

## A TASTE FOR SIMPLICITY

THE flow of new ideas into the common consciousness—the ideas are not, of course, really *new*, except perhaps in form—proceeds continuously, but since this is a collective subjective process we have difficulty in marking the changes for identification. Yet we know they are going on, even though a century or two must pass before they become apparent to all. H. T. Buckle wrote of this in his *History of Civilization*:

If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed has had its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes another period in which they are declared to be necessary, and even the dullest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

The process Buckle describes is no simple ortholinear advance, but involves frequent forward and then backward movements, as in the present. In the July issue of the new quarterly, *democracy*, the editor, Sheldon Wolin, gives an account of the status quo in American affairs, characterizing it as a time of counter-revolution dominated by "corporate capitalism, managerial bureaucracy, and science-technology." Seeking the sources of emotional support for this regime, Mr. Wolin turns first to the raw simplicity of partisan patriotism. He says:

The patriot admires power and seeks to identify with it because secretly he feels powerless. Above all, patriotism feeds on resentments: at having been defeated by a nickel-and-dime country of small Orientals; at having its wars fought with a disproportionate number of blacks; and, more recently, at being held up to ridicule and for ransom by a mob of political extremists and religious fanatics.

Another current of support for counter-revolution is found in the political activity of fundamentalist Christians:

The Moral Majority may share no ontological assumptions with scientists and technocrats, but they do admire the same virtues of discipline and hard work, and feel no shame at possessing power or profits when these result. Further, the puritanical qualities of the Moral Majority make them the perfect complement to the anti-welfare thrust of the new political economy. The patriots and religious crusaders have found their common motto in the Oklahoma bumper sticker that reads "God, Guns, and Guts."

If we wonder how it is possible for the Creationists to join with the Darwinians, the revelationists to ally with the technocrats, and the fundamentalists with the multinationalists, the answer is precisely in the irrelevancy of the former to the latter. In this new order science, bureaucracy, and corporations are not to be constituted or defined by religion, only supported by it. No one has yet claimed that the well-advertised prayer meetings in corporate board rooms are going to transform TRW into a Christian corporation.

Still another support for the counter-revolutionary mood is identified by Mr. Wolin in what might be called "the treason of the clerks." Today various academics exhibit "a fondness for defending regimes which torture as a matter of principle," while others "now float comfortably in think-tanks subsidized by corporate wealth and stir themselves on occasion to sign right-wing manifestoes against 'international terrorism' and in favor of the murderous regime of El Salvador." Wolin concludes:

The counter-revolution in the making is of formidable proportions. With the collapse of the Democratic Party and the desperate efforts of its leaders to join the rush to reaction, some things seem apparent. The ease with which the Reagan administration is rolling back fifty years of liberal progress—which represented social programs that were modest, even by the standards of European socialism—suggests that genuine democrats have little to gain from continuing to press for change through the conventional national institutions of political parties, elections, Congress and the presidency. Corporate power and resources have totally won that game; the only matter in doubt is which corporate alliances will gain the most. The counter-revolution has helped to crystallize the choice: for in destroying liberal culture, corrupting its political institutions, and attacking

liberal freedoms the counter-revolution has inadvertently exposed and sharpened the alternative. Historically, liberalism is the compromise version of democracy, willing to trade popular participation for representation, to modify equality to allow for meritocratic elites, and to suffer the delusion that the morality of public choices could be mostly avoided by relying on a system of incentives. The counter-revolution has, in effect, narrowed the choice: democracy or the corporate state.

Mr. Wolin's prescription, coming at the end of his editorial, is the reason for quoting him here. This, we think, is an important change in thinking and attitude now going on—a move in the direction of what may fairly be called the New Radicalism. He says:

The democratic prospect may seem bleak, but despair is a luxury that democrats cannot afford. Since the present political system is likely to remain an enemy of freedom, equality, and participation, and since its repressive powers are formidable, democratic resistance should be expressed in constructive actions aimed at creating alternative modes of common life. Most individuals possess the basic resources needed to found new, more democratic relationships: some skills, energy, and the moral sense to participate in the exercise of power. Contrary to the cheerless advice of disillusioned radicals of the '60s that the right course was to prepare for "the long march through institutions," today's democrats must begin to disengage from the many forms of dependency that make them accomplices in the legitimization of reactionary power.

This is an appeal to individuals, not to parties. It seeks "constructive actions" to shape another mode of the common life. Interestingly, a German sociologist, Detlef Kantowsky, starting at the other end of the spectrum of possibilities, has proposed that the Gandhian program of Sarvodaya—the welfare of all—has direct application to industrialized societies. Speaking at the second international conference on Sarvodaya, held last May in Enschede, The Netherlands, Prof. Kantowsky began by saying: "I am firmly convinced that Sarvodaya is a strategy for *individual* emancipation in the service of all. It is only through *individual* attentiveness that the social reconstruction of a Sarvodaya reality can be achieved." For his ideal he takes the Sinhalese or Bali rice farmers whose conscious or unconscious intention is "To keep *all* life going, and not to make *only man's industry* grow."

But how can this spirit be spelled out, developed into a philosophy that touches Western man in all the complexities of his everyday life? Kantowsky faces some obvious difficulties:

. . . I see the general relevance of Sarvodaya's altruistic ideology of sharing one's time, thought and energy for the Awakening and Welfare of All. But how to apply it? What impact, if any, does our token commitment have? We drink Sarvodaya Tea, we sell Sarvodaya Batiks, we maintain links with Sarvodaya villages, we have letter-dialogues with some Sarvodaya Pre-School groups, we try to reduce our energy consumption through a change in life-style and diet, we might shift from town to village and start to grow our own fruits and vegetables, we might be members of the executive board of a cooperative selling only big-organic food, and some might even try to further sharpen their mindfulness by attending an occasional meditation course. Does this form of "Global Populism," this kind of identification with a certain locality at one end and the world as a whole on the other, and does a change of life-style of some "happy few," really matter?

All these little efforts, Kantowsky shows, seem compromised at the start, and how, he asks, can we pretend to such a lofty ideal when our own performance is so limited? "Worldling or hermit, world conqueror or world renouncer, to be or not to be—are these really the only two positions between which we must choose? Is there not, besides cynical intellectual self-defense, a Middle Path to avoid the two extremes of materialistic greed and spiritual escapism. . . ?"

Yet it remains possible to be subjectively whole-hearted in objectively compromised positions. The difficulty in admitting or adopting this view is that it makes it impossible to judge our fellows. It gives more importance to motive than to results. Indeed, it is concerned *only* with individuals and affords no common denominators prescribing behavior for parties or even groups. Organization of such individuals is fruitless, although voluntary associations may at least make combined effort possible.

Prof. Kantowsky muses:

Those of you who have some personal experience with so-called "alternative groups" will know that most of them do indeed suffer and ultimately fail because they think in dualistic extremes. As mere rejections of the

dominant culture and life-style their alternatives remain dualistically linked with them. Obviously it is not possible for me to provide an instant answer to this western dilemma. I can only say that Sarvodaya, especially in its Buddhist appearance . . . has taught me that I have to find a Middle Path. At the same time I have, however, to be mindful enough not to become too attached to this idea of the Middle Path as such. It should be used as a raft only, i.e., for crossing over and not for detached but comfortable floating in the mainstreams of today's illusions, i.e., the tempting trappings of modernization. We have to live in this world but we need not become part of it. That is the meaning of the lotus flower, Sarvodaya's symbol.

For practical illustration of the Middle Path, Kantowsky turns to Richard Gregg's classic article, "Voluntary Simplicity," published in India in the 1930s (reprinted in two parts in *MANAS* for Sept. 4 and 11, 1974), calling it "a kind of Magna Charta of a whole movement." Of Gregg, who wrote *The Power of Non-Violence*, he says:

Greatly influenced by the writings of John Ruskin and the teachings of Gandhi, he argued that the way to master the increasing complexity of modern life is not through still more complexity. Instead, we need to "turn inward to that which unifies all—not the intellect but the spirit, and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and social life that will truly and vigourously express that spirit." Gregg made it clear that voluntary simplicity can have a decisive impact since "consumption is the area within which each individual can affect the economic life of the community. Small as his own share may be, that is the area within which every person can exercise his control over the forces of economic production and distribution." The power to reject, the will to do without, can counterbalance the forces of greed and competition that perpetuate our destructive economic system. Simplicity of living, said Gregg, could act as a deterrent to ostentation and keeping up with the Joneses. "Therefore, all those who desire to reform the existing economic system can take an active part by living simply and urging and encouraging others to do likewise. Capitalism is no mere exterior organization of bankers and industrialists. It consists of a spirit and attitude and habitual actions in and among all of us."

How, then, should we *organize* the movement for voluntary simplicity, so that its impact will become evident to all? We shouldn't, and we can't. Like Sheldon Wolin's prescription to democrats, Detlef Kantowsky's answer is "radical" indeed:

Having thus realized that Sarvodaya is indeed an effective strategy for individual emancipation in the service of all, we begin to see that the bureaucratic routinization of the message's charisma would be a self-defeating instrument of the concept as such, Buddha himself was fully aware of these social mechanisms when during his last days he told Ananda, his devoted attendant, that he had not given any thought to how the Bhikkhus should organize themselves after his passing away. Had he not told them the full Truth? Had he ever tried to withhold anything in the closed fist of the teacher? Certainly not, so each of them could be his own support and refuge. Similarly, Gandhi had warned against an administered and organized form of "Gandhism." In his ideal state everyone should be his own ruler and should rule himself in such a way "that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor."

The last few words of Richard Gregg's article will serve to emphasize the pragmatic aspect of *voluntary* social (personal) change. He tells of a counsel given him by Gandhi:

We were talking about simple living and I said it was easy for me to give up most things but that I had a greedy mind and wanted to keep my many books. He said, "Then don't give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired."

This fragment of psychological sagacity has immeasurable importance for the moralistic West. Here the emphasis is not on righteousness and strict conformity to the ideal, but on a very simple conception: a *change in taste*.

The real question, then, is: What are the persuasions which lead to a change in taste?

This is the question which haunts a great many *MANAS* articles. We keep looking for answers, which of course don't really exist, but now and then we come across a valuable hint. The most recent find, and one of the best, appears in an article in the *Summer CoEvolution Quarterly*. The writer, Jan Wojeik, tells about a lecture by Wendell Berry given at Purdue University, Indiana, a few months ago. (Actually, Wojeik, an English teacher, had himself

arranged Berry's visit to Purdue, for a double date involving a poetry reading and a talk on farming: "Standards for a Durable Agriculture," and his account of the latter event is a masterpiece of objective-subjective reporting. Here he muses on what had happened at Purdue:

Wendell Berry had delivered a serious paper critically questioning the industrial methods of modern agriculture, and he had done this at the invitation of Purdue University which had pioneered the technology of those methods under the direction of Earl L. Butz, past dean of the Purdue School of Agriculture, and of course, past Secretary of Agriculture under Nixon and Ford. This is the same Butz that Berry had criticized closely and passionately in his book-length diatribe against industrial farming, *The Unsettling of America*. Earl Butz wasn't in the audience this day. But his presence looms over any mention of agriculture at Purdue as a mountain over the river that carries away its runoff. Berry had been bucking the current with every flourish of phrase. The bipartisan applause at the end said he had made it to the headwaters intact.

As the applause subsided, I wondered about the power of even his words to change minds. I glanced at the Ag school faculty greeting each other across the rows of seats as they struggled into their coats, their smiling faces as inscrutable to me as the Buddha's. What did they think? I recalled that earlier in his talk Berry had said that he changed his thinking about farming when he came into some bad land—corned-out, run-down, hilly ground conventional farming couldn't revive. His ideas are now what his fields taught him. Earlier in the afternoon, over a cup of coffee, he and his wife Tanya had engaged for a minute in what seemed to be a long standing playful disagreement about what it takes for people to change their minds. Tanya thought an observant eye was enough; Wendell, a disciplined mind. It occurs to me now, however, that what neither Berry had talked about was what was at large in this room: the age-old energy of edification—the power of a good example. The sheer presence a person commands recommends what the person says, however odd it sounds at first. And Berry, standing now on the stage at the end of his talk, talking to people who had pressed up close to him, including some faculty from the Ag school, he as trim and proper as Gary Cooper at the end of *High Noon*, probably hadn't convinced anyone in the audience not already convinced about what he had to say, but among even the skeptics he had established for the first time perhaps the credibility of his ideas about farming, publicly, on the strength of his forthright, brainy wit, delivered in a modulated but authentic slow Kentucky drawl. Why, by God, a Lincoln could almost convince the South.

There's a lesson in this for those despairing of their ecological ideas ever getting a hearing. Be true.

Our article ends right here. What more can we say? But since a little space is left we give Berry's reply to the "challenging" question of someone—probably an Ag school professor—in the audience:

"Mr. Berry, what you say about farming on a human scale sounds attractive. But who's going to decide who's going to starve when we cut down today's enormous productivity to start farming your way?"...

Berry began by acknowledging the obviousness of the question. But he pointed out the irony of our cheap wheat imports to Peru forcing their native wheat farmers to turn to raising barley that their breweries made into more beer than the country could drink. Maybe some people would be better off less dependent on our enormous farm productivity. Briefly he answered the question directly: "A few powerful people will always decide who'll starve in scarcity and who will not." He went on to make some points of his own. "I've seen figures," he said, "which suggest intensive organic farming is less productive but not much less productive, than industrial-chemical farming. Often today organic farming is the only way to revitalize land conventional farming has run out. The question should be," he added, "do we want to feed an enormous amount of people as we do now for a little while longer until our fossil fuels run out and our top soil runs into the sea, or do we want to feed as many people as we can forever on farms which can renew their own fertility?"

## *REVIEW*

### HOW TO READ A BOOK

SINCE books are published at a particular time, they have in them material about that time, but since they appear in the service of minds, if they are any good, they consider the time in the light of the timeless. This is the art of the writer, or ought to be. A book lacking in such comparisons is not worth reading, except for the tabulation of needed facts. The professional writers who want merely to make money understand this distinction well. An eminently successful contributor to the pulps once gave this advice to young writers desiring to imitate him: "Avoid originality as you would an argument on religion." Which is to say, if you want to sell the mass market, be careful never to require your reader to do any thinking. What little is called for, you do it for them.

That is one of the reasons why, from time to time, we go back, here, to books published in the past, giving attention to writers who deserve to survive because of the way they combine time and the eternities. A good example is the work of a man of the early years of this century, who died young—Randolph Bourne.

Bourne was born in Bloomfield, New Jersey, in 1886, and succumbed to the influenza epidemic of 1918—a few days after the armistice which ended World War I. He is known chiefly for his opposition to the war, the interesting thing being *how* he opposed it. In *War and the Intellectuals*, the collection of his essays (1915-1918) published in paperback by Harper & Row in 1964, the editor, Carl Resek, notes that Bourne's reputation "rests on a career that coincided with the years of World War I." Of the small body of prose so produced, Resek says in his Introduction:

Bourne offered none of the usual simplistic interpretations of the conflict. He made no charges against munitions makers, bankers or imperialists and cared less about the causes of war than about its moral consequences. With the exception of "The Collapse of American Strategy," none of the writings stands up as profound comment on policy. Their

unifying theme lay in Bourne's determined refusal to invest the war, as some of his fellow intellectuals had, with a holy mission to make the world safer for democracy. A league of nations he regarded as only an alliance of all against each, a means of petrifying the *states quo*. He was certain that the war would impoverish domestic reform and that reformers and intellectuals, however large their wartime services would have little to say about the post-war world. If the intellectuals were not strong enough to prevent war, they could not be strong enough to influence the peace. The power of Bourne's essays is surely derived from these prophetic passages.

Writers who see such things clearly are worth reading because what they say is not much affected by the passage of events. They have a grasp of the human situation and understand better than others the puzzles and contradictions of what is termed "progress." Bourne contributed articles and reviews to *Seven Arts*, the *Dial*, and the *New Republic*. As a writer, he gave critical attention to other writers, and what he says about H. L. Mencken illustrates the reason for reading the rest of what he wrote. He begins:

Mr. Mencken gives the impression of an able mind so harried and irritated by the philistinism of American life that it has not been able to attain full power. These more carefully worked-over critical essays [in Mencken's *A Book of Prefaces*, under review] are, on the whole, less interesting and provocative than the irresponsible comment he gives us in his magazine [*The Smart Set*]. How is it that so robust a hatter of uplift and puritanism becomes so fanatical a crusader himself? One is forced to call Mr. Mencken a moralist, for with him appraisal has constantly to stop while he tilts against philistine critics and outrageous puritans. In order to show how good a writer is, he must first show how deplorably fatuous, malicious or ignorant are all those who dislike him. Such a proof is undoubtedly the first impulse of any mind that cares deeply about artistic values. But Mr. Mencken too often permits it to be his last, and wastes away into a desert of invective. Yet he has all the raw material of the good critic—moral freedom, a passion for ideas and for literary beauty, vigor and pungency of phrase, considerable reference and knowledge. Why have these intellectual qualities and possessions been worked up only so partially into the finished attitude of criticism? Has he not let himself be the victim of that paralyzing Demos against which he so justly rages?

As you follow his strident paragraphs, you become a little sorry that there is not more of a contrast in tone between his illumination of the brave, the free and the beautiful, and the peevish complaints of the critics of the old school. When are we going to get anything curatively done for our generation, if our critical rebels are to spend their lives cutting off hydra-heads of American stodginess?

It is easy enough to get people to like what you say if you give a brilliant finish to their own egoism and sophisticated self-righteousness. How much, one wonders, of the popularity of Eric Hoffer is due to a talent of this sort? In order to appreciate Bourne—appreciate him fully—you have to be ready for slights to vanity, for impersonal exposures such as he applied in Mencken. Not many can stand that sort of criticism, and fewer still are able to accept and make something out of it. This difficult area of the human situation was clearly recognized by A. H. Maslow, in his titling phrase, "The Need to Know and the Fear of Knowing." In other words, a writer who illustrates this psychological dilemma, bringing it to consciousness, is worth reading.

A story told by Karl Shapiro in the Spring *American Scholar* about a black poet, Melvin B. Tolson, whom he much admires, might show what it takes to learn from a penetrating critic. Shapiro, who writes engagingly, recalls:

Tolson's great poem *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, which was commissioned by that nation to celebrate its centennial, was published in 1953 with an introduction by Allen Tate. As far as I can tell, the poem is still only a *succès d'estime* even though, along with Tate and myself, Tolson's poetry was hailed by William Carlos Williams—who quotes a piece of it in *Patterson*—Theodore Roethke, Robert Frost, John Ciardi, and others. But Tate played a role in the final form of the *Libretto* which is not dissimilar to the role Pound played in the formation of *The Waste Land*.

Tolson had sent an early version of the poem to Tate, with the request that he write a preface for it. After reading the manuscript, Tate returned it, saying that he was not much interested in the propaganda of a Negro poet. Instead of taking offense, Tolson set about to correct this weakness, which he himself had

criticized in the work of other black poets. A year later he submitted a new version to Tate, who wrote a remarkable preface. He praised the first-rate intelligence at work in the poem and observed "For the first time, it seems to me, a Negro poet has assimilated completely the full poetic language of his time, and, by implication, the language of the Anglo-American poetic tradition."

We return to Randolph Bourne for the concluding words of his review:

Comstockery is not so much a function of American culture as it is of the current moralism of our general middleclass civilization. The attack must be, as Nietzsche made it, on that moralism rather than on its symptoms. But Mr. Mencken is not particularly happy in his understanding of Nietzsche. He wrote the book from which a majority of the Americans who know about Nietzsche seem to have gotten their ideas. How crude a summary it is may be seen by comparing it with the recent study of Nietzsche by another American, W. M. Salter. One wishes Mr. Mencken had spent more time in understanding the depth and subtleties of Nietzsche, and less on shuddering at puritanism as a literary force, and on discovering how the public libraries and newspaper reviewers are treating Theodore Dreiser.

Mr. Mencken's mode of critical attack thus plays into the hands of the philistines, demoralizes the artist, and demoralizes his own critical power. Why cannot Demos be left alone for a while to its commercial magazines and its mawkish novels? All good writing is produced in serene unconsciousness of what Demos desires or demands. It cannot be created at all if the artist worries about what Demos will think of him or do to him. The artist writes for that imagined audience of perfect comprehenders. The critic must judge for that audience too.

Following "All good writing" in the above is a flow of meaning which comes not from the times but from the eternities. It has to do with the human mind, how it works, what it is for, and what, inevitably, we must do with it, even though we also attempt to do something else.

It is worth while to go from this statement to similar things said by other writers, to put the idea a little more in the round. One example would be the first pages of Louis Halle's *Men and Nations* (1962) where the author shows that concepts—

the substance of what people write about—are like geometrical figures—*ideal* forms—which are actually normative for everything we say. In principle, these ideal conceptions are the *logos* behind all communication. We continually fall short of them, but we can *know* that we fall short, and the task of the critic is to illuminate how. And to cheer and praise when on rare occasions we don't.

An extraordinary example of not falling short is Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots*. She came as close as anyone in our time to writing like a pure, disembodied intellect, utterly devoted to what is true, good, and ideally necessary. This is the reason why some of the best writers of the present speak of her with something akin to reverence. And why columnists sneer at and ridicule her. Simone Weil does not write in this book about what will work, but about what *ought to work*, and she explains why. Those who write only about what can be made to work now are captives of the age, immune to the light of the eternities.

## COMMENTARY

### SIMONE WEIL

ON page eight, at the end of Review, Simone Weil is named as one who "came as close as anyone in our time to writing like a pure, disembodied intellect." Some samples are in order. She begins the first chapter of *The Need for Roots*, titled "The Needs of the Soul," by saying:

The notion of obligations comes before that of rights which is subordinate and relative to the former. A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation toward him. . . . A man left alone in the universe would have no rights whatever, but he would have obligations. . . .

Obligations are only binding on human beings. There are no obligations for collectives, as such. But they exist for all human beings who constitute, serve, command, or represent a collectivity, in that part of their existence which is related to the collectivity as in that part which is independent of it. . . . There exists an obligation toward every human being for the sole reason that he or she is a human being, without any other condition requiring to be fulfilled, and even without any recognition of such obligation on the part of the individual concerned. . . .

This obligation is an eternal one . . . an unconditional one. . . . This obligation has no foundation, but only a verification in the common consent accorded by the universal conscience. . . . It is recognized by everybody without exception in every single case where it is not attacked as a result of interest or passion. And it is in relation to it that we measure our progress.

Later in this chapter she says:

The need of truth is more sacred than any other need. Yet it is never mentioned. One feels afraid to read when once one has realized the quantity and the monstrousness of the material falsehoods shamelessly paraded, even in the books of the most reputable authors. Thereafter one reads as though one were drinking from a contaminated well.

There are men who work eight hours a day and make the immense effort of reading in the evenings

so as to acquire knowledge. It is impossible for them to go and verify their sources in big libraries. They have to take the book on trust. One has no right to give them spurious provender. What sense is there in pleading that authors act in good faith? *They* don't have to do physical labor for eight hours a day. Society provides for their sustenance so that they may have the leisure and give themselves the trouble to avoid error. A switchman responsible for a train accident would hardly be given a sympathetic hearing.

She thinks that writers who lie, or are merely careless, should be somehow punished. But by whom? By a tribunal of rare individuals who have shown that they love the truth. And she concludes: "There is no possible chance of satisfying a people's need of truth, unless men can be found for this purpose who love truth." Is this practical? Of course not. But neither are the substitutes we are using. Simone Weil obliges reflection concerning such farreaching matters.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves DOWNS AND AN UP

A RELEASE from the Central Committee for Conscientious objectors, an organization founded in 1948, speaks of the recent "tremendous growth in militarism in this country," adding that "the influence of the military in our schools is growing at epidemic proportions." This Pentagon campaign is no doubt a calculated response to the growing anti-militarism among the youth of the country. While the conflict in Vietnam was a peculiarly odious war, it matured feelings and attitudes justifying rejection of practically any war, and it is difficult to imagine a modern war that would be attractive to a young man or woman of normal intelligence.

The CCCO draws attention to energetic attempts by military agencies to get at the minds of both college and high school students. The ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) is now duplicated at high school level, as JROTC, offering courses taught by military personnel—courses said to be "often of questionable academic merit" which "encourage values at odds with the goals of academic learning." Then there is the Delayed Entry Program

The DEP encourages students to sign the enlistment contract up to one year before starting basic training. Once student enlistees sign the contract, they are bound by it, and discharges under the DEP are rarely granted. Each year, hundreds of thousands of young people who are uncertain about what to do sign up under DEP. Once students enlist in DEP they are given bonuses for recruiting other students, thus becoming a sort of undercover recruiting force. However, if a student changes his or her mind a few months later because of a job offer, school or vocational training possibilities, or marriage plans, it is usually too late to get out of the military unless counseling is sought through groups such as CCCO.

Larry Spears, a spokesman for CCCO, says:

One of the biggest problems results from counselors and school administrators who become

active helpers of military recruiters. The military often seems to be an easy way for a counselor to offer direction to a student. But the counselor or teacher is often unaware of the potential problems and disappointments facing many enlistees.

Military recruiters are salesmen. They have a quota to meet, superiors to please, and they certainly will not take the time to explain the possible problems to a potential recruit. Students who are considering joining the armed forces should have the benefit of seeing both sides of the story before enlisting. Counselors and teachers who are in a position to give advice on enlistment should be aware of the loopholes in the enlistment contract which put the enlistee at a distinct disadvantage, and in fact, offer very few guarantees. They should be aware of the problems many enlistees face. For example, verbal promises are often made by recruiters. If the military should not come through with what the recruiter promised, the enlistee has no legal recourse.

Further information along these lines may be obtained by writing to the CCCO, 2208 South Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19146.

To go from gloom to gloom, we have the report of Pete Hamill, a *New York Post* columnist (Feb. 10), on the experience of a father named Maguire, who noticed that his fourteen-year-old son didn't seem as bright as he used to be. His marks were poorer and his speech was getting sloppy. He visited the boy's school:

"They told me he just wasn't doing much work," Maguire said. "But the teacher told me he wasn't much different from the other kids. In some ways, he was better. He at least did some work." Maguire asked the teacher if she had any theories about why the kids behaved this way.

"Of course," she said. "Television."

"What do you mean, television?" he said.

"Television rots minds," the teacher said flatly. "But most of us figure there's nothing to be done about it any more."

Maguire got together some figures based on SATs (Scholastic Aptitude Tests) which showed that "the reading scores of all high school students had fallen every year since 1950, the year of television's great national triumph."

In the following week, Maguire accumulated more and more ideas about the impact of television on the lives of Americans. All classes and colors have been affected intellectually; reading requires the decoding of symbols, the transforming of a word like "cat" into a cat that lives in the imagination. Television shows the cat. No active thought is required. Television even supplies a laugh track and music to trigger the emotions the imagination will not create or release.

Maguire tried to do something. He called a family conference after dinner one night, explained his discoveries, suggested a voluntary limiting of television watching, or its complete elimination for three or four months.

"I said we could start a reading program together," he told me. "All read the same book and discuss it at night. We'd come closer together. I'd even change my job to be home more."

After 10 minutes the kids began to squirm, as if expecting a commercial. Maguire's wife dazed out. He gave up. Now, when he goes home, Maguire says hello, eats dinner and retreats to his bedroom. He is reading his way through Balzac. . . . Beyond the bedroom door, in the cold light of the television set, are the real people of his life. Their dumbness grows, filling up the room, moving out into the quiet suburban town, joining the great gray fog that has enveloped America.

One can understand why Maguire was even willing to change his job—he loves his family. What is his job? He is an account executive in "a major advertising agency." For Maguire, as for most American families, there are problems within problems. Where should one make a start? Maybe he *should* change his job. How many people need to get new jobs before others will be willing to attempt needed changes?

Another columnist, Scott Burns, author of *Home, Inc.*, provides a note of relief. In the *Seattle Times* (March 11) he tells about a survey by Gardens for All, made every year "to find out how many Americans are gardening, what they spend and how large their gardens are," and to collect evidence of how gardeners differ from other people. (Even advertising men have been known to learn gardening.) This is the Burns summary:

The 1980 survey, just released, has some striking figures: 34 million households, 41, per cent of all households, had vegetable gardens in 1980; the typical garden used 663 square feet and cost \$19 in materials to produce \$460 in vegetables; the total retail value of what was produced in those gardens was a record \$15 billion, a sum that may nearly double this year in the wake of rapidly rising food prices. To put this value in perspective, \$15 billion exceeds the combined 1979 net profits of Exxon, General Motors, Ford, Texaco and Standard Oil of California, the six largest corporations in the United States.

Even more striking than the economic values involved, however, is the fact that gardeners conserve more and are dramatically more self-reliant than the general population. . . . 31 comparison items show quite clearly that gardeners are between 50 and 100 per cent more self-reliant and conserving than nongardeners.

Even if you don't appreciate the quantifying of such qualities, and tend to distrust the numbers, common sense alone is enough to win agreement with what Scott Burns is presenting and pushing. Finally, he proposes that the gardening human would be an ideal model for the "inner directed" people of tomorrow.

What have you got? Work, independence, productivity, conservation, . . . and . . . a burgeoning market for personal tools and personal technology.

The bottom line here is very simple: When we do, finally, "reindustrialize" America, a lot of that reindustrialization will be in homes, not factories, as American business realizes that the traditional market for personal "consumer" goods has been replaced by a massive market for personal "capital" goods.

It all starts with hoes and hammers.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Building Community

NO two residential areas in the United States are more unlike than the coastal garden city of Santa Barbara, in California, and on the other side of the Continent, the South Bronx of New York, yet they have one thing in common—a strong manifestation of the community spirit. Community spirit is a social and moral force that can be generated and come into action wherever there are people who see the need for it and get to work. In the case of both these places—as elsewhere in the country—the initial stimulus to community action was a major disaster. Santa Barbara suffered an oil spill so extreme that the people resolved to organize for the restoration of their beaches and for basic community improvement. The improvement now goes on and on. The disaster that overtook the South Bronx was of another sort.

In the April *Country Journal*, Douglas Hand relates what happened:

Between 1970 and 1975 the South Bronx lost one fifth of its housing—45,000 units. Almost 600 acres of empty lots and abandoned buildings mar the area which, in the past two years alone, has been hit by more than 7,000 fires. Thirty-five per cent of all malnutrition cases reported in New York City occur in the South Bronx. The high school drop-out rate is terrible: only one of every four students who enter stays to graduate. The infant mortality rate is a shocking 28.5 per 1,000 births—more than double that of a more affluent area like Westchester County.

Today gardens are springing up in the South Bronx and a community organization, Bronx Frontier Development Corporation, is helping with this and other transformations. Santa Barbara has its Community Environmental Council which this year celebrated its tenth anniversary of effort with the opening of the Mesa Project—a demonstration and educational center with solar projects in process and classes in organic gardening and farming. "A diversity of ethnic and age groups are represented by the

gardeners, and many styles of gardening are used."

How did the change begin in the South Bronx? In 1976 a red-haired lady named Irma Fleck, who had worked there as a community organizer for thirty years, looked around at the mess and decided that "it ought to be possible to do something with what you've got."

"I knew that if there was one thing we had plenty of in the South Bronx," she says, "it was open space and garbage." Starting with a plan, first drafted by Martin Gallent of the New York City Department of Planning, that proposed turning the acres of rubble into parks, Mrs. Fleck and Jack Flanagan, a tall, bearded, former police detective, began researching how to come up with enough top soil to cover the empty lots. They promptly ran into their first obstacle: One acre of topsoil, approximately eight inches deep, would cost about \$10,000. "At that price there was no way we could come up with the money, says Mrs. Fleck, "so we started reading up on composting—anybody who does gardening can tell you about composting—and I made a trip to the Hunts Point Market, one of the largest produce markets in the world. There they were, chopping off the tops of carrots, cutting off the ends of lettuce, putting it all in a big dumpster for disposal, and I thought, 'That's our source!'

Two years later—that's how long such things often take in New York—they were doing large-scale composting on a 3.2-acre site on the Hunts Point peninsula. A few of the dead-land lots could now come alive. One cooperating group, the Barretto Street Block Association, "has transformed an abandoned 100- by 10-foot lot into a flourishing garden which last summer fed more than twenty families." Of the three hundred residents on the block, seventy-five work on the garden, sharing the harvest—people just "take what they need." Lately the Barretto Street garden was expanded (with help from other organizations) into a community center. Joan Pipolo, head of the block association, says that the garden doesn't just grow food:

"It has brought the neighborhood out. People who used to stay in all the time, people who were afraid to come out in the street, now wander out in

the morning just to say hello. And you don't find vandals tearing up the garden because people have built this and they become protective. It's *their* property.

#### Douglas Hand remarks:

Coming across the Barretto Street garden may seem like finding a blossoming flower on a barren, glaciated rock. But other flowers like this one are starting to grow. . . . More than sixty community gardens are sprinkled throughout the South Bronx. . . . "Ten years from now you won't even recognize this area," says Irma Fleck. . . . She says that Bronx Frontier has accomplished about two thirds of what it set out to do and has expanded some programs. It runs a "chuck wagon," a mobile kitchen and library that travels through the South Bronx, holding demonstrations and workshops on food and nutrition. It gives a five-week course in nutrition to interested families and community groups. It teaches energy conservation at the windmill site [the Frontier windmill stands 64 feet, making electricity to aerate the compost heaps, and power not used is sold to Con Edison]. It is planning co-ops for vegetables. And, it is completing a curriculum for South Bronx schools on energy conservation and the use of small-scale technology.

Mrs. Fleck says that Bronx Frontier's most important achievement has been to change the direction of thinking in the South Bronx, to give people hope. It could be that the involvement of local schools will yield the greatest long-range benefits. Implanting new ideas in the young so they can build upon what has been started is all part of what she calls the "ecological succession" of the South Bronx.

The community building efforts in Santa Barbara and the South Bronx of New York are the result of local initiative, as are many similar activities around the country.

What part might or should the government play in their support? A report issued earlier this year by the Office of Technology Assessment, *Technology for Local Development*, a survey of ongoing projects in appropriate technology around the country, makes a good illustration of a useful government service. The undertakings described in the report range from "attached solar greenhouses in New Mexico to a plant that converts municipal waste to steam heat in Akron,

Ohio; from a heat-retentive house designed for low-income families in Alaska to a cooperative farmer's market in Louisiana; and from an innovative wastewater treatment plant in California to small-scale hydroelectric dams in New England." George E. Brown, Jr., a California Congressman involved in the founding of the Office of Technology Assessment, noted with approval that the report declared there was "no justification for a new, centralized effort to promote such projects," going on to say that the Federal role should be (1) to provide reliable data; (2) provide information dissemination; (3) provide technical assistance, and (4) where necessary, provide selective financial assistance.