, *unless there are conscious efforts to the contrary*, wants will always rise faster than the ability to meet them.

Of course, if people think that the satisfaction of wants is all there is to life, they will not be much impressed by this conclusion. But there are some people in the world—the prosperous, affluent world—who realize that the complication of their lives by the multiplying requirements of their wants is becoming an intolerable burden. They want to simplify, but don't know how. Schumacher speaks to their condition. We are feeling the impact of the law of diminishing returns and this contributes to their awakening.

Another part of Schumacher's diagnosis:

> Things have become so capital-costly that you have to be already rich and powerful before you can really do anything. This is a very serious matter: for instance, to give only one example and not the prime example, take agriculture. You have a highly scientific, highly chemicalized farming in very large units, and it is an outstanding fact that, if one wants to live off the land, supplying himself and his family with the wherewithal, he needs to be of quite exceptional industry and intelligence to make a very humble living. All the research has gone in the opposite direction, to ever-greater capital requirements. To start a farm on the established system, even if you believe in the established system, is so capital-intensive that you have to be rich to do it. So more and more people get excluded. This of course hits most massively the poor countries, who find that they can't do most of the things because they are so capital-intensive. An intermediate technology that would not require this capital is not readily available, so they are excluded. Then they are told just to go on buying it from the rich countries. And the fact is, with their developing they are becoming not more independent but more dependent.

What is the alternative?

> Experience shows that whenever you can achieve smallness, simplicity, capital cheapness, and nonviolence, or, indeed, any one of these objectives, new possibilities are created for people, singly or collectively, to help themselves, and that the patterns that result from such technology are more humane, more ecological, less dependent on fossil fuels, and closer to human needs than the patterns (or life styles) created by technologies that go for giantism, complexity, capital intensity, and violence. It is incumbent on those who reject these criteria or guidelines to come forward with another set; because as long as there are no guidelines the search for alternatives cannot even begin.

To people who decide to work in the direction outlined—toward smallness, simplicity, capital cheapness, and nonviolence—Schumacher has this to say:

> If one actually, consciously engages in work in these four directions—not all four may be feasible all at once—one can also mobilize support from people who are going hell for leather in the opposite direction, because they are all a bit rattled. Of course if one simply says, What you are doing is terrible and you are this or that, and denounces it, then one doesn't get the best cooperation. But one can convince, if not the organizations, at least people in the organizations, that something, some reorientation is necessary and that they have the resources and they can do it without any strain.
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> My formula for this is a lifeboat. I have persuaded some big farmers in England to have a lifeboat, to separate out a bit of their land, which they don't need for making a living—they make their living on 95 per cent of their land, and take 5 per cent and run this as an organic unit or experimental unit to try to minimize their dependence on a very sophisticated and vulnerable industrial system. Well, after some persuasion this is actually happening. They are hard up as to who is going to manage this, because we haven't trained any people to non-chemical methods of farming. And of course it is harder now than it was fifty years ago because the standardized farming, the chemicals, virtually irrespective of the quality of the soil, has lost us the traditional knowledge. Oh, no, for this spot of land you take this and for that you take that, otherwise you get infestation. Why worry about infestation? You've got insecticides. Otherwise you get overrun with weeds. . . . Why worry about that? We've got herbicides, etc. Or this is a poor soil and that is a rich soil—well, why make a distinction? We have chemicals; we don't grow plants out of the soil, we grow them out of chemicals.
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> With this attitude, this standardization, this unification the knowledge of how really to cooperate with the soil is very largely lost. It has to be regained. It's much more difficult now but still it can be done.

What does one get from reading Schumacher? Well, here was a man with lively and sensitive appreciation of the evil in the world—the bad things happening—but who responded more with determination than with wrath. He devised ways to redirect the misguided good in human beings. If we can get the good going in the right direction, he said to himself, the forces of evil will seem far less omnipotent. At the same time, he was a tough-minded man who submitted willingly to no illusions. He said to his readers:

> If we engage in this work and do it intelligently, and are clever enough to engage people who at first sight might be our enemies, then I find it's not going to be very difficult and not going to be all that lengthy. If there were enough people, I think we could have alternative technology, alternative possibilities, absolutely established over the whole range of basic human requirements. This is a finite job.

What stands in the way? Why do people smile wanly and shake their heads? The habit of "big thinking" keeps them passive. They are victims of the statecraft of the age—capitalist, liberal, Marxist, it doesn't matter which, it's still statecraft thinking. As Schumacher says:

> One of the greatest confusions, in most discussions, is the term "we." You know, people say, We ought to decentralize General Motors. I look at them—I couldn't decentralize the drugstore on the corner! Or we ought really to change human nature—they couldn't even change their own nature! When I say "we" I am asking what can actual people, small as they are, what can they do?
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> If you look at it this way, you find that if one could make visible the possibility of alternatives, viable alternatives, make a viable future already visible in the present, no matter on how small a scale, even if it's only with a Scott Nearing—then at least there is something, and if that something fits it will be taken. Suddenly there will be demand. If one establishes something, then one gets the benefit that this technology is not simply made by man but it also

> makes men. A type of technology that is not born out of the system we deplore will create a system we approve of. If little people can do their own thing again, then perhaps they can do something to defend themselves against the overbearing big ones.
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> So I certainly never feel discouraged. I can't myself raise the winds that might blow us, or this ship, into a better world. But I can at least put up the sail so that, when the wind comes, I can catch it.

People talk a great deal about self-knowledge. The person who has self-knowledge has the sort of understanding of the good and the promise in human nature that Schumacher reveals and has proved for himself in practice. How many people has he influenced for good? How many have started moving in a better direction because of his infectious appeal? But he had another sort of capital to work with. He had self-knowledge, but he also had knowledge of the material things of the world—how they work, what are their laws, and how to organize them for the common good. He discovered how material things could be kept from interfering with the quest for self-knowledge, and he knew how to show this from experience. So, if you want to speak to a great many people with good effect, you need both kinds of knowledge—self-knowledge, and knowledge of what is not the self, but important for giving the self a better chance.

This combination of knowledges is what the world has great need of, today. It represents the idea whose time has come, if we are to get out of the mess we are in.

We have been reading in another book—a small one—written in the same spirit which reaches the same general conclusion. *Community Technology* (Harper Colophon paperback, $2.95), by Karl Hess, sometimes reads like a chapter in Schumacher, except that the material comes out of the grain of another man's life, making it wholly original and uniquely valuable. Hess, on his own, has been doing what Schumacher talks about, working in the apparently hopeless cities of the United States. He knows from experience that "when people begin to take a new active part in any segment of their lives, it becomes a self-feeding passion, urging a person on for more and more responsibility, more and more self-reliance, more and more action as a whole person and not merely as a spectator."

From practical experiments he carried out in a poor district of Washington, D.C., involving a shared community workshop, Hess says:

> A problem common to many communities is the plight of more resources leaving than coming back in. This is particularly true with national marketing systems that draw resources toward a few centers rather than encouraging a scattering among many communities. The shared work space and the shared warehouse space involve a community in taking a first look at this problem at a homely and nonideological level. It could be hoped that after the process is begun it will continue until the community is prepared to discuss every aspect of its resource base and its shared interests in regard to it.

Hess and some like-minded colleagues took on a very tough assignment—trying to encourage self-reliance and to make possible a few steps toward economic independence for the people of the Adams-Morgan district of the capital city. Musing about what happened, he says:

> For many communities these days the first and most obvious place to start any community technology demonstration or experiment is in the area of energy. My own prejudice is that food comes first. . . . A good look at a community's food base, it seems to me, would be more enlightening in many ways than a look at the energy base. Nevertheless energy is obviously on more minds today than food. Experiments and demonstrations in alternative sources of energy are a quick entryway to the interests of most communities. The most obviously intriguing part of it is solar energy. Fortunately, it is the part most susceptible to community technology demonstration, even in northern climes. . . .
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> My own feeling is that the what or the where of the solar experiment is not as important as the process of doing it wherever and whatever. It begins that process crucial to a community technology outlook in which you feel that new answers can be found for old problems and that you and your neighbors can find and apply them.

Community Technology is one of the meatiest books on the subject of privately initiated social change (and other sorts of change) that we have ever read. It combines an active imagination with a record of things done. Speaking to people interested in doing the things he has worked on Hess says:

> . . . in studying the future and the tools available to shape it with, the community needs to think seriously and democratically about just how it wants to live in the near and the long term and how it might best get on with doing it. And just as the study of available technologies should be undertaken with an open mind and without the restrictions of conventional wisdom (which at the moment keeps saying that you should let the experts and the big boys do it), so should the study of how a community wants to live. The study should not begin with a pessimistic notion of not being able to change anything. There is nothing to lose at all if the discussion begins with the idea that we can do anything. It is better to discover restrictions as you go along than to never explore at all and thus risk never discovering even the smallest hopeful possibility.

The idea is to keep the attempt from becoming one more exercise in futility. Hess recommends studying tools and concrete possibilities and dreams *simultaneously*. The dream must have both a social and a material base. It should be "founded on productive reality even though it rises to heights of speculative Utopianism." Hess is himself a practical sort of dreamer:

> Imagine, to consider just one detail of what such a study might encompass, what it would mean for a town, through some sort of community garden space, to provide all the food to alleviate the hunger of welfare clients in the area, rather than using cash resources to buy food from distant suppliers. A social dimension: What is the effect of alleviating some welfare needs, such as food, through the work efforts of those welfare clients able to assist in the gardens? Would prisoners be better served and the community better guarded if they worked in a community garden project? What about gardens and education? Year round? What about putting some garden space into greenhouse areas? How do you plan such greenhouses? Hmmmm. Maybe the community technology group should be working on that in conjunction with some local plumbers and florists. But mightn't all that community effort divert money from local merchants or craftsmen? For one thing, most money for welfare food is spent at stores that buy from remote areas and whose profits are siphoned off to other communities. Any threat to local incomes needs seriously to be considered, of course. Perhaps if new ways of doing things permitted a lowering of taxes, the first benefits should go to any neighbor adversely affected by the activity. It is an important point and one which the community itself should discuss and decide.

He says at the end of a book filled with practical suggestions, garnished with the know-how of an experienced man and writer:

> I would not even want to suggest how your community technology group might operate, internally and externally. I have suggested possibilities of purpose here and have emphasized several, but I would not want the suggestions or the emphasis to substitute in any way for your own inescapable responsibility, along with your friends, to make the basic decisions on your own, for your own purposes and in the light of your knowledge of your own community. . . .
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> My own interest is the responsibility of people to be responsible for their own lives and, with their neighbors, for their public space and actions. To sing their own songs. To make their own inventions, to love and not just yearn.
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> To build and not just envy. To light that candle which is so much better than cursing the darkness. To be as much as the human condition can sustain, rather than being only what a system can allow.
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> To be. To do. That is community technology.

The practical question—to which both Schumacher and Hess address themselves—is: What sort of system, society, community presents channels instead of barriers to the expression of these qualities, and how can humans, whatever their present situation, start working toward this goal?

For a concluding theme we return to Schumacher's *Good Work*, in which he sets down the laws which have guided his life and effort. In the chapter, "Toward a HumanScale Technology," he says:

> If life is a "school of becoming," a school of self-development, the ideas of personal freedom and personal responsibility must become ever more firmly established. . . . It is the individual, personal example that counts. The greatest "doing" that is open to every one of us, now as always, is to foster and develop within oneself a genuine understanding of the situation which confronts us, and to build conviction, determination, and persuasiveness upon such understanding.

These are "metaphysical" conceptions that have never led to anything but good.

REVIEW
SOMETHING THAT MIGHT WORK

THE best books, these days, are either by economists who are reforming themselves and their ideas or by human beings who are rediscovering themselves and writing effectively about what they find out. They say the same things but in very different words. The reformed economists say, basically, that economic problems are not economic problems but human problems (as for example Herman Daly in his recent *Steady-State Economics*, which is likely to be recognized as a minor classic). The other good writers say quite a lot about the intrusion of the old (present) economics on their lives, not as a central theme, but as something that has to be dealt with and put in its place. Their central theme is the rediscovery of their own humanity, with the color, wonder, and delight that comes with finding, deep down, the grain of a natural life, behind the artificial Procrustean façades of the time. There is a cost in doing this, but they pay it, and cheerfully, most of the time.

Toward the end of *Part of a Winter* (Harmony Books, 58.95), George Sibley, who lives in mountainous Colorado, looks at the great "cirques" or bowls gouged in the countryside by glacial action, ages ago, and then at the more recent gouges by man—mines which change the face of the earth. He asks:

> All I want to know is this: are those tremendous accomplishments—the creation of cirques on a par with glacial work, the piling up of great moraines of rubble and rust—somehow worth it in what they bring us in the passing? I have, as I said, largely stopped reading the papers, and I've always avoided the television news like the latent alcoholic obeying a sixth sense to avoid that first drink, so I don't know what good news I've been missing . . . but the street talk this year has all been about the incredible fact that the coal-miners don't seem to want to go down and dig the glorious coal for the glorious future achievements of America! And everywhere I go—into stores, into groceries, into the discount temples—I find the set smile or the more honest glumness that seems to whisper behind eyes *Don't tell me about it, I'm just in it for the money. I* hear we're going to get a tax break so we'll all have more money to spend thereby cranking up the economy: we'll consume more, we just aren't creating those cirques and moraines fast enough. . . . Jesus God, are we on some kind of a *timetable* or something? When we are working at maximum efficiency, this civilization of ours, what will our rate of consumption be? One mountain per decade. One per *year? Two* per year?

What does Sibley say about civilization? There are devastatingly critical as well as proudly delusive ways of defining it. Sibley chooses a laconically neutral definition: "Civilization is the possession of instruments, material and social, for accomplishing all sorts of things, whether those things were worth accomplishing or not."

Who is George Sibley? He is a young fellow (in his early thirties) who explained in the October 1977 *Harper's* why the American Southwest is going to run out of water. It was so impressively done (with facts and figures for the skeptical) that we asked for this book. Like his recent ancestors, Sibley lives in Colorado, and like Thoreau, he (with wife and child, unlike Thoreau) went into the woods, staying a bit longer than Thoreau did. We won't say he writes like Thoreau—who could?—but he warms his thinking with sparks from Thoreau and a lot of the time gives the same sort of enjoyment to his readers. Thoreau was able, over a hundred years or so, to acquire a great many reluctant admirers. You can't stop reading him because you never know what he'll say next, but you have to know, because of the glint of truth that shines out of every other line. But meanwhile you resist his primitive austerity. So you tend to read him carefully, with only a part of yourself. But Thoreau has imperial tendencies. He wants all of you, and it gets embarrassing. Sibley has some of this quality.

Living off there in the woods—high up in the Rockies—he would sometimes fight forest fires to make a few dollars. He tells about it:

> In the course of that work, we had occasional opportunities to watch forest fires in action—when a fire is really running, there's not much to do *but* try to get in a good flank position out of the way and, if

you're lucky, watch it go until it's had its fun for the day and has subsided to a comparatively fightable conflagration. What can you do about a fire that's moving through trees a hundred feet off the ground, raining fire and sucking all available oxygen as it moves uphill in great leaps and gulps? Stay out of the way, is what you can do.

What became evident from watching forest fires in their "eating phase" was the fact that they are selective—or inefficient, whichever you'd rather call it. Unlike a good logical clear-cutting operation, the fire didn't eat everything on a hillside, but raced through the easy parts of the forest—the places with diseased, dead and overcrowded areas. Healthier parts of the forest, where trees were young, better spaced, and undiseased, often got no more than a quick once-over by the fire, if that. But even that quick once-over could be harmful to healthy trees, singeing needles and burning holes in bark in a way that made the trees at least temporarily vulnerable to pests. And in or near the unhealthy parts of the forest, the moderately healthy trees were taken along with the dying and dead.

What the fires always seemed to do, however, was leave enough of the old forest to at least regenerate the new forest gradually, over a period of time, during which time something like the aspen keeps the terrain together. This is probably how forests managed to perpetuate themselves before there were Principles of Forestry and a Forest Service to administer them.

This passage made us reflect that the writer was not only watching how the forest fire works, but also watching another kind of scourging, ultimately purifying blaze out in the world, which people don't understand and don't know what to do about, so that the few who think they know what ought to be done have a choice between the patience of Job and outraged lamentation. Mr. Sibley seems to have acquired some patience, along with the capacity to write engaging prose. He is able to say to himself: Given all we have done, this is the way things have to be. It is not easy to say, and the pain one feels, personal and social, doesn't go away. Well, Job managed to endure it, and Thoreau made extraordinary capital out of it. This seems about the only sort of health sane people are capable of, these days. Mr. Sibley sets a good example—good for ordinary folk, because he is human enough. That makes his book persuasive. Thoreau, after all, came close to being superhuman, as Emerson remarked.

Sibley touches a lot of bases. He is sharp, delicate, and gracious about the joys and woes of married life. The Struggle for Existence out there in the wilds bothers him (just as it bothered Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek).* What about all this incessant birth and death—fecund versus slaughtering Nature? One day he watched a badger killing a skunk—one food for the other.

The skunk, of course—pardon his frantic ignorance—didn't get the big picture, and the air was heavy with his protest. A skunk has a sharp set of teeth, and claws like tenpenny nails, but they are practically useless. His mouth is tiny, his nose in the way, his jaw underslung, and he's as slow and clumsy as a drunken Russian. The awkward assemblage of his frame should be enough to make even the most devoted believer in a master plan want to ask the great *a priori* whether the skunk was a dirty track or just an honest mistake.

The badger, by no means a daisy, didn't mind the evil-smelling spray. He just went on killing the skunk.

This may sound ridiculous; but it wasn't really very funny or enjoyable; and under the gray imminence of winter, even though this was Nature in the Raw—what the adventure films call a life-and-death struggle in the wilds—it really wasn't even very interesting. It was, in fact, tedious and disgusting; and even though it was none of my business, and was a typical example of man interfering, I broke it up. Sticks, snowballs, and loud noises.

The skunk dragged himself off, softened up for the next predator to take him easily. Sibley felt a little foolish. What had he done? How do you relate to such goings-on? When do you back off and let nature have her way? Yet the poor skunk . . .

What solace did I have for him? Buck up, fella—sure it's a hard life, but we're all just links in the great sausage string of the food chain, and if we all do our part, eating and being eaten, it all balances out in the end. . . . My end, burbles the skunk . . .

This may be how a junior Thoreau now grows up in America. What is a junior Thoreau? In essence a Thoreau is a man able to figure things out for himself, acknowledging no other authority. You have to add that he sees more, knows more, understands more than the rest of us. We don't know why.

The Thoreaus of our world are bad for complacency. Read *Life Without Principle* again. Read it once a week for a few months. You'll be in serious danger of infection. Happily, these are days in which the infection spreads. We have more encouragement from nature to listen to Thoreau. The fire is spreading fast. So is Thoreauvian sense.

At the very end Sibley says:

> "After thirty years in the toils and tribulations of Western Civilization I needed to go out to the unfanged, second-growth, multiple-used, road-laced, over-administered woods to find something to write about"? Yes, my words exactly.
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> But once I was well into my "life in the woods" . . . once the woods were well into my life . . . it began to occur to me that what I had been thinking of as "problems" were more accurately seen as the consequences of a network of *solutions* that weren't working as well as they might have. But underlying all those solutions (with their smokes and smogs and other forms of solution-pollution), were the same old problems, the mysteries, the dragons that are as old as awareness. If we want wilderness, wildness, all we have to do is cancel our solutions, stop our juggernaut (which will eventually run down anyway), and we will have lots and lots of wildness: a tree will grow for every person who dies of starvation, badger violence, and general lostness. If we want predictability, regularity, uniformity, standardization, homogeneity, just remember what the New England farmers said: "The Ice Age isn't over, the glaciers just went back for more rocks."
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> As it turned out, I gradually came to realize that my real problem, here at the apex of (or maybe just a little past) the greatest of all civilizations so far, was the same basic problem that confronted the oldest of ancient men: How do you put together, out of all this vast potential, something that might work?

COMMENTARY
THE MOST POWERFUL POINT

WRITING in 1908 on home rule for India (in *Hind Swaraj),* Gandhi said that the English did not "take" India, but that Indians had given their country to them. "They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them." The English occupied India because of the opportunity for commerce, and Gandhi pointed out, "We like their commerce, they please us by their subtle methods, and get what they want from us." They are, he said, a nation of shopkeepers—"They wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods."

In *Community Technology,* Karl Hess makes a similar argument:

> To live by leeching off others requires some very strict social controls and arrangements. We have such arrangements and controls today. Under them, most people have to conform strictly to conventional wisdom and to conventional standards in order that a few—the ones who make the rules—can live pretty much as they wish. . . .
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> A different way of living is to live in freedom by cooperating with others so that the rules of your lives together are set by yourselves. If those are terms under which you want to live, there is no *material* reason for you not to do so.
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> The rules and imperatives that conventional wisdom has imposed on us so far are not binding except to the extent that we permit them to be. We acquiesce to the rules, literally. Nature does not force us. We volunteer.

The essentials of an alternative way are briefly described:

> If production can be reduced to a community level, so can social arrangement. Community, not nation or corporation could be the basis of social life, permitting all those affected by decisions to be participants in those decisions. Democracy which is often sacrificed for imagined efficiency, can be efficient as a way for people to live together, even if it is cumbersome.
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> It is possible for people in their communities to develop to deploy, and to maintain the sort of technology, tools, aids, and techniques that will permit them to live as they wish—so long, of course, as they don't wish to live in a way that requires the coercion of others. Today's technology, in fact, works the other way. It permits a relative few to live the way they wish by fastening rules and regulations on everybody else. . . .
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> The most powerful point to be made for community technology efforts is that when people take any part of their lives back into their own hands for their own purposes, the cause of local liberty is advanced; and such liberty, in turn, seems the strongest base on which to found a decent culture of mutual aid and humane purpose.

Hess calls this a "revolutionary change."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE SOCIAL WORLD

WE have from a reader the clipping of an article by a fifteen-year-old, Matthew Roazen, which appeared in the *Westfield (Mass.) Evening News* for June 1. He tells about the suicide of a student in a private school, a boy who hanged himself five days before graduation. The boy's friends and school-mates could not understand it. It seemed a senseless horror to them. They tend, therefore, to ignore it, since it cannot be explained. Matthew Roazen says:

> Yet it is not a thing easily ignored. According to recent estimates, 12 out of 100,000 persons between the ages of 15 to 24 will commit suicide in the next year, ten per cent of the deaths within that age group. Suicide is now the third largest cause of death among teenagers.
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> It is a growing problem; the suicide rate is four times what it was twenty-five years ago. It is also a problem that will not just go away. We must face this problem, whether we are adults of today, or those of tomorrow.

The writer discusses environmental causes, which certainly exist. Years ago, as he points out, the young were drawn into responsibility at an early age. Desirable jobs were more plentiful, the prospect of adult life less threatening. Today they don't feel ready for what seems expected of them.

> Perhaps this pressure to perform, this laying of responsibility without preparation, is what causes so many young people to quit so early, giving up their lives when they see all of their energy wasted and misdirected.
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> There is no way of turning back, of course. This society is the way it is. It will be for quite a while yet. The answer then, is not to change our surroundings, but to adapt. Already there are many programs to deal with teenage suicide and depression, and they perform their jobs diligently. But they can do only so much. Perhaps the answer lies with us, we the teenagers, and you who must deal with us. It is we who must restore their faith in life, we who must catch our fallen peers and teach them the value of their lives. Because soon the shocking facts may become so common as to be transformed into mere statistics, beyond the realm of outrage or compassion.

This affirmation seems entirely admirable, but if you have ever talked to a really depressed person you know that restoring "faith in life" has to be more than a matter of wise words. The birth of faith seems a natural thing, but its rebirth is much more difficult. Some kind of change in the environment seems almost a necessity, as a way of letting at least a ray of hope come through the door. Even if it is only seeing things a little differently, the beginning has to be made. Older people can help in this, sometimes through a practical change in the relationships which surround younger members of the family. While reading Matthew Roazen's article, we recalled a MANAS story about a Canadian who built a workable windmill with the help of his ten-year-old son. We thought: that boy will probably never have suicidal thoughts. Doing good things generates the rhythms of life. The most obvious characteristic of life is that it is ongoing. People need to have a part in the rhythms of life in order to want to go on living.

On the day we received this clipping we began reading an essay written by Simone Weil back in 1934. The first sentence seemed the right place to stop and think. She said:

> The present period is one of those when everything that seems normally to constitute a reason for living dwindles away, when one must, on pain of sinking into confusion or apathy, call everything in question again.

She is absolutely right. Right in what is happening and right in what must be done. Since Simone Weil wrote this hundreds of good books have been written, directly or indirectly on how the things that have supported reasons for living have dwindled away. And there have been dozens of good books calling everything into question. From Sartre to Martin Green. But chronicles of decline and iconoclastic challenges to traditional wisdom are of little use to teenagers. They need engagement appropriate to their waxing energies. For a start, they need to see around them things going on which have the rhythm of life and on which other people, older people, but not much older, are betting their

lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Not some "project" some professor thought up.

Back in the early days of the *Republic*, children had a lot of reasons for respecting their parents. They had a lot of reasons for wanting to grow up and come to grips with life. We remember a story about pre-Revolutionary times which described a Long Island farmer who was plowing a field, with John Locke's *On Civil Government* balanced on the handle of his plow. He was thinking to himself how he would explain Locke to his sons and daughters after dinner. They were to have the schooling they needed to take part in what would happen in America. This was of course an exceptional farmer, but the days of the Founding Fathers were exceptional times, and good changes don't come about except through exceptional people who rise to responsibility.

Which brings us to John Holt. His paper, *Growing Without Schooling*, is devoted to encouraging parents to teach their children at home. He calls this "Unschooling." This is probably a program for exceptional people—very exceptional people, one might say—except that Holt thinks practically any fairly intelligent parent can manage to do better than most public schools. The paper is rich in two kinds of information: (1) Accounts of how much (the apparently exceptional) children who are taught at home learn, and (2) reports of legal struggles of the parents to secure their right to teach their own children. Editing this kind of material issue after issue (No. 10 came out recently) is making something of a lawyer out of Holt, so that his legal advice sounds pretty good. He tells people ready to buck the state or municipal educational system what to read in advance and offers other useful advice. He reports success stories (in the courts and in teaching) and seems to have going a kind of "movement" for family self-education.

Now this, to go back to Matthew Roazen's essay, is not only adaptation but an actual change in the surroundings—the surroundings of the young. It also shows how institutions can be made more flexible by determined citizens. Holt quotes at some length from the decision of a Massachusetts Superior Court judge in the Perchemlides case, outlining the constitutional rights of parents, then says: "We print these words from Judge Greaney's ruling so that from now on people will quote freely from them in any home education plan they draw up. These words, in short, are not here just to make people feel better (though we hope and expect that they will do that) but to be used."

So the movement for home education is strengthening and the word is spreading, as inspection of any recent issue of *Growth Without Schooling* (308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116) will easily demonstrate.

This has its importance, but there is a larger benefit growing out of all such efforts. These pioneers in reducing the wilderness of overgrown institutions—really harder to cope with than the mountains and the prairies, with angry Indians thrown in—are helping to restore the capacity of Americans to recognize, accept, and fulfill the responsibilities which are naturally theirs and cannot be successfully delegated. Schools doubtless have a place in the scheme of things, but this is for parents to decide, not legislators and administrators. And when schools get to be the size of factories, they inevitably take on some of the traits and limitations of factories, just in order to open up every morning and keep going. Excessive size brings defects which even the best administrators can't correct, something which is as true of schools as of businesses, cities, and nations.

There are all sorts of transfers when people embrace responsibility and carry it out against multiple institutional obstacles. The community gains morale from people who do these things. Human beings begin to find more meaning in their lives. After a while, some of these parents may even *start* a school themselves, and keep it the right size and under control. From such beginnings people discover that they *can* change the environment. As Vico said long ago: "The social world is the work of men."

FRONTIERS

Success Stories

FRONTIERS for June 20 told about the impressive record of sixteen Northwest plywood manufacturing plants that have been taken over and operated by former employees, who are now the owners. This is apparently a trend in other parts of the country. In the May-June issue of *New Roots*, a magazine (resembling *Rain)* which covers the self-reliance and appropriate technology movements in the Northeast (published at Box 548, Greenfield, Mass. 01301, $8 for six issues a year), Patricia Greene reports on two similar enterprises in New England. One is a large printing concern in Clinton, Mass., the Colonial Press, which makes books and once had 2,000 employees, but which was driven into liquidation by bad management. The other, a much smaller venture, is the Common Ground Restaurant in Brattleboro, Vt., which started as a co-op, suffered miscellaneous vicissitudes, and is now functioning well as a worker-owned and operated place to enjoy natural foods. After a year of comparative success, one of the working owners of the restaurant, Fritz Hewett, says:

> Perhaps it's too early to make any grandiose claims, but from all current indications, it appears that we are overcoming the problem of high turnover of both staff and management, and the consequent lack of expertise that beset the Common Ground for its first six years.
>
> You know, it's funny, the staff (about twenty-five people) talks about "the restaurant" almost as a separate entity, like a precious endowment. In a way, it's like a land trust where people don't "own" the land. The Common Ground isn't owned, but it's here to be improved, used and loved. I get the feeling people are really beginning to take root and flourish.

The critical change came in 1977 when the restaurant was on the verge of being sold to a single entrepreneur. The workers were upset, and with the encouragement and counsel of a representative of the Industrial Cooperative Association (a group of experts in Cambridge, Mass., devoted to helping worker owned and managed businesses to get going) they decided to take over the restaurant. The original co-op membership agreed and facilitated the change. Fritz Hewett relates:

> From that time on things changed drastically. There was suddenly no we/they; no one to blame and carp about anymore. We *were* they, and only *we* were responsible for how the business ran. Everyone took a new interest in cash flow—people wanted to know what we made every day.

It should be said that the restaurant is a popular place that serves naturally prepared food in a pleasant setting—the product was right. Management was the issue. Could it be democratic?

> One of the main problems of democracy is determining what it's necessary for the group to talk about and what individuals can decide. Individuals are making decisions without bringing them up at staff meeting, which may be avoiding a staff responsibility. But at least we don't have things kicked around forever. The important thing is that for the first time people are trusting each other's judgment. We're all responsible for the place together, so it's not the feeling of "Aha! Now I can do what I want." Decisions are made when a person feels he or she has a good idea of what the group would want.

Another comment:

> The committees are really working hard now and save staff meetings many hours of time by doing the research and making concrete proposals. That way everyone gets to participate. Used to be that the committees, when there were any, were all the same people. Well, I and others had to give up our mother hen attitudes and learn to keep our hands down and not volunteer. Now there's a lot of excellent talent coming along and our services are not as needed. It's good to know the place won't fall apart any more if certain key people leave.

One thing the worker-co-op has done is establish a trial and training period for new people—three months. Then they may be hired by a staff meeting. "Before worker management one person did all the hiring and the training period was only two weeks."

An editorial note about the Common Ground Restaurant in Brattleboro calls it "a meeting place and center of activity for the whole community," adding:

> Its carefully prepared natural cuisine has excited many tourists and area business people about health food as well. But there's more going on at the restaurant than meets the eye or palate. The cook stirring the vegetables, the waiter serving the food and the cheerful cashier are all part of a worker-controlled cooperative which has been successfully operating for over a year. It is interesting . . . that despite totally different backgrounds and types of business, the workers at Clinton and Common Ground have sought and used such similar solutions to their problems.

The Clinton concern is the big printing (book-making) business, and a much larger and probably more difficult transition was involved—too complicated to tell about briefly, so we have given more space to the Common Ground story.

The prelude to the worker-management takeover at Colonial involved changes of ownership of this once very successful concern and a downhill course due to unbelievable mistakes by a conglomerate proprietor. The company was on the way to liquidation when two or three of the two thousand people who worked there got the idea that maybe the employees could somehow keep it going. Advisors from the Industrial Cooperative Association entered the picture and helped the nucleus of workers to chart a course. A big meeting of all the workers raised some money. There were ups and downs, but finally, with some financial help from a foundation, the nucleus has grown to twenty-three people who are setting type and doing composition and bindery operations. A spokesman says:

> The people who work here really love the idea of working for themselves. If Colonial closes because we don't make it run properly, it's all our fault, not the fault of some executive in Toledo, Ohio. Decisions are being made by people within our community; people who have a personal interest in what happens here at Clinton. . . . One of the greatest things I've noticed is how well we all work together now. We're working harder, but enjoying it more.

These two modest success stories deserve reading in full.