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THE REVIVAL OF THE COMMONS

SCOTT NEARING died last summer in the month of August (1983). He was one hundred years old. With Helen Nearing, Scott wrote *Living the Good Life,* now something of a classic in the literature of homesteading and rural reconstruction.

The Nearings were among those people whose homesteading "experiments" in the Great Depression provided us younger folks with guidance and direction from the late sixties onward, when *Living the Good Life* was reissued in paperback with an Introduction by the late Paul Goodman. Ralph Borsodi and Mildred Loomis are also of this older generation; many of us recognize their names not only for their explicit intellectual contributions but also as representative of a small but strong movement for the renewal of rural life.

Paul Goodman wrote the Introduction to the new edition of *Living the Good Life* in 1970. This is some of what he said:

> By 1970 it is clear that we have to take seriously the Thirties' ideas of the Nearings, Borsodi, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Southern Regionalists—and the economic ideas of Gandhi before them and, of course, the kibbutzim. Their experiments and analyses used to seem cranky, if not crackpot, and they were certainly not mainstream of the technical and political issues that were discussed. But suddenly we have reached a tipping point. Ecologically, we are facing disaster, both environmental' because of pollution and physiologically because of poisoning. Abuses of technology have gone so far so fast, that the chief present purpose of technology must be to try to remedy the effects of past technology. Everywhere in the world the galloping urbanization is proving to be ecologically and fiscally unviable; worse, it is impossible to bring up citizens in urban and suburban areas that are no longer cities. The processing and social engineering that go with these conditions have called forth waves of populist protest, articulate and inarticulate, by those who are pushed around and find themselves without power. And finally, the expanding Gross National Product, the ever higher Standard of Living, which was the justification for all this, has begun to yield sharply diminished returns, trivial goods, incompetent services, base culture, and spiralling inflation.
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> Thus, the eccentric ideas of the Nearings and the others are no longer out in left field. History, alas, has caught up with them. With a few more years of power failures, transit strikes, epidemic of heroin overdose, water shortage, unacceptable levels of air pollution, crashing aeroplanes, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers will regard Scott and Helen as uncanny prophets. My own opinion is that American society would be far more viable if we could push the present five per cent rural ratio back to something like twenty per cent, as an option and a standard of people who respect the environment and who, as Jefferson pointed out, cannot be pushed around because they can feed their faces.

The "five per cent rural ratio" Goodman alluded to was, more explicitly, the actual population of farm people in 1970. By 1980, farm population had dropped to two-and-a-half per cent of the national total. And every indication within the present market-oriented agribusiness economy points to an immediate future of larger and fewer farms. This is clearly the immediate prognosis for dairy, grain, and poultry farms. Growing concern for toxic residues in food notwithstanding, the immediate future of food production in this country is still in the hands of scientific reductionism and the "rationalized" market.

There are a couple of crucial questions to be asked. First, is there a problem with this increasing consolidation and rationalization of agriculture? Second, if there is a problem, what is the solution?

Let us begin this (brief) investigation with an assertion that is also a ground rule: that most of the debate regarding agriculture and rural life does not cut deeply enough into the underlying issues. That is, the debaters will zero in on the chemical aspects of food and farming—and those *are* very important issues—but they generally fail to offer a comprehensive historical perspective, nor do they generally seem able to understand the dynamic cultural symbolism involved in displacing rural

folkways and replacing culture with business. So let us try and squeeze this analysis into a small space, for small is beautiful.

A deep historical perspective requires that we look as far back into human evolution as we are able—tens and hundreds of thousands of years. This is a history of gathering and hunting, of life in small bands frequently on the move. There seems to be scholarly consensus that gathering was largely feminine and hunting largely masculine. There also seems to be consensus that gathering was largely the path to agriculture. And agriculture was the key discovery which led rapidly (by the measurement of history) to the rise of civilization: abundant food and stable village life enabled a much greater population density to emerge, and, with greater human density, the specialization of labor and new inventions.

Here we run into a tangle of facts. First, if women were the gatherers, it follows that they were also the discoverers and primary practitioners of horticulture: the harvesters became the planters. (There is dispute, apparently, about the domestication of animals; that is, whether women or men were *primarily* responsible.) Second, agricultural abundance precipitated the stable village; agricultural people stayed put. Third, the enlargement of the village eroded the culture of hunting: wild game would become scarce within walking distance of the settled village. Fourth, the domestication of bovines and the subsequent invention of the plow resulted in deep social change; men entered the fields as farmers. Since horticulture in particular had been "women's work," the entrance of men into farming is already a cultural revolution.

The representations of divinity in the pre-civilized agrarian village were overwhelmingly feminine—often "fertility figures" carved in stone or shaped in clay. Nature was the proverbial Mother; and horticulture, as women's work, reflected the bounty of Mother Earth. But the contraction of hunting as a necessary and viable work caused men to move into women's work—that is, into farming. The growth of the village into first a town and then a city saw the rise of invention (the plow, the wheel, the sail, the alloying of metals) and the growth of specialization. Into these new activities filed men. Above the mass of society (itself a new entity) rose a civilized elite who held in their control the essential forces of government and religion. A radically new distance was being created between the leaders and the led, between the governors and the governed. The enforced energy of this distancing we may also call civilization.

It is at the heart of this analysis, following in the tradition of Lewis Mumford, that civilization has always had two faces. One face is the physiology we have been trained to admire: the development and dissemination of high culture, fine art, classical music, sophisticated inventions, literacy, trained medicine, rational government, and so on. The other face we have tended to hide from our analysis and pretend that it has nothing to do with civilization; that face is the mask of coercion and exploitation. In our enthusiasm for civilization, we have consistently glossed over its negative face. We have failed to look critically behind the mask at the mayhem, carnage, and general despoliation the sweep of civilization has left in its wake, or at the environmental degradation which seems to accompany civilization like a shadow. Civilization has become a term of uncritical approbation, but we can no longer afford to indulge in this one-sided view.

The rise of civilization required the enforced organization of primary production. There is simply no such thing as civilization without surplus production. But the benefits of surplus production were by no means distributed with an egalitarian spirit. The many produced that the few might live a life of civilized affluence. These few dew it in their interest to maintain the surplus-extraction structures even if human community was oppressed and natural ecology degraded. Through taxation and armed force, the elite expropriated the surplus production of the many.

That many civilizations have fallen into ruin should tell us that over-extension of civilized extraction has been something of a rule. We might even draw from this a rule of thumb: the more dynamic a civilization is, the more likely it is to rationalize its exploitation in the direction of disaster or collapse.

Of necessity, all civilizations up until the modern industrial period were pretty well constrained to keep their peasantry intact. (Rome failed to do so, substituting large aristocratic estates with slaves for small farms, with the subsequent decline of national morale.) But reductionist science with its machines and chemicals enabled the civilized establishment to eradicate the peasantry as a social class. This was a wholly new cultural revolution. Never before in history had the earth been so nakedly exposed to rational exploitation; the cultural buffer of the peasantry had been eliminated. The machine now substituted for human and animal labor.

Lewis Mumford in his numerous works has traced "the machine" back to the early city: the interchangeable and replaceable parts of the *human* machine that built the pyramids or constructed the irrigation networks or annihilated the "enemy." This makes industry, properly speaking, an outgrowth of the machine organization of the earliest civilizations. Industry is, finally, the extension of the machine principle into a rational *system* of extraction and production.

It is intellectually helpful to cast this conception of industry against a cultural background. And no one has done this more incisively than the late E. F. Schumacher. In his chapter, "The Proper Use of Land," in *Small Is Beautiful*, Schumacher provides this analysis:

> In our time, the main danger to the soil, and therewith not only to agriculture but to civilization as a whole, stems from the townsman's determination to apply to agriculture the principles of industry. No more typical representative of this tendency could be found than Dr. Sicco L. Mansholt, who, as Vice-President of the European Economic Community, launched the Mansholt Plan for European Agriculture. He believes that the farmers are "a group that has still not grasped the rapid changes in society." Most of them ought to get out of farming and become industrial labourers in the cities, because "factory workers, men on building sites and those in administrative jobs—have a five-day week and two weeks' annual holiday already. . . ." The Mansholt Plan accordingly, is designed to achieve, as quickly and as humanely as possible, the amalgamation of many small family farms into large agricultural units operated as if they were factories, and the maximum rate of reduction in the community's agricultural population. Aid is to be given "which would enable the older as well as the younger farmers to leave agriculture."

In the discussion of the Mansholt Plan, agriculture is generally referred to as one of Europe's "industries." The question arises of whether agriculture is, in fact, an industry or whether it might be something *essentially* different. Not surprisingly, as this is a metaphysical—or meta-economic—question, it is never raised by economists.

Now, the fundamental "principle" of agriculture is that it deals with life, that is to say, with living substances. Its products are the results of processes of life and its means of production is the living soil. A cubic centimetre of fertile soil contains milliards of living organisms, the full exploration of which is far beyond the capacities of men. The fundamental "principle" of modern industry, on the other hand, is that it deals with man-devised processes which work reliably only when applied to man-devised non-living materials. The ideal of industry is the elimination of living substances. Man-made materials are preferable to natural materials, because we can make them to measure and apply perfect quality control. Man-made machines work more reliably and more predictably than do such living substances as men. The ideal of industry is to eliminate the living factor, even including the human factor, and to turn the productive process over to machines. As Alfred North Whitehead defined life as "an offensive directed against the repetitious mechanism of the universe," so we may define modern industry as "an offensive against the unpredictability, unpunctuality, general waywardness and cussedness of living nature, including man."

In other words, there can be no doubt that the fundamental "principles" of agriculture and of industry, far from being compatible with each other, are in opposition. Real life consists of the tensions produced by the incompatibility of opposites, each of which is needed, and just as life would be meaningless without death, so agriculture would be meaningless without industry. It remains true, however, that agriculture is primary, whereas industry is secondary, which means that human life can continue without industry, whereas it cannot continue without agriculture. Human life at the level of civilization, however, demands the *balance* of the two principles, and this balance is ineluctably destroyed when people fail to appreciate the *essential* difference between agriculture and industry—a

> difference as great as that between life and death—and attempt to treat agriculture as just another industry.

As industrial civilization replaced the peasantry with agribusiness technology, organic culture was supplanted by machine "culture." Industrial civilization has no need for the organic culture of rural life, all "preservation of the family farm" rhetoric notwithstanding.

This loss of organic culture is a major reason why we are presently lost in the geometric wasteland of technological progress. We have broken with the past—not just the past of yesterday or last year, but with the ancient heritage of our cultural evolution. Advanced civilization has eradicated those forms of culture which existed in and through nature and has substituted technological organization for organic life. When the *entire world* has been brought under civilized jurisdiction, no room will be left for non-civilized culture. That which has no formal, legal existence does not, for all practical purposes, exist at all. "No State within the State."

Hence we see the rapid substitution of industry for culture. We already have the industry of farming, the industry of fishing, the industry of forestry, the industry of health care, the industry of education, the industry of recreation—and perhaps we are even approaching the industry of religion. This is the logical outgrowth of what former president John Calvin Coolidge called (approvingly) a "business civilization."

Is there a problem then with increasing consolidation and rationalization in agriculture? We are far beyond the range of the word "problem" and are already in the terrain of calamity.

And what is the solution? In a word, the *only* solution is the creation of an ecological and egalitarian civilization. This requires the renewal of the life of the countryside, the revival of the commons, the creation of a new folk culture, the planned obsolescence of reductionist science, the rediscovery of nature, the elimination of catastrophic weaponry, the selection of the finest public transportation (probably the railroad), and the democratic control (at various levels of decentralization) of the global economy.

Since agriculture has been our touchstone, let us return explicitly to this subject in conclusion. And since E. F. Schumacher's chapter "The Proper Use of Land" is one of the finest statements on rural renewal to be found in modern literature, let us close with a key quotation:

> I agree with Mr. [Lewis] Herber's assertion that "reconciliation of man with the natural world is no longer merely desirable, it has become a necessity." And this cannot be achieved by tourism, sightseeing, or other leisure-time activities, but only by changing the structure of agriculture in a direction exactly opposite to that proposed by Dr. Mansholt and supported by the experts quoted above: instead of searching for means to accelerate the drift out of agriculture, we should be searching for policies to reconstruct rural culture to open the land for gainful occupation to larger numbers of people, whether it be on a full-time or a part-time basis, and to orientate all our actions on the land towards the threefold ideal of health, beauty, and permanence. . . .
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> I have no doubt that a callous attitude to the land and to the animals thereon is connected with, and symptomatic of, a great many other attitudes, such as those producing a fanaticism of rapid change and a fascination with novelties—technical, organisational, chemical, biological, and so forth—which insists on their application long before their long-term consequences are even remotely understood. In the simple question of how we treat the land, next to people our most precious resource, our entire way of life is involved, and before our policies with regard to the land will really be changed, there will have to be a great deal of philosophical not to say religious, change. It is not a question of what we can afford but of what we choose to spend our money on. If we could return to a generous recognition of meta-economic values, our landscapes would become healthy and beautiful again and our people would regain the dignity of man, who knows himself as higher than the animal but never forgets that *noblesse oblige.*

Merrill, Wisconsin PAUL GILK

REVIEW
MORRIS AND WILDE

A BOOK that has recently come our way is E. P. Thompson's *William Morris,* first published in 1955 by Merlin Press, with a revised edition by Pantheon in 1976. Morris is an illustrious ancestor of many of the promising currents in present-day thinking, chiefly in his advocacy and practice of communitarian simplicity and his championship of the crafts. Born in 1834, he early became the enemy of Victorian complacency and the anti-cultural effects of the industrial revolution. Thompson's life of Morris is a fascinating and formidable volume of more than eight hundred pages. Two paragraphs from a recent essay on Morris by Richard Boston (*Manchester Guardian Weekly,* April 1, 1984) outline some of the achievements of this extraordinary man before his death in 1896:

> He produced so much: seven volumes of poems, four of prose romances, as well as translations, lectures, more than 500 designs for wallpaper, textiles, carpets and tapestries, as well as countless pamphlets and speeches (the very last of which incidentally was at the first meeting of the Society for checking the Abuses of Advertising). But even more important than his own productions was his influence on those of others, and in ways that are very much alive today. It's not simply a matter of the Morris designs that you can still buy . . . or the typography of London Transport, or the high standards of book production which he set in the publications of the Kelmscott Press.
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> From Morris stem the arts and crafts movement and art nouveau and the garden cities. His ideas about education are still discernible in progressive schools like A. S. Neill's Summerhill and in state primary schools with their admirable emphasis on using both mind and hand (though it is regrettably less discernible in art schools than formerly). . . .
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> Morris is an awkward character because he makes, in his own words, "a direct challenge to the death to the present system of labour in civilized countries. That system, which I have called competitive commerce, is distinctly a system of war; that is of waste and destruction." That statement is just as relevant today as is Morris's remark that great schemes hang about neglected because of lack of money while money can always be found for wars.

Morris devoted a large part of his career to attempting to undo the work of Colbert, general administrator for Louis XIV, who had successfully separated masons from architects, designers from workers. Morris was master of ancient and medieval design. When it came to textiles, he said: "I think it would be better . . . that the man who actually goes through the technical work of counting the threads, and settling how the thing is to be woven, through and through, should do the greater part of the drawing." Soon after his marriage he established in Kent the undertaking which became Morris & Co., and known as the Firm, to make decorative furnishings and objects for the home, including stained glass, metal work, jewelry, and embroidery. By the 1870s, Thompson says, Morris's example had begun to "set the pace among wealthy circles where any claim was made to cultivation." Commercial success resulted. Morris was chief designer, coordinator, and business manager, but remained uncomfortable in having to serve the moneyed class, and was known to be brusque with the customers. Nor was he happy and satisfied with the reforms he had introduced in the design and decorative trades. He said in a letter in 1883:

> In spite of all the success I have had, I have not failed to be conscious that the art I have been helping to produce would fall with the death of a few of us who really care about it, that a reform in art which is founded on individualism must perish with the individuals who have set it going. Both my historical studies and my practical conflict with the philistinism of modern society have *forced* on me the conviction that art cannot have a real life and growth under the present system of commercialism and profit-mongering.

Ten years later, looking back on the Firm's accomplishments, he told a reporter that he had failed to help workmen to gain the satisfaction he had enjoyed in design and craftsmanship:

> "I could not do anything (or at least but little) to give this pleasure to the workman, because I should have had to change their methods of work so utterly

> that I should have disqualified them from earning a living elsewhere. You see I have got to understand thoroughly the manner of work under which the art of the Middle Ages was done, and that that is the *only* manner of work which can turn out popular art, only to discover that it is impossible to work in that manner in this profit-grinding society."

In 1883 Morris became a Socialist and developed into a veritable firebrand, almost an "agitator," except that his socialist dream was of the sort he described in his short Utopia, *News from Nowhere*, revealing an idyllic pastoral life.

Something of his spirit is suggested in an entry in his *Socialist Diary* in 1887: "I don't think I should ever make an economist even of the most elementary kind: but I am glad of the opportunity this gives me of hammering some Marx into myself." "This" was the preparation of an article on Marx for *Commonweal*, a magazine begun in 1885 with Morris as one of the editors.

The literary ancestors of Morris were Carlyle and Ruskin, with themes from the romantic poets. Thompson shows how these thinkers affected him, and he quotes from Morris:

> "My Socialism began," he wrote, "where that of some others ended, with an intense desire for complete equality of condition for all men." And "I became a Communist before I knew anything about the history of Socialism or its immediate aims." It was at this point that he turned to Marx and became "a practical Socialist"—"in short I was born again." But to be born again did not mean renouncing his own parentage. "Ideal" and "science" continued to co-exist and to argue with each other.

Thompson explains in a long postscript in the 1976 edition of his book that numerous critics have claimed he made Morris more of a Marxist than the record will justify, and he replies that most other writers soft-pedalled Morris's socialism. For the reader, the best thing to do is to read Thompson carefully, to see where Morris's inspiration came from, and how he differed in temper from Marx. There was always a communitarian anarchist in Morris, and it is fair to suggest that he would have little use for present-day communist states. Another value in reading Thompson's book would lie in recognition of the difference between nineteenth-century socialists and those of the present. The difference seems very great.

By contrast with Morris's genuine concern for the welfare and development of the common people, Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Man under Socialism* seems almost frivolous, although the two men, who were contemporaries, had in common their æsthetic devotion to beauty. Wilde's little book, now available in a 1984 edition by the Kerr Publishing Co. in Chicago, is the egoistic work of an artist who insists on uninhibited freedom for the creative spirit. He is playful throughout and cares little for historical support of his contentions. Yet there are extraordinary perceptions in the book which deserve to be remembered, much more valuable than his brief exposition of "theory," which can hardly be taken seriously, as for example:

> Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to attain to. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a wise man once said, many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind. All modes of governments are failures.

What then is Wilde's Socialism? It is the abolition of private property, nothing more, nothing less. Private property, Wilde declares, corrupted individualism, and once property is eliminated natural virtues will rule human life. Humans will spontaneously discover the right way to live. Wilde seemed to think that the revolutionary act of prohibiting ownership would somehow accomplish a change of taste in everyone.

COMMENTARY
WILDE LOGIC

IN justice to Oscar Wilde, we add here his defense of the unique claims in behalf of his sort of "socialism":

> It will, of course, be said that such a scheme as is set forth here is quite unpractical, and goes against human nature. . . . This is why it is worth carrying out, and that is why one proposes it. For what is a practical scheme? A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions. But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The conditions will be done away with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes.

Who will be able to make this sort of revolution, or at least get it started and persuade people to agree? He does not say. Yet in all his "arguments" there is a species of uncommon sense. Human nature *does* have to change, and adaptations of schemes to the existing ways of life *would* be a waste of energy.

In one place Wilde remarks in passing:

> Is this Utopian? A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.

Wilde wrote mostly plays and verse. His plays made him famous, and some of his poetry is unforgettable. We think of two poems in this category: "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and "Helas." The last of these is so good and so short that we reproduce it here:

> To drift with every passion till my soul
> Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play.
> Is it for this that I have given away
> Mine ancient wisdom and austere control?
> Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
> Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
> With idle songs for pipe and virelay,
> Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
> Surely there was a time I might have trod
> The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
> Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God:
> Is that time dead? lo! with a little rod
> I did but touch the honey of romance—
> And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
IN THE MAGAZINES

NOBODY can read all the good magazines that are now available, so that it is a mistake on principle to tell about more than a few of them and encourage people to subscribe. We have our favorites, but when we come across good stuff elsewhere we tell about others, too. At issue is the kind of reading one likes to have lying around the house. It is not that the young always read what their parents read, but that sooner or later they may be influenced by it. Magazines represent a level—various levels—of everyday thinking. The good magazines raise the level and are therefore a cultural resource. Some of them have wit and tone in the use of language, as for example the *Nation*, which is a weekly on the MANAS exchange list. In a back issue—for May 19 of this year—we found several composite *bon mots* with both wit and civilizing effect:

On the preparation for the twenty-third meeting of the Olympic Games:

> The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee has been selling logo-display rights and franchises in Olympic goods with such abandon that the whole event is beginning to look like a TV docu-drama about the last days of capitalism.

On the election result, earlier this year, in El Salvador:

> José Napoleon Duarte is probably the best President of El Salvador that money could buy. His purchase price, which runs into millions of dollars, was laid out by various American agencies and came in several forms: The C.I.A. bankrolled a Salvadoran labor organization promoting Duarte's candidacy; the State Department set up, paid for and manipulated the Salvadoran electoral system to favor Duarte President Reagan poured cash from his "discretionary fund" into Salvadoran pockets on the eve of the election, and the American media bought heavily into the deal with a spectacular propaganda offering for Duarte's cause.
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> They are not likely to get much of a return on their investment. Duarte is only the best of a very bad lot, and although his loyalty to his American mentors is solid, his competence to manage the Salvadoran crisis is not.

On the alarm caused by growing concern for health:

> General Foods, which sells almost 40 per cent of the coffee drunk in America (Maxwell House, Sanka, Brim, Yuban), has long been at war with Proctor & Gamble (Folgers, High Point), whose market share is just over 20 per cent. It has been a costly war for dozens of small roasters, who have been driven out of business by savage price competition. But now the behemoths and the smaller survivors have joined forces to combat a problem they share: the alarming number of young people who manage to get through a day with little or no coffee.

This story has a kicker at the end. If you get a coffee headache, it says, "you might think twice before reaching for an Anacin or an Excedrin. They contain caffeine too."

But the best of all in this issue of the *Nation* comes at the end of a long interview with Mary McCarthy, writer of distinction. After telling about her fruitful friendship with Hannah Arendt and Nicola Chiaromonte, she declared, "I realize that I'm extremely conservative." She went on:

> I think I've always been extremely conservative. I feel I'm the only one! I mean, the idea that someone like William Buckley is a conservative is just totally laughable. Nobody who believes in the capitalist system can possibly be a conservative, because it's a contradiction in terms.

The interviewer, Carol Brightman, asked why.

> Because of the growth ethic that is built into the system. Everything has to be in continual growth and presumed evolution. A true conservative wants to preserve something resembling a golden age. Not only would he be against nuclear power—that goes without saying—he would also be against crossbreeding.

She means the crossbreeding of plants, which is puzzling. She might ask Wes Jackson what he is doing at the Land Institute in Kansas, and why crossbreeding perennial grain plants is so important for conserving the land.

Another virtue peculiar to the *Nation* and a few other journals of social content is biographical material which serves to break up the stereotypes formed by American readers of the commercial press, which offers nothing else in the news about political figures overseas. An example is the series

of extracts from letters by Jan Jozef Lipski, Polish literary critic and historian who was awaiting trial in Warsaw on charges of high treason for statements made as a member of KOR (Committee for Defense of the Workers). His trial had been delayed because of "complications following open-heart surgery." In a letter written (to a Pole in America) in March, 1983, he said:

> We are a fairly humanitarian country: a dissident on a surgical table in London is preferred to his corpse in prison, and to the altogether superfluous noise bound to arise thereby. This is why I believe that even after the conviction I may be granted leave from prison and a passport in order to let me undergo surgery, if it is necessary.

As the *Nation* explains, Lipski's letters to Witold Jedlicki (the *Nation* contributor), while read by Polish censors, were not interfered with, and other KOR defendants, more than thirty, were free to express themselves in letters. Lipski wrote without fear, Jedlicki said because "nothing he could write to me could possibly implicate him further." He agreed to publication of his letters, as unable to harm him. A further extract from the letter quoted above shows the quality of thought of a Polish "dissident." It is about the views of a writer who believes that in theory the Palestinians have a right to self-determination, but thinks it must be prevented because it would "damage the foreign policy aims of the United States." Lipski said:

> I can say only that I am perfectly familiar with such attitudes. It is astounding indeed that such gentlemen never try to see things reflexively, never apply their standards to themselves. It is a tough problem because in the fire of battle, whoever happens to be our ally can usually count on our evaluative leniency and vice versa. This is why the world is becoming increasingly dichotomous, with the effect that otherwise decent and reasonable people are suddenly no longer capable of understanding that, for instance, a Latin American peasant may wish to stop laboring in serfdom for reasons of his own and not because one superpower tries to trip up another. Likewise, the Palestinians surely have reasons of their own for wishing to live at home rather than in refugee camps. But this dichotomy of the world does more than merely obstruct one's thinking and feeling. Suddenly, it is a knife pressed against your own throat. Then there is no longer any fun; intellect stops functioning; emotions become primitive, morality relative. You yourself know how it was: at first, we just "loved" the Khmer Rouge; later, it was the opposite. The point is that the average Pole's thinking about Cambodia followed the same pattern, only in reverse. (And I sometimes feel I come perilously close to resembling such an "average Pole.") And surely the case is not that of Cambodia alone.

The independent socialist quarterly, *Dissent*, for the spring of this year, had an article by the Russian writer, Andrei Sinyavsky, for years imprisoned for publishing abroad (under the name of "Abraham Tertz") opinions that could not be printed at home. He was eventually released and allowed to emigrate, and now writes about how it feels to be a dissident. He says at the end of his reflections:

> In conclusion, I only want to confirm my "dissent." Under an avalanche of abuse, this is easy. As an émigré I began to understand that I am not an enemy of the Soviet government only, but generally: I am an enemy—an enemy as such—metaphysically, in principle. Not that I was someone's friend first and then became his enemy. I am not anyone's friend, but only an enemy. . . .
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> I ask myself, how could I ever have sunk so low? After all, I was a nice boy at some point, like all people. But apparently society knows better than I what sort of man I am. After Soviet justice, if you will, there is émigré justice—and the same evidence. Of course, they do not throw you into a concentration camp. But a camp is not the most frightful thing in the world. There it is even pleasant compared to emigration. . . .
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> I am now interested in one question: Why did Soviet and anti-Soviet, émigré justice agree (agree literally) in their accusations of me, a Russian dissident? Most likely, because both of these organs of justice are just and therefore similar to each other. Who needs freedom? Freedom is a danger. Freedom is irresponsibility before the authoritarian collective. Watch out for it—freedom!

Finally, he asks: Didn't I want all this? And he says, "Yes, that is all true. Freedom! Writing—that is freedom."

FRONTIERS

The Manhattan Project—and Trimarans

THERE are, it seems, two kinds of people who are working against nuclear war. One kind is made up of individuals who are horrified by the prospect of such a war, aghast that the leaders of nearly all the nations are preparing for it in one way or another, and devoting most or all of their energies to generating public opinion to oppose policies founded on the threat of nuclear bombs. The other kind are working to create and foster the root and plant of a society which neither would nor could have such plans.

Probably we need both kinds of people, but our interest here is mostly in the second kind. Historically, the individuals who accomplish the most good are people more or less untouched by fear. They simply do what seems to them important and right. In the long run, they are the ones who will save us from nuclear war—if, that is, we *can* be saved—by designing another focus for our energies, radically different from the one we collectively have now. Our hero, Thoreau, put into a few words what may be the right response to all the talk of the dangers of nuclear war:

> We should wash ourselves clean of such news. Of what consequence, though our planet explode, if there is no character involved in the explosion? In health we have not the least curiosity about such events. . . . I would not run around a corner to see the world blow up.

Yet there is an intelligent instead of a hysterical reaction to fear, and now and then a book comes along (among the scores of volumes expressing opposition to plans for nuclear war) which gives an account of how the motivations behind anti-nuclear activism are shaped. One such book is Totten and Totten's *Facing the Danger* (Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886, $8.95), which tells the personal story of twenty well-known activists—such as Helen Caldicott, Ernest Steroglass, Barry Commoner, Ted Taylor, Gene LeRoque, Robert J. Lifton, and Anna Gyorgy—with biographical sketches made up of information obtained by interviews. 'Dr. Sternglass, for example, was moved in two ways: first, by his medical knowledge of what radiation will do to coming generations—a nuclear war may make it impossible for healthy children to be born; second, by an afternoon he spent with Albert Einstein, talking about his ideas on "electronic emissions from solids," but also about what had become the great physicist's primary concern:

> And so we talked about the bomb. We talked about this enormous, terrible guilt feeling that he had. He said, "We may never find a way to prevent the arms race, and we'll end up destroying us all." . . . I really got the sense of a man who felt that his whole life had been a failure. I think coloring everything was the fact that he had, of course, been the one who initiated the Manhattan Project through his letter urging Roosevelt to investigate the possibility that a bomb could be made from uranium.

The other biographies are equally interesting—telling how deep and informed convictions are built and then come into play. One learns from such accounts.

For thinking about the other kind of "activist"—the community-building ones—we might go out to sea with John Todd on his trimaran, a prototype sail-powered fishing vessel designed by Dick Newick, the *Edith Muma*, called a 1.5-ton Ocean Pickup. Todd was on his way from Bermuda to Guyana in South America to test the capabilities of his craft as a fishing vessel. The voyage, which had its adventures, also gave him time to reflect, as he tells in this spring's *CoEvolution Quarterly:*

> . . . I had been musing on the experiences that led to my being out in the middle of the Atlantic, headed south, to develop a sail-powered commercial fishing vessel in the first place. It really had begun when Nancy Jack Todd and I, in our travels in the South Pacific, Java Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean and Central America, came to understand some of the problems faced by fishermen throughout the tropics. Within the last few years, one fishing community after another has begun to suffer from a lack of spare engine parts and fuel, which are costly or in short supply. Modern fishing vessels are getting harder and harder to maintain. In Guyana some

> fishermen have to own five outboard engines to keep one running and in spare parts. . . . Many tropical countries, like Guyana, are essentially going broke, as they have little in the way of foreign exchange. Without hard currencies they are unable to import. The service networks as well as the industrial infrastructure of the fisheries are beginning to fall apart, in some cases rapidly. Around the world growing numbers of small-scale fishermen lack the wherewithal to ply their trade.

The Todds are the kind of people who, when they see problems of this sort, turn their talents to finding solutions. The trimaran seemed one good answer—a new type of working vessel requiring four characteristics:

> Our fishing boat had to be primarily wind-powered, but at the same time as fast as most of the motor boats it was to replace; the construction technologies had to be suitable for building in the tropics, within the communities themselves; the primary construction had to be derived from fast-growing trees that would be part of the reforestation projects we intended to promote; and finally, imported components must be less than 20 per cent of the overall costs of the vessel. Then, if tropical countries exported one in five of their vessels to hard-currency nations, they would be able to sustain their fishing fleets.

The description of how the Newick trimaran is made is also an excellent example of one of the meanings of intermediate technology—the use of modern sophisticated techniques and materials—in this case the molding, made possible by epoxies, of curved hulls that are "extremely strong, very light, rot resistant, and long lived." From the first the vessel was a success for fishing. After one trip the Guyana fisherman who went out with them in the pickup wanted to buy it. On subsequent trips they caught 300 pounds of marketable fish per hour. The economics of this sort of fishing sounds good. Todd says:

> An Ocean Pickup could net an owner/skipper close to $12,000 U.S. a year. . . . Fuel savings alone would pay for an Ocean Pickup in the 10-fathom, 20-mile distant fishery in as short a period as two years. In the middle ground fishery in depths of 20 fathoms, annual fuel savings over a 55-horsepower outboard would be close to $12,000 a year about the price of a Guyana-built Ocean Pickup.

Todd says that a larger, three-ton trimaran with more capacity would be adaptable to wider uses, and the Pickup could be built in two sizes by using panels made in the same master mold. He concludes:

> Part of my work in Guyana was to try to assemble a cast of characters from the government, the international development agencies, and the private sector to build a fleet of Pickups. The role of Ocean Arks International will be to provide the designs and training in the construction methods. We would like to do more experimental fishing as well. Robert Williams, the executive director of Guyana Fisheries Limited, has been quoted in the press as saying that he would like to see at least 200 Pickups built in Guyana. However, the wheels of government grind slowly anywhere, and in that Guyana is no exception. My hope is that within a year or two the Ocean Pickup will be a common sight on Guyana's fertile sea.
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> As I write, Dick Newick and I are getting ready to sail the *Edith Muma* to Costa Rica, via Trinidad and Tobago Curacao, and the Spanish Main, a voyage of 2000 miles. In Costa Rica we will join Bill McLarney [co-founder with Todd of New Alchemy Institute] and his colleagues on the Talamanca coast. There they have already planted groves of boatwood trees—albizia, sesbania, eucalyptus, and melina. The melina has grown to boat-wood size in less than three years. Preliminary tests show it to be compatible with epoxies.

How big is the Pickup? Thirty-two feet long. It weighs a ton, but can carry a load of a ton and a half. John Todd is president of Ocean Arks International (10 Shanks Pond Road, Falmouth, Mass. 02536) and Nancy Todd edits their journal, *Annals of Earth Stewardship,* which a gift of $10 will bring to readers.

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11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

DIANE LAWSON, Mgr.