

## THE INVISIBLE MOMENTUM

NATURALLY enough, the sweeping implications of the popular appeal of writers like E. F. Schumacher and Amory Lovins are generating critical response. When the governor of the most populous state in the country (California) openly declares his sympathy with Schumacher's thinking in *Small Is Beautiful* and endorses Amory Lovins' energy program calling for "a shift from highly centralized energy systems toward small non-nuclear systems that draw on renewable resources," far-reaching changes in public opinion are evidently on the way.

The embarrassment to the critics of such ideas and proposals is that they make a great deal of social and moral sense along with their practical appeal. During the President's conference with some forty governors last July, Jerry Brown objected to reliance on nuclear energy by saying:

The chief threat to the democratic fabric is the centralization of power in the public and private sectors . . . the way to slow that down is through a policy that emphasizes small business and individual entrepreneurs. And that goes counter to the big-bang mega-psychology that presently has the greater momentum.

It's all very well to proliferate nuclear plants all over the landscape, but the opposition is sufficiently strong to make nuclear power very expensive. . . . People who think they're going to be able to build nuclear plants in a couple of years in virtually every community in the country are not taking real account of the strong feelings people have against nuclear plants.

These views were attributed to Governor Brown by the *Community Planning Report* for July 18, which also said that at this conference Brown "announced his support of a California bill that would provide a 50% income tax credit of up to \$3,000 for the purchase of solar energy equipment." (Passed and signed by the Governor on Sept. 26)

A spokesman for the status quo given space in the August *Harper's* is Samuel Florman, an engineer who contends that such "soft" technologies will cost a lot of money. And what, he asks, will happen when the devices break down?

Lovins assures us that the solar collectors or windmills in our homes will be serviced by our friendly, independent neighborhood mechanic, a prospect which must chill the blood of anyone who has ever had to have a car repaired or tried to get a plumber in an emergency. As for Americans becoming self-reliant craftsmen, as Schumacher assures us we can, this idea sounds fine in a symposium on the human condition, but it overlooks the enormous practical and psychological difficulties that stand in its way. The recently attempted urban homesteading program, for example, was based on this very appealing concept. Abandoned houses were to be turned over to deserving families at no cost, just as land was made available to homesteaders in the last century. The program failed because most poor families simply were not capable of fixing up the houses.

How accurate are these easy generalizations, so unbecoming to an engineer? It happens, for example, that the *Saturday Review* for July 23 devoted its first two articles to the achievements of the urban homesteading program in the South Bronx of New York City. There a young Puerto Rican, Danny Soto, has organized the Peoples Development Corporation, of which the *SR* writer says:

Visionary as well as practical, the PDC has developed a list of projects that reaches far beyond what is thus far its one tangible accomplishment—the rehabilitation, into 28 apartments and several common rooms, of an abandoned tenement at 1186 Washington Avenue. Among the projects: creating a small but leafy park, now half complete; forming a food cooperative; building a "solar greenhouse" and, most important, "rehab-ing" additional tenements in the vicinity of 1186.

When you call a project a failure and leave out such delighting facts, you are not being very accurate. The entrepreneur in this case is twenty-two years old, and there may be others like him, here and there. Local rehabilitation is only now catching on, and if it does no more than restore some do-it-yourself morale to the inhabitants of slum areas in America's cities, to say nothing of decent, healthful conditions, these urban homesteaders will have accomplished for at least a few people what big institutions and relief agencies have failed at for more than a century. Already they are showing how it can be done.

It is difficult to see why Mr. Florman should find the cost of manufacturing "millions of new mechanisms" so objectionable. After all, we have millions of people in America, and if the move toward decentralization and a larger measure of subsistence and autonomous economics will make the people more independent of enormous, impersonal systems (that may break down within a decade or two), what more sensible manufacturing program could be imagined? These "new mechanisms" will not be the output of static, "no-growth" theory, but the vital flow of growth in the right direction. And as for the "crew of competent men" who wheel into action to set things right when big systems collapse, it was the comparatively small community of Bronxville, in New York, which didn't need emergency repairs during the blackout which paralyzed that city for close to twenty-four hours last summer. Bronxville has its own small generating plant which operates independently of Con Edison's power grid.

Mr. Florman seems to think that the obstacles to "Americans becoming self-reliant craftsmen" are more than we can overcome, even though we were all, once, exactly that. What, after all, is high technology but the technical evolution of craftsmanship? Present-day craftsmanship means aiming technology in the right direction. For example, on top of a twelve-family rehabilitated tenement on East 11th Street in New York a

windmill erected cooperatively by the residents generates some of the electricity they consume, and the New York Public Service Commission has ruled that Consolidated Edison would have to purchase "any excess power the East 11th Street mill fed into the utility's system." Meanwhile, according to the *Christian Science Monitor* for Aug. 11, what is claimed to be the largest windmill in the world is operating on Cuttyhunk Island, off the coast of Bedford, Mass., and the 150 residents of the island hope that eventually they will need no more diesel to operate their generators.

Stories like this one come out practically every week in the *Monitor* and other leading newspapers. Editors sense the public interest in such developments, and a great many Americans whose Yankee ingenuity is peaking are inventing new intermediate technology devices and testing their efficiency and economy. The talent level in such undertakings may be very high. For example, some scientific technicians working at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena have formed the Alternative Consumer Energy Society which offers reference material, information, and advice on choosing solar energy systems for home use. The members are ready to give help to do-it-yourselfers who want to make or install their own systems, according to a report in *ITLA*, the newsletter of the Intermediate Technology group in Los Angeles. Meanwhile, an active member of the latter group, Jock de Swart, is turning an old house in Venice, Calif., into a model home demonstration of various intermediate technology applications.

The ad hoc character of such reports is explained by the fact that you can't organize the spontaneous qualities of human beings which bring such developments into being. The nature of the change going on requires that it move forward on independence, elbow-room, and the unpredictable resources of human imagination. Over-all planning would probably get in the way. This is a factor wholly neglected by Mr.

Florman—the factor of human potentiality, human adaptability, in combination with a sort of commitment that has been missing from American life for a long time. This spirit is at last coming to the surface once again. Also involved is faith in the inner longings and latent capacities of human beings to support and manage their own lives. Here the idea that "small is beautiful" means simply that there is an appropriate scale of everyday human activity which permits and encourages the flowering of normal human virtues—qualities which the managerial imperatives of bigness usually suppress.

The fundamental claim of men like Sdbumacher and Lovins is that the way we live now, in the grip of big systems and overgrown technology, is an *aberration*. The external control imposed by the necessities of bigness is the omnipresent signature of the aberration. As a result, our lives are increasingly subjected to the rule of the market place and the rule of the machine—neither of which has any awareness of distinctive human motives. As Karl Polanyi pointed out in "Our Obsolete Market Mentality," we have adopted the rule of the market place as the law of human life, and meanwhile the rule of the machine has become the designer of policy, as Carlyle predicted.

But man is *not* a machine, and the establishment of economic objectives as the controlling factor in private as well as public decision has "fatefully warped Western man's understanding of himself." This is indeed the aberration—called Materialism by moralists—which has pervaded our historical period, and from which the present generation of pioneers and reformers is trying to help us recover. The recovery depends upon thinking of ourselves as moral and social intelligences, not economic units or consumers. Polanyi puts it well in *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies* (Beacon, 1971):

Aristotle was right: man is not an economic, but a social being. He does not aim at safeguarding his individual interest in the acquisition of material possessions, but rather at ensuring social good will,

social status, social assets. . . . *Man's economy is, as a rule, submerged in his social relations.* The change from this to a society which was, on the contrary, submerged in the economic system was an entirely novel development. . . .

In actual fact, man was never as selfish as the theory demanded. Though the market mechanism brought his dependence upon material goods to the fore, "economic" motives never formed with him the sole incentive to work. In vain he was exhorted by economists and utilitarian moralists alike to discount in business all other motives than "material" ones. On closer investigation, he was still found to be acting on remarkably "mixed" motives, not excluding those of duty toward himself and others—and, maybe, secretly enjoying work for its own sake.

In other words, in writing *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, Mr. Schumacher opened the closet in which the human qualities of human beings had been shut up for so long. He attacked the aberration headon. Bigness no doubt has a place in some human undertakings. It is sometimes appropriate. This is made clear by an excellent but seldom remembered book, Lyman Bryson's *The Next America* (Harper, 1952). But the stranglehold of bigness as a rule of life should now be evident to all. Take war, which everyone knows is stupid, cruel, wrong, and results in uncontrollable evil. Yet as Alva Myrdal says in *The Game of Disarmament*, "Those who have power have no will to disarm." This means the superpowers—the big powers! It follows that so long as there are super powers, there can be no real peace because the blind necessities of bigness rule against it.

The case for smallness in states or national organization has been so well stated in recent years—by Leopold Kohr, for one, in *The Overdeveloped Nations*, and by H. R. Shapiro, in *The Bureaucratic State*—that it hardly needs repetition here. But what might be done is to present some historical evidence showing, as Polanyi says, that the excessive preoccupation with economic acquisition is abnormal, an aberration. In a recent paper, "The Nature of Chinese Society—a Technical Interpretation"

(*Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. XII, Nos. 1 & 2, 1974), Joseph Needham draws a comparison between the history of China and that of the Western world. He begins with the impact of Western invention:

Completed by Watts, the steam-engine brought the industrial revolution into being, spearheaded by the textile factories, especially cotton, and gave rise to the steamship and the railway. The steam-engine then reacted back on science with the development of energetics and thermodynamics. In turn the eighteenth-century science of electricity found employment as electrical engineering, able to provide cheap and convenient artificial light and tractive power from central generating stations. Finally came petroleum engineering, also giving light at first, and lubricants also, but then with the internal combustion engine affording simple prime movers that could work unattended, and drive in all directions the small carriages with which we are so familiar. Coal, iron and oil were thus the real wealth of the Western world, far more so than gold and silver, and the peoples of the Western world were fortunate in that vast supplies of these natural endowments were to be found under their territories. . . .

With the above expose as a background, it might seem that the world ought to have advised China to separate herself from her past and copy the West in earnest. In fact such proposals gained currency some fifty years ago, and were even accepted by a handful of Chinese intellectuals. History however has proved their complete absurdity.

China eschewed the concept that ownership of property carries an inalienable right, not because her philosophers were incapable of conceiving the notion, but because the idea itself was incompatible with China's physical environment, already manifesting its effects more than two thousand years ago.

The course followed by China, perhaps less self-consciously than Mr. Needham seems to suggest, gives ample illustration that it is quite possible for even a large population to subordinate the economic motives to other considerations:

China abstained from developing an independent judiciary, not because the Chinese were by nature contemptuous of law, but because in their history no stalemate between equal citizens of city-States, or kings or feudal barons, calling for the arbitration of the jurist, ever developed. The lack of

capitalist enterprise among the Chinese in late medieval and modern China was perhaps due to the conviction that political stability was a much greater good than economic gain. To be sure, Chinese merchants never lacked the virtues of initiative, honesty, thrift, capable accountancy and ingenuity, as has been abundantly shown by their success as business men, outstanding beyond all their neighbors. . . . What this background really indicates is that the solutions of China's problems are far more likely to be found from readjustments of classical motifs within, rather than imitations of the world outside. . . . Today the problem confronting the Chinese is the same that confronts the rest of the world, how to find a reconciliation of economic rationality with other qualities of life. What will make the Chinese solution different is China's unique historical background, and everyone will have something to learn from it.

If, with a little effort, we are able to look at China's past with unprejudiced eyes, such historical studies may free us from the ideological assumption that the formulas of the Western economists are an expression of Natural Law, and thus open the way to recognition of the endless possibilities of a common life deliberately based on organic reciprocities instead of ruthlessly acquisitive goals. Actually, the seeming impossibility of the changes proposed by such writers as Schumacher and Lovins results from a comparison of present conditions with objectives based on very different conceptions of human and natural good. This comparison ignores the incalculably productive effects of small-scale change, moving step by step, altering attitudes, however imperceptibly at first, until, finally, ideas once regarded as ridiculously utopian become the spontaneously chosen goals of the majority.

Our fundamental problem lies in the way we think. Consider, for example, the following criticism by a reader of environmental and ecological proposals:

When one thinks through any of their arguments, whatever their wisdom, one usually sees that the thing they are advocating won't be done, because it would be against a financial interest. It would, let us say, reduce production of something. That would create unemployment. Ecology is an example. Oil, among other things, ruins the

landscape and poisons the sea. But you have to sink the wells because they create jobs. You have to sell the oil, although that mortgages the future of the planet, to make a profit. . . . As soon as the national product stops increasing, unemployment starts rising and the welfare state has no money for pensions schools, etc. It's the same with technology. . . .

If the reformers thought in the same terms as their critics, change would indeed be impossible. But the advocates do *not*, although quite able to, think in terms of the abstract equations of economic process. They recognize that massive and sudden change would require all the anti-human methods of control which have created so many of present-day problems. They suggest and undertake step-by-step improvements and reforms, being aware that cooperative attitudes take time to spread. Actually, the United States is likely to be the best place for such changes to go on—as a kind of show-case for the rest of the world—simply because the country is so big, with plenty of open spaces for experiment and innovation.

Reduced mass production would indeed create unemployment, but a return to labor-intensive modes of production would also give a lot of people more satisfying work. An increase in subsistence gardening would make people less fearful of losing their jobs, and the tensions which periodic depressions produce would be less likely to lead to violence. There would of course be many areas where these balances would not apply—the inner cities, for example—but when the idea of change begins to catch on, as it has in some depressed urban areas, the inventiveness of a few people determined to move toward self-reliance and autonomy creates model after model for their neighbors to follow. The reformers, in short, are relying on the potentialities of human beings to rediscover the principles of a good and natural life. The impressive response to this faith is recorded in such journals as *CoEvolution Quarterly*, *Rain*, *Self-Reliance*, the publications of the New Alchemists, and dozens of other new magazines. These papers have subscribers, their

ideals have constituents. The reformers are betting on the synergistic balances of nature and the moral as well as practical intuitions of human beings. While scientific and technological and marketing abstractions may seem a better guide to "reality" for those who have lost touch with the way nature works, and are therefore unable to recognize the force of the natural argument for change, the change is nonetheless going on before our eyes.

## *REVIEW*

### A KIND OF THINKING

IN 1914, Evan Thomas, younger brother of Norman Thomas, having graduated from Princeton in 1919, was attending Union Theological Seminary in preparation for a career in the clergy. The outbreak of World War I led him to continue his theological studies in Scotland. He wanted to be close to the war, to find out what it meant and what he should do about it. The period of his life which then began—a little more than four years—is the subject of *The Radical "No,"* edited by Charles Chatfield, and published at \$19.50 by Garland Publishing (New York and London). It is a book of the letters written by Evan Thomas, mostly to his brother and his mother, during that time. A concluding section gives some of his writings concerned with opposition to war.

Evan Thomas became an absolute pacifist—one who rejected not only military service but conscription as well. He tells in these letters why he took this stand. While he didn't like the term "absolute" for the reason that all human life is involved in relativities, the adjective serves to identify the quality of his determination. This is the real content of the book—the driving integrity of a mind seeking the right decisions. At first, as the editor says, his thinking has a somewhat theological cast, while later his expressions are essentially humanistic in character, but these changes did not affect the constant of integrity.

When America entered the war in April, 1917, Thomas and some of his companions (they had been working for the Y. M. C. A.) came back to America to challenge conscription as pacifists and conscientious objectors. In due time he was drafted. After his reasons for rejecting military service were found unacceptable, he was tried by a court-martial for refusing an order (to eat) and sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor. He began this term as a political prisoner at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

After the war and his release, Thomas was at a loss to know what to do with his life. While attracted to the cause of labor, there was too much "manipulation," he found, in the work of a union organizer, and he realized that he cared more for helping individuals than working for theoretical goals. "Revolution" of the familiar political sort seemed to him to require belief in dogma, discipline, and organization. Reflecting on these requirements, he wrote:

They are the things that will make for success with the mass of people; but my scepticism keeps asking me: what can that accomplish for the mass of people? It may be successful in that it some day comes into power, but will the mass of people be any better off? And I have no implicit faith that the answer is yes. On the other hand, I think it more likely that the answer is no. And yet I know that if I am to be a revolutionist and be in any way effective it is only some such organization as that of the communists that could make me effective. I lack the strength to do anything effective alone, and the liberals weary me to death.

So he wandered around, trying different jobs, working in a lumber camp for a time, and as a seaman on a freighter. Eventually his sense of purpose came into focus in the idea of a medical career. He was nearly forty when he began medical school in 1929. Upon graduation he specialized in venereal disease; as his biographer says, he was "ministering to the twentieth-century equivalent of lepers." He joined the faculty of the New York University College of Medicine and pioneered the use of penicillin for treatment of syphilis and gonorrhea. Of his subsequent career, Mr. Chatfield writes:

His practice was a kind of social ministry, one which met human needs where they were without moralizing and without judging them against some absolute scale of social values. Thomas' later life was not without its personal difficulties, even a measure of anguish; but it gave him, too the kind of personal fulfilment he had sought since 1914.

As the Second World War approached, Thomas renewed his ties with pacifists in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the War Resisters League. He devoted his time especially to the W. R. L. because of

his great sympathy for the nonreligious objector for whom it was an organizational home and because he had difficulty in expressing himself in the religious language of the Fellowship. He recalled in print the witness of the C. O.'s of World War I and he tried to explain them to the young objectors facing a possible crisis of their own. When conscription was legislated again he accepted the chairmanship of the Metropolitan Board for Conscientious Objectors. In this role he held meetings, intervened with federal authorities, and counseled C. O.'s. In particular, he tried to explain pacifism as a positive faith in the terms he himself had hammered out as a young man.

Evan Thomas died in 1974 at the age of eighty-four. He was a man of vision, and few illusions. The letters to his family, which reveal how he "hammered out" his conscious convictions, on which he then acted, help the reader to understand why it was that, during the years of World War II, Evan Thomas was a power and an inspiration to the young men who had decided they would not, could not, kill. He gave the whole weight of his being to the needs of the men who went into the camps or who went to prison, and to the eighteen-year-olds who would be confronted by draft boards. The latter were little more than boys, yet expected to offer articulate testimony as to their convictions, in a form which would satisfy antagonistic and narrowly bureaucratic minds.

What was the reasoning which supported Thomas' dedication? He wrote in *Fellowship* for April, 1941:

What, then, can pacifists expect to accomplish in the midst of the totalitarianism of war? They can keep alive the spark of freedom and bear witness to truth in the sense of truthfulness. Of what social value is this? It represents the only way I can find of attempting to leaven and soften the collective lump which is crystallizing or has crystallized in totalitarian molds. There are in general two ways by which pacifists hope to accomplish this. One is the refusal to cooperate with the worst evils of governmental tyranny and the other, which necessarily involves the former, is to set an example of a freer and better way of life. Neither of these methods can actually overthrow a totalitarian government unless large numbers of people use them.

But to say that they cannot or will not leaven the lump in any manner implies that the way we have chosen has no social value. Even in the midst of totalitarianism, pacifists by their belief in truth as truthfulness and love as brotherhood, at whatever cost to themselves, can act as a ferment within the body politic and thereby soften the inhumanity of governmental bureaucracy and even change its forms. Repudiation of this possibility represents a pessimism which is understandable but its implications are too profound and variable for analysis here. Most pacifists believe in the leavening process.

The potency of the ferment in which we believe depends less on its quantity than on its quality or purity. Individual seers and saints have never achieved Utopia but they have leavened society in innumerable ways. Most of our constructive gains in culture have come through them. One does not have to be a great seer or saint to oppose war, but pacifists must be driven by an inner flame which can be called divine if anything can. This does not urge them to sacrifice necessarily for the sake of their own souls but for the salvation of the world. Salvation in this sense represents no ideological Utopia, but freedom for life to go on. In other words, individual integrity cannot be separated entirely from its leavening effect on the social organism.

The value of Mr. Chatfield's book lies in its continuing illustration of how that "inner flame" animated the life of a man who practiced and upheld high human ideals during a very painful and difficult period of history. The quality of his striving—which gives a light on the impartiality of mind and generosity of spirit which entered into everything he did—becomes manifest in a letter to Norman in 1915. A professor in the Scottish Divinity School had wanted him to do a survey of social conditions in Edinburgh, and to interview all the pastors and representatives of other charitable groups concerning actual conditions in the city. Commenting on this proposal, he said:

. . . I don't know what practical value such a survey would be. There are many such surveys made of places elsewhere—aren't there?

Personally I am up against it to know how to make my own life count for anything in this world. I don't know what work I can do. There is always the question of after this year, then what?

Thomas' views on the weaknesses and inadequacy of organization as the chief means to human good were shaped by personal observation and experience while working through the Scottish churches and later the Y. M. C. A. He wrote to his mother in 1916:

It is unfortunately true that the church has ever been the keenest in the persecution of the prophets. But the church can never be a pioneer; it never has been one and never will be one, for it is composed of the majority of the respectable, more or less satisfied middle class, the very backbone of the social order of things as they are. . . . Individual and state morality are necessarily two different things, for in the state the majority must rule. But the only way to bring the majority up to your ideal for the state is to live true to your ideal and take the consequences if the majority believe it right to persecute you. If your ideal is true your suffering persecution will make it shine all the brighter in the darkness; if it is false it will die with you. . . .

That is exactly how it worked out in the life of Evan Thomas. He was true to his ideal—to his conception of how to contribute to the genuine good of mankind—and saying that he suffered "persecution" at the hands of the American government, along with other conscientious objectors of similar conviction, puts very mildly what happened to the war resisters at Fort Leavenworth.

Thomas was never doctrinaire, never self-righteous. He could see merit and decency in men utterly opposed to his view. His criticism of those with whom he disagreed was mainly expressed in the way he lived his own life, by where he gave his energies, and by the principles he was faithful to.



**COMMENTARY**  
**E. F. SCHUMACHER**

IT is easy to see in retrospect how the forces of change work. Needed is the conjunction of liberating ideas with oppressive circumstances and influences. Copernicus, Galileo, Bruno, and Newton ignited the awakening mind of Europe and set going the great Movement called the Enlightenment. Rousseau and Locke, along with others, dramatized the horizons of a social order that struggled into being at the end of the eighteenth century, while Paine brought home to Americans the great truths of equality, freedom, and self-determination.

When great ideas conjoin with widely felt needs, changes may be quite rapid. During the period of transformation, there is inevitable resistance in many quarters, but as H. T. Buckle remarked, after a few generations "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 lead article in this issue suggests that we are now in the midst of a great transformation. The best known standard-bearer of the needed changes has for several years been E. F. Schumacher, a man who put his finger on the structural cause of economic disorders that increasingly beset the modern world. He was an effective iconoclast toward illusions that have for generations directed the energies of Western man on a course set for multiplying disaster. At the same time he was able to show both the theory and the practice of another way of economic life which would simply mop up and eliminate most of the apparently insoluble problems of the time.

His *Small Is Beautiful* has achieved record-breaking circulation. His idea of ideal economic relationships and thinking is set down in a brief chapter, "Buddhist Economics"—probably the most appealing and immediately persuasive of all

his writings. He wrote dozens of articles, all knowledgeable, convincing, and inspiring, many of which appeared as monthly contributions to the British *Resurgence*.

Most notable is the fact that the extraordinary response to Schumacher's appeal is in all cases *voluntary*. He addressed free people, inviting them to *use* some of the freedom they still have for moving in the right direction. While he died suddenly on Sept. 4, the influence of his ideas, so brilliantly launched, will go on and on.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves A REVEALING TEST

WE had a letter recently from a businessman who thinks a great deal about the value of economic enterprise as a vehicle of education—not academic education, but the formation of character. Can, he wondered, the qualities needed be anticipated by some sort of "testing"?

The question seems legitimate. He wanted people able or likely to learn. Whatever one thinks about the morality of current economic enterprise, the fact remains that behind all the distortions of acquisitive motive and the excesses of profit-seeking there is indispensable service in the production of food, clothing, and shelter, and all such functions, therefore, have an educational role. As people grow to maturity, they need to develop a sense of meaning for their lives, and they need to acquire the skills of self-support.

Most of the kind of testing of students we do nowadays corrupts the subtle relationships between meaning and skill. The psychological tests are mostly concerned with the ability to manipulate symbols, while the tests intended to measure the retention of cultural information are largely exercises in superficial intellectuality. F. R. Leavis put it well in *Education & the University*:

"Nothing," says Dr. Meiklejohn, "is more revealing of the purpose underlying a course of study than the nature of the examination given at its close."

Judged in this light, the underlying purpose of the English Tripos is to produce journalists. Not that the reading for it doesn't give intelligent men opportunities for educating themselves. But distinction of intelligence, though manifested in a special aptitude for the field of study, will not bring a man a distinguished place on the class-list unless he has also a journalistic ability—a gift of getting promptly off the mark several times in the course of three hours, and a fluency responsive to the clock. Such a facility is not the profit towards which a serious critical training—a serious education of any

kind—tends, and the intelligent and sensitive, having become more and more aware of the difficulty of thinking anything with precision and delicacy and of writing anything that they can allow to stand, have commonly formed habits that handicap them badly in the examination-room.

The confirmation of this judgment of the examination system is generally available in the dominance of the "media" over so much of our lives, and it is specifically verified by medical educators who have found that the medical students who earn high marks in medical school examinations usually turn out to be mediocre or bad physicians, while the best doctors are often those who seemed to do poorly in school. The schools, in short, have things backwards when it comes to preparing people for life.

Yet we are not entirely without evidence concerning the influence of what we call "education." If we ask, not about the rating of individual students, but what sort of education has the best result, some answers can be found. One such answer is available in the experience of a man who, after twenty-five or thirty years of being out in the world, attended a class reunion at Dartmouth College. A few weeks earlier he had met on invitation with alumni (all ages) of St. John's College who had responded to an invitation to come together to honor Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, the Platonist teachers who, under the inspiration of Robert M. Hutchins, put together the program and discipline of a college committed to learning from the thought of great minds, as found in great books.

Following is the report comparing these two reunions.

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Dartmouth, where I matriculated almost fifty years ago, is a serene and hospitable campus, alive with natural amenities: trees, water, wilderness, remoteness. It promotes a devotion to old college days that often approaches zealotry. At reunion, campus tents and riverside picnic grounds hum with happy fraternity. Beer is drunk, wives,

children, and grandchildren are exhibited, words flow.

This was the condition at the reunion I attended twenty years ago, and presumably it still prevails. It was pleasant to greet old companions. Often the incessant talk turned to careers and accomplishments. All of us were veterans of the Depression. Many had weathered the storm and were in safe haven at Minicorp or Magnacorp. Some were already renowned and deferred to as corporate moguls from whom all could learn lessons. Discussions of how to make money attracted a good crowd. Other corners of the breakfast table concentrated on sports: golf handicaps, number of Dartmouth football games regularly attended, sailing and scuba diving as hobbies.

There were tales and pictures of children—Little League, pregnancies, flunk-outs, high-school halfbacks, and, best of all, those few already or about to be enrolled at Dartmouth.

A favorite professor joined us at lunch. That was the closest any of us came, to the best of my knowledge, to recovering any of the educational content of our four years together.

Toward the end of the second day, with the important class dinner still to be held, when the coach would speak on football prospects and the president would speak on increased enrollment, and awards would be made for diligent fundraising and other services to the old school, I left. I was ashamed to admit it to myself, but I left because I was bored. It had been forty-eight hours of anecdotage and glossolalia. Many years before we had shared dormitories and classes; we had no shared educational experience. I began to recall another reunion I had attended a month before. I listened in as a visitor, not an alumnus of St. John's.

It was a more or less spontaneous affair, initiated to honor Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, re-founders of St. John's, which twenty years earlier had adopted a Great Books program

as the core of its curriculum. It was held, not on campus, but on the lawn of a house near New York City. The reunion lasted only five or six hours. Its likeness to the Dartmouth affair was limited to the beer and sandwiches. The honorees, both of whom had left St. John's in the interim, described briefly their subsequent wanderings and wonderings. Barr reflected on world government, on whether it was feasible to release intellectual energy with money, and on his belief in truth and the possibility of finding it.

As he spoke I gazed across the three or four dozen reunioners, sitting, kneeling, lying across the lawn. Here were businessmen, teachers, an accountant, a television celebrity, lawyers, a housewife or two, a book critic, others. All listened intently. A few took notes.

Buchanan said that he had five questions to be answered: Do you believe in and trust your intellect? Have you become your own teacher? Do you recognize that you have been and always are your own teacher? Do you consider that there are knowledges and truths beyond your grasp? Do you accept the idea of the world?

"I think," said Buchanan, "that the questions are valid, and I draw a drastic consequence, namely, that we need a national system of education, from university to kindergarten, and that it should aim at the intellectual confidence which would dare to act freely, and go wherever it pleases, and ought to go."

The balance of the afternoon was occupied by discussion. With only one or two exceptions, everyone joined in. Buchanan's questions were the trunk of the conversation, from which many branches shot forth. There was some waving of arms and shouting. There were patient corrections of misunderstandings. There was no jargon, though a good deal of citing of philosophers, scientists, poets, and historians. The St. John's alumni talked to one another. Their terms and references were familiar to one another. Thirty or forty minutes were used in trying to get clear the contemporary pertinence of the Preamble

to the Constitution. Would Federal direction of education be constitutional? It was a near approximation of *The Dialogue*: serious people talking seriously to one another about serious matters.

Those few hours were an exceptional experience. It was not my introduction to serious discourse, but it was the first time it had ever occurred to me that it could be the chief and only product of a college reunion.

The situation is plain enough. Dartmouth has a centrifugal effect, slinging its alumni into the world equipped with information and polish. St. John's is centripetal in effect, drawing its inhabitants inward toward the cultivation of the intellect's capabilities and the unfolding of man's unique qualities. The former leads to reunions that have no common language, no common intellectual understandings, only chat about four social years together in congenial surroundings. The latter leads to the result achieved by St. John's alumni, when, as Buchanan said, "in no time at all a conversation sprang up like fresh water from an old spring, in a world where there are fewer and fewer conversations."

I wonder whether it is too much to expect that a liberal-arts college should equip its sons and daughters with some abiding intellectual concerns, a method of considering them, and a common language in which to discuss them.

## FRONTIERS

### Who Knows Enough to Plan?

IT is very hard to give up the practice of deciding what other people need and then trying to persuade them to agree with you. The first step in recovery from this habit is usually the realization that people who need help seldom benefit unless they "participate" in what is done for them. This, however, may not be a real change, but only an egoistic substitute for change. In the July 18 issue of *Community Planning Report* (655 National Press Bldg. , Washington, D. C. 20045), Douglas Carmichael is quoted on "participatory" community planning:

A group of planners come in and do a lot of things with photos and charts, and interview people in the street. They form groups and meet for six weeks, to find out what "they" want. "We're going to have a mall here, what do you think should be in it?"

It strikes me that the community people don't really participate. The characters who are going to make a killing off all this—store owners, etc.—are treated as people behind the scenes, but not the community. The communities are the people in the scenes, but not the community. The communities are the people in the street, the powerless, who are not allowed to raise the question of whether a mall is a good thing; and if so, whether *they* should get the jobs to build it. . . .

A planning idea, Dr. Carmichael says, needs testing in two ways: First, "How do you know that's what people really want to do?" Second, "For whom will the project generate income?"

Medical needs are an example:

When a group wants to do medical planning in the community they go round and ask: "What kind of medical services do you want?" It's a long list, always longer than what is being provided. The outcome is that professionals will be brought in and funded to provide those services. That's an example of where it looks like the community is benefitting, but the real benefits are going to the planner who now has a guaranteed market. The increased costs in terms of taxes, insurance, benefits, etc., aren't put into the diagram. . . .

The situation is far worse in the "emerging countries." You go into a country with a development process and you want to have participation to help plan family planning. It's almost always done in a situation where people don't want it. The purpose of the participation is to overcome their resistance and bring them into something in such a way that they can never question whether this is something they really want or not.

Hardest of all the lessons to learn is that we don't even know what other people *ought* to want. On the other hand, the assumption that all we have to do is "ask" them about it, may be equally at fault.

What then does one do? We know. of no better example than the policy of the Intermediate Technology Development Group in London, founded by E. F. Schumacher. "We never go anywhere to help unless we're invited," Dr. Schumacher says. When a community—or a nation—says it wants to do something and needs help in deciding how to do it, the panels of ITDG study the problem and make proposals. The moral, here, is that the initiative must come from the people.

A useful study of the difference between self-inspired planning and the kind of "participation" here objected to is available in Sugata Dasgupta's *Social Work & Social Change* (Porter Sargent, 1968). The result of his field comparison of two kinds of village planning is very similar to Dr. Carmichael's conclusion, which is:

Typically, in a planning process in a village, planners come in and put up signs that say they want to talk to people about what they want. But only the most vocal and forward speak out. If you think of the whole person as being the participant, you have to find a way for them to be vocal about concerns they don't know they have. You can't just come in and say, "Do you want more roads, medicine, etc. ?" That's not participation, because they don't understand the total impact.

Participatory planners like to believe that people know what they want, but this is demonstrably not true. Real participation requires educating the people who are going to participate about what their real options are.

Gandhi, who understood this well, spoke of what such help actually involves:

We have to tackle the triple malady which holds our villages fast in its grip: (1) want of corporate sanitation; (2) deficient diet; (3) inertia. . . . They (the villagers) are not interested in their own welfare. They don't appreciate modern sanitary methods. They don't want to exert themselves beyond scratching their farms or doing such labour as they are used to. These difficulties are real and serious. But they must not baffle us.

We must have an unquenchable faith in our mission. We must be patient with the people. We are ourselves novices in village work. We have to deal with a chronic disease. Patience and perseverance, if we have them, overcome mountains of difficulties. We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have an incurable disease.

A notable example of this sort of devotion to human need in the United States is available in Jacques Levy's *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (Norton, 1975).

Successful planning by community people for themselves is well illustrated by an article in *Self-Reliance* (July-August) on the evolution of food-buying clubs in America into regional food distribution networks. People who recognized their own needs, not professional planners, made this growth come about:

In the past decade, a movement has evolved in different parts of the country which is aimed at providing an alternative to the standard supermarket fare of impersonal service and expensive, poor-quality food. The movement began with groups of people banding together as informal buying clubs, pre-ordering their vegetable and grain purchases in large quantities so as to benefit from bulk, wholesale prices. Today, these networks have grown to include co-ops, collectively-run storefront foodstores, warehouses, trucking collectives, restaurants, bakeries, and other food production and processing businesses. These alternative food systems have, in many places, become important factors in the local economy, providing jobs, encouraging spin-off businesses, lowering the cost of living, and recycling money in the community.