

THAT ANGRY MAN

A LETTER from a reader on "Problems of Politics" (MANAS, Nov. 28, 1951) illustrates so clearly a view which has played an enormous part in liberal thought in the United States during the past twenty years, that portions of it should be useful as starting points for new reflections. This correspondent writes:

The article that especially interested me was the one referring to Marx, Debs, the socialists and anarchists. I understood the writer to take the position that socialism or Marxism is primarily materialistic and that it rests its claim to validity on the theory of economic determinism. While Marxists certainly believe in the economic determinant as the ever-present factor, I do not believe the appeal was originally materialistic—if by that we mean that human phenomena should be conceived in terms of physical or material causes rather than as spiritual or ethical causes; certainly not if we mean a devotion to material nature and its wants.

My own slant as a student of Marx, and a member of the Socialist Party for about five years, is that by economic determinism, we mean that men's daily actions—the way they earn their living—and their daily relationships toward their fellows—determine to a large extent their actions, their attitude, and their kind of civilization. While this may be a denial of a personal God—Marx was an atheist—it is not necessarily a denial of an ethical search or spiritual values. Marx believed that the history of our European civilization is that of a slave economy, though changed from outright slavery to wage slavery. Marx's contention was that this slavery is wrong, that every man is entitled to free access to the land and that the worker must own his own means of production (and the product of his labor), whether these be hand tools or machines in a factory. It follows that the institution of private property as we know it is an unnatural one, and Marx believed that the master-slave relationship debases both slave and master. If a man in his daily action is upholding a slave economy, either by having the head or holding the whip, he cannot be free or healthy in his thoughts or attitudes. From the master-slave relationship, Marx claimed, come most of our ills. By ills I mean

neuroses, mental breakdown, crime, poverty, race hatred, religious bigotry, depressions, and wars.

Perhaps we should say at the outset that nothing in this communication is meant as a defense or apology for the present-day Communism of Soviet Russia. The question, rather, concerns the basic character of Marxist thought, and Marxist influence upon history—in a word, the "place" of Marx as a historical force, in so far as this can be determined. This letter is by no means an unqualified endorsement of Marx, but speaks of him as "a victim of our 'leader' neurosis," and one who "went in for all the tricks of the trade, parliamentarianism, dictatorship of the proletariat, and a promise that the machine would bring the emancipation that could only come from within."

The first question, then, is whether or not Marx's appeal was "originally materialistic." We may begin by quoting from the fifteen propositions put forward by Marx in 1859, in the Introduction to his *Criticism of Political Economy*. These propositions constitute what has been called the "classical formulation" of the materialist conception of history. The second, third, and fourth propositions are as follows:

(2) Conditions of production, taken as a whole, constitute the economic structure of society—that is the material basis on which a superstructure of laws and political institutions is raised and to which certain forms of political consciousness correspond.

(3) The political and intellectual life of a society is determined by the mode of production, as necessitated by the wants of material life.

(4) It is not men's consciousness that determines the forms of existence, but, on the contrary, the social forms of life that determine the consciousness.

In the first proposition, Marx had declared that the conditions of production, which form the economic structure of society, are "necessary and

independent of the human will," so that it follows that the entirety of man's conscious life, including religion, morals, art, science, literature, and opinion, is determined by forces "independent of the human will."

While Marx, so far as we know, never retreated explicitly from this position, Engels offered some qualifications thirty-one years later. He wrote to Joseph Bloch in 1890 that it was "not the case that the economic situation is the *sole active cause* and everything else only a passive effect." The difference between early and later Marxism is clarified by Edmond Wilson (*To the Finland Station*, pp. 182-3):

The main point about the philosophy of Marxism for us here is that its emphasis is considerably shifted between the first phase of its creators and their latest. If we read *The German Ideology* of 1845-46 into which an element of satire enters—we find that we are having it drummed into us that all the things that men think and imagine grow straight out of their vilest needs; if we read Engel's letters of the nineties, written at a time when people interested in Marxism were beginning to ask fundamental questions, we get an old man's soberest effort to state his notion of the nature of things, and it produces an entirely different impression. "Marx and I," he wrote, "are partly responsible for the fact that at times our disciples have laid more weight upon the economic factor than belongs to it. We were compelled to emphasize its central character in opposition to our opponents who denied it, and there wasn't always time, place and occasion to do justice to the other factors in the reciprocal interactions of the historical process."

However, as Wilson shows, neither Marx nor Engels ever made very clear what the "other factors" were supposed to be, and how they worked. In the letter to Bloch, while saying that economic conditions were not the "*sole determining factor*," he nevertheless added that "the production and reproduction in real life constitutes in the *last instance* the determining factor in history." Wilson asks the pertinent question: "Is the 'last instance' last in time or is it ultimate in the quite different sense of being the fundamental motive of human behavior?"

But whatever shades of meaning and distinction may be found by scholars in the works of Marx and Engels, the indisputable fact remains that from their stimulus and influence grew the dogma that human behavior is absolutely determined by material conditions. The rapid spread and popularity of this dogma is partially explained by Karl Federn in his critical volume, *The Materialist Interpretation of History*:

The theory appears, at first sight, extremely clear and ingenious. Reducing all historical developments to comparatively simple processes, and explaining them by facts which are, so to speak, palpable and very easily stated, it appeals by its simplicity and lucidity. Young people, in particular, are easily converted to it; they feel as if their eyes had suddenly been opened; they are surprised not to have found out all this long ago. The economic facts being, as has been said, of extreme importance in life and history, it is easy to group all other phenomena around them so that they seem to flow from them. One need but describe and arrange the facts in a certain manner, and all will appear logical and conclusive.

There is, however, a further and more important explanation of the world-wide influence of the Marxist interpretation of history. While there is plainly a necessary opposition between Marxist thought and philosophical idealism, there is no necessary opposition between Marxism and *ethical or moral* motives. The appeal of Marx to the ethical instincts of mankind was dramatic and powerful, even though concealed. It was dramatic because it provided through intellectual analysis what seemed to be a "lever" by which the longings of men for justice might be satisfied; and it was powerful because, in an age of religious unbelief and rising faith in Science, the moralistic content of Marxist socialism brought a new, non-theological faith for the oppressed and deceived multitudes. Marx was an analyst of the past; but he was much more than this: he was a *prophet* with a dream of paradise to proclaim. And the paradise could presumably be reached in fulfillment of the stern laws of history, developed out of the Dialectic. Achievement of the Classless Society, for many Marxists, appeared as if written

in the stars. For the tired, exploited, and disillusioned millions, Marx squared the circle—he gave impersonal, non-moral science the dynamic of a new gospel of humanitarian brotherhood, the brotherhood of the dispossessed, who were now to inherit the earth! This was to occur, as *Das Kapital* declares at its climax, by "expropriating the expropriators."

Marx, in short, the child of his age, the pro-human, anti-God man, late product of the Renaissance, admirer of science, hater of theologies, intellectual and scholar, hid his intense moral judgments, his disgust for commercialism, and his supreme contempt for the mentality and habits of the petty bourgeoisie, behind the screen of sociological "laws" which, he attempted to show through the Dialectic, were like Gravitation rooted in the cosmos. As Federn puts it:

. . . averse to moral points of view, he [Marx] cannot openly favor what he condemns, and so he introduces his moral judgments in the disguise of a pretended law that is to bring about of necessity that state which he considers just and desirable. . . . In order to disguise the fact that the demand for a more just and humane distribution of the goods of this earth is a moral demand, that socialism, in short, is a moral end, they [the Marxists] declare it to be a logical necessity and their political theory is called "scientific" socialism. . . . they generally have a dread of ethics akin to that which medieval Catholics had of the devil; their invariable reasoning is that socialism is inevitable and necessary, that it will come according to a "historical law."

The Marxist reform and revolution have thus the psychological impact of an ethical, utopian revelation, backed by the prestige of science, which came to appeal, in the name of the brotherhood of man, to the ruthless emotions of class hatred and revenge. There is no need to wonder why it has fascinated half the world—all the factors necessary to fascination were present in the beginning.

The world was ready, in the last half of the nineteenth century, for Marx—its psychological weaknesses and inclinations made almost to order for him, and he for them. As a matter of fact, only

one dull in spirit, even today, could read the *Communist Manifesto* without thrilling, in some measure, in response to its moral power, its indictment of social injustice, however much he may recoil from the historical consequences of this incendiary document. And duller still the man who will not read the *Manifesto* at all, lest some dying spark of conscience be made to flare up to confront the life he is living and the material inequities of the world he complacently accepts.

It is not half so important to prove Marx "wrong," or to denounce him as a "materialist," as it is to understand why he has seemed "right" to so many people for so many years. Here, in the peculiar power of a group of ideas about the nature of things, lies an important key to the mystery and misery of our times. Nowhere, except among small minorities, odd anarchist cults and isolated groups, has the key been given a full turn, and the reason for this is easy to see.

To explain with any conviction the magic of Marx is to expose the spiritual impoverishment of our civilization, and this the makers and keepers of our civilization do not wish to do. The three great "anti-Christ" of our epoch—Marx, Darwin, and Freud—have each torn down some vast hypocrisy or pompous pretense of our "Christian" culture. For centuries, men of wealth and power had "used" the countless multitudes of poor in much the same way that modern armies are "fought" by their commanders. Marx described these crimes in objective terms. Darwin exposed the preposterous fable of creation by an anthropomorphic God, and if he did not solve the mystery of human origins, he at least, with the help of geologist contemporaries, returned to Nature some of the dignity and potentiality which had been stolen from her by presumptuous theologians. Freud began what soon became almost a new "Satan" myth by daring to try to empty a great cesspool of emotions in which warped Christian "consciences" had been not very successfully hiding their "sins." These three were each violently opposed by Christian orthodoxy. It

might be argued that the enmity and opposition of religious organizations to Marx, Freud, and Darwin were primarily responsible for the "materialism" of each of these great revolts. Each knew—and if Darwin be an exception, then Huxley, his champion, may take his place in the unholy trinity—that "God" would be invoked against them, and, ardent men that they were, they attacked "God" along with the delusions which were their direct concern.

Each of them saw and tried to deal with a tremendous human need. If they made mistakes—great and terrifying mistakes, perhaps—we shall impotently reap the harvest of those mistakes unless we, too, see the need they saw, and deal with it more wisely. Actually, titanic forces have their play in these areas of human life. They are areas of incalculable hungers and volcanic emotional deeps. The demand for a moral law that *works* cannot be suppressed by either pieties or witch hunts, and that law will be sought by the masses, with either fair means or foul. They will fight for freedom, even if they must put on new and more terrible shackles and lose what freedom they have before they begin—if no better ideal of liberty is offered than the technologized barracks society available today. The hunger for love will be satisfied, too, and if men cannot learn to love as gods, including the world in their affection, they will love as beasts—which may not be "love" at all, but at least it is not "sin."

It is time that we begin to understand our age. Already we have wasted generations hunting our age. Already we have wasted generations hunting personal devils to cast out, when it is ourselves who have done the betraying. It is we who, resting, as we thought, secure behind the bastions of orthodoxy in religion and science, have given the initiative to iconoclasts and nihilists. And what security have we now—what security *can* belong to a civilization which can think of nothing better to do to save the world than send its young men to die on the frozen hills of far-off Korea?

Letter from **GERMANY**

BERLIN.—For some years now the average Berlin citizen has lived under a steady stream of propaganda in which the word "peace" dominates. Lately, a picture appeared in East Berlin magazines showing Danish "peace fighters" chained to train rails in order to stop ammunitions transports. (Every day American military transports roll through the Soviet occupation zone to West Berlin, unmolested by either Soviet authorities or civilians.)

Because nothing is said as to whether the onrolling trains were stopped before reaching the "peace fighters" chained to the rails, and since rearmament programs are everywhere well under way, the essence of such propaganda demonstrations is their utter impotence. To make the resistance against rearmament effective, deeds of direct action would be necessary, carried through by huge crowds—crowds organized not from above, which is legally impossible, but by their own free will. The influence of the Communists on such crowds is nil. The main communist strength today is in the Asiatic agrarian reform movement, aiming at national independence of former colonies.

Such demonstrations are characterized not only by impotence, but also by falseness. They are rhetorical acts of "defiance" carried on by people who were taught until 1933 to shout for "war against war." Their general weakness of today has forced them to change their slogan to "peace," written and spoken in all languages. (Last August, East Berlin was the show window of a big youth festival, well plastered with foreign language posters for "peace"—*Paix, pace, mir, puz, pokoj*, and so forth.)

When forced to live amid such a huge and deceitful daily stream of propaganda, one is shaken and roused to indignation by the incessant debasement of the human values of freedom, peace, and truth. Yet this critical attitude is

condemned to inactivity in practice. The Communists—too weak to prevent their decline on a world scale—are still strong enough to keep their critics and adversaries silent. Thus the impotence of the Communists becomes general, contributing to the general degradation of man and his values.

When we look about, the contrasting Western world seems to present a picture of enormous strength, both material and moral. But this is only on the surface. Imagine what would happen were the Communist states wiped off the political map of the world! What problems would arise, at least for the production sector, with the need for war material gone? Brushing aside cheap optimism, one can foresee the enormous turmoil that would affect the people in the Western hemisphere. Behind the picture of utmost power lurks the threat of future social and economic catastrophes.

Today beneath the strata of open (Communist) and future (Western) impotence, lies the weakest layer of socio-political outlook—the outlook of the critics of Stalin within his reach. Yet it seems to us that these critics have a hidden strength: their insight is too penetrating for them to be deceived by claims and promises—they clearly see the road downwards; and their moral qualities are the last defense against the growing alienation of man from his fellows and humane institutions.

GERMAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

"THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE"

THOSE who have found Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* an extremely interesting and significant book will also be glad to encounter his *The Forgotten Language—An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairytales and Myths* (Rinehart & Co., N.Y., 1951). *The Forgotten Language* also provides excellent correlative reading for Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and, we might say, carries further, in philosophical language, Campbell's attempt to reconcile the world's great religions in terms of a common symbolical language.

Both the Fromm books, however, are a bit frustrating for a MANAS reviewer, since exceptional paragraphs of the sort we like to quote are offered in such amplitude that selection is most difficult. Dr. Fromm is a philosopher, perhaps one of the most genuine and original of our times, and his approach to matters of scientific, psychological or religious interest shows a thoughtful disregard for contemporary prejudices. Though a distinguished student of psychoanalysis and a man respectful of Freud's forceful impetus towards psychological revaluation, Fromm's context is considerably broader than Freud's. He plainly indicates this at the outset of the book in explanation of the elongated title:

The term, an introduction to the *understanding* of dreams, etc., was chosen intentionally instead of using the more conventional term *interpretation*. If, as I shall try to show in the following pages, symbolic language is a language in its own right, in fact, the only universal language the human race ever developed, then the problem is indeed one of understanding it rather than of interpreting as if one dealt with an artificially manufactured secret code. I believe that such understanding is important for every person who wants to be in touch with himself, and not only for the psychotherapist who wants to cure mental disturbances; hence I believe that the understanding of symbolic language should be taught in our high schools and colleges just as other "foreign

languages" are part of their curriculum. One of the aims of this book is to contribute to the realization of this idea.

As many readers have doubtless observed while perusing other views in this column, the most valuable critical material produced in respect to any field of human inquiry is apt to be produced by men who are leaders in that field. For instance, Fromm's quotations from Emerson seem to strike us much more sharply, when cited by one of the world's most renowned psychologists. And when Fromm uses the term "soul," that much abused word seems to acquire a new lease on life. This must be because we recognize that a *synthesis* of knowledge about religion is what is most needed, and that it must include science and psychology.

While Dr. Fromm is not overly impressed by the magnitude of his own present contribution, neither is he guilty of that specious sort of modesty which assigns little importance to diligent effort in a new field. He is trying to stimulate study and inquiry on related subjects of great psychological, social, and religious significance—the study of dreams, symbols, and myths. The following passage is reminiscent of Campbell's preface to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

The study of myths and dreams is still in its infancy. It suffers from various limitations. One is a certain dogmatism and rigidity that has resulted from the claims of various psychoanalytic schools, each insisting that it has the only true understanding of symbolic language. Thus we lose sight of the many-sidedness of symbolic language and try to force it into the Procrustean bed of one, and only one, kind of meaning.

Another limitation is that interpretation of dreams is still considered legitimate only when employed by the psychiatrist in the treatment of neurotic patients.

The Talmud says, "Dreams which are not interpreted are like letters which have not been opened." Indeed, both dreams and myths are important communications from ourselves to ourselves. If we do not understand the language in which they are written, we miss a great deal of what we know and tell ourselves in those hours when we are not busy manipulating the outside world.

It is our contention, a logical one, we think, that every percipient psychologist automatically emerges as a qualified sociologist. It is impossible to study the contents of the modern mind from the standpoint of the great need for emotional balance without assessing and passing judgment upon many of the features of present society. Dr. Fromm demonstrates, conclusively and succinctly, that the basic reason for our disregard of the possibility of important meanings in dreams is our preoccupation with the superficial standards of daily life. Proceeding to the core of the matter, he suggests that the common assumption that dreams are "unreal," while waking life is "real," needs to be challenged:

The effect of this separation from reality depends on the quality of reality itself. If the influence from the outside world is essentially beneficial, the absence of this influence during sleep would tend to lower the value of our dream activity, so that it would be inferior to our mental activities during the daytime when we are exposed to the beneficial influence of outside reality.

But are we right in assuming that the influence of reality is exclusively a beneficial one? May it not be that it is also harmful and that, therefore, the absence of its influence tends to bring forth qualities superior to those we have when we are awake?

In speaking of the reality outside ourselves, reference is not made primarily to the world of nature. Nature as such is neither good nor bad. It may be helpful to us or dangerous, and the absence of our perception of it relieves us, indeed, from our task of trying to master it or of defending ourselves against it; but it does not make us either more stupid or wiser, better or worse. It is quite different with the man-made world around us, with the culture in which we live. Its effect upon us is quite ambiguous, although we are prone to assume that it is entirely to our benefit.

But the question is whether it is exclusively true or whether the negative elements in the influence of society do not account for the paradoxical fact that *we are not only less reasonable and less decent in our dreams but that we are also more intelligent, wiser, and capable of better judgment when we are asleep than when we are awake.*

Modern man is exposed to an almost unceasing "noise," the noise of the radio, television, headlines, advertising, the movies, most of which do not enlighten our minds but stultify them. We are exposed to rationalizing lies which masquerade as truths, to plain nonsense which masquerades as common sense or as the higher wisdom of the specialist, of double talk, intellectual laziness, or dishonesty which speaks in the name of "honor" or "realism," as the case may be. We feel superior to the superstitions of former generations and so-called primitive cultures, and we are constantly hammered at by the very same kind of superstitious beliefs that set themselves up as the latest discoveries of science. Is it surprising then, that to be awake is not exclusively a blessing but also a curse? Is it surprising that in a state of sleep, when we are alone with ourselves, when we can look into ourselves without being bothered by the noise and nonsense that surround us in the daytime, we are better able to feel and to think our truest and most valuable feelings and thoughts?

These lengthy quotations should give something of Fromm's general perspective. He offers new horizons, and seems like a man who has finally learned at which end of the telescope it is most profitable to place the human eye. The climate of opinion in any age tends to narrow all conventional outlooks, be they religious or scientific. Dr. Fromm is successfully concerned with reestablishing positions in terms of the enduring human values, and his criticisms of Freud seem especially valuable in relation to his subsequent discussions of symbolic language in myth and ritual. It is his contention that Freud's great work, in inaugurating a modern study of symbolic language, "was more of an indirect than a direct help to mythology, because Freud tended to see in the myth—as in the dream—only the expression of irrational, antisocial impulses rather than the wisdom of past ages expressed in a specific language, that of symbols."

The myth, like the dream, offers a story occurring in space and time, a story which expresses, in symbolic language, religious and philosophical ideas, experiences of the soul in which the real significance of the myth lie.

Dr. Fromm, we think, is not just engaged in trying to produce saleable volumes, although he is indeed accomplishing this, but is engaged primarily in a fascinating reevaluation in psychology, religion and philosophy. If his writings tend to be prolific—he promises a second volume of *The Forgotten Language*—we can be assured by both style and content of the first that here is a man who is in a hurry because of a vital interest rather than because of a desire for remuneration or acclaim.

COMMENTARY
THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

THE recent film version of *Berkeley Square* conveys as well as anything we can think of the idea of the "relativity" of time. Suppose, it is suggested, you were aloft in an airplane, looking down on roads which wind through a mountainous terrain. From this vantage point you could see, all at once, the past, present, and future experiences of the travelers—where they have been, where they are, and where they will be.

Perhaps there is a way to spread out "time" before us, like a great map. Dunne, the English inventor, thought so, and presented rather startling evidences for this view in *An Experiment with Time*. But there is another way of considering that time is spread out, quite independently of the psychic wonders of prophetic dreams and "second sight." For example, at least several epochs of history are confusedly united in our bewildering "present." The people of India, to take an instance from the East, are now confronted by the same sort of social and political problems which the people of the United States faced in the years which followed the American Revolution. As the Indian spokesman, Frank Moraes, remarked in the Dec. 31 *Life*:

Since independence the pattern of Indian history has closely followed the pattern of American history in the early decades after 1787. We have started internally with the consolidation of the states. Externally India seeks to avoid foreign entanglements much as America did. To many in India it seems odd that a country which was neutral for three years of World War I and for two of World War II should resent neutrality in another country—and that in peace, not war. . . .

Again, labor conditions of forty and fifty years ago in the United States as a whole are virtually duplicated today in the local conditions affecting the migrant laborers of the rich agricultural valleys of California. The efforts of the Farm Labor Union to organize this exploited group have thus a special validity. Similarly, it is possible to understand and even to view with

restrained sympathy the great, Communist-dominated strikes of the 1930's in these agricultural areas. Such events and the circumstances behind them throw light on the causes of behavior in the extreme situations of today. A good "prophet," after all, is only a man who has grasped something of the relativity of time.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

IN requesting information about how and where to find the best American public schools, a subscriber takes us out of the area of any of our presumed qualifications, at least so far as the "where" is concerned. To single out any excellence of personnel or methods in some locality with which we were acquainted might easily leave unmentioned a score of other locations where even better work is being done. But the question of how to tell a good school when we see one is interesting and worth considering.

It is, at least at first glance, far more difficult to find ways of comparing and evaluating different public schools than different private schools. The private schools not only provide brochures outlining the special advantages and unique methods which supposedly characterize them, but they seem to evolve something of a distinct personality or atmosphere to which the parent may spontaneously react either favorably or unfavorably. While there is often just as great a difference in quality of teaching personnel between two public schools and two private schools, the private schools have often developed or pledged allegiance to some particular method of education which distinguishes them from others, having their own distinctive traditions, etc. But in the public schools, the chief differences in proclaimed method are usually only those to be found between "Progressive" schools and those of more conservatively inclined school boards. Even this line is far from clearly drawn. The influence of the Progressive educators has been so potent that nearly every school system has adopted some of their techniques and approaches, differences being rather of degree than of essential premises. (See "Children . . . and Ourselves" for June 7, 1950, and Oct. 10 and Oct. 31, 1951, for commentary on progressive methods.)

Education, however, is much more than a method; or rather, the best "method" is undoubtedly the combination of all methods. Educational *systems*, just as political systems, will of necessity be

imperfect in and of themselves, in the same sense that any field of human knowledge is always incomplete, and guilty of faulty presuppositions and prejudices. Whenever teachers or school boards become blindly partisan, either anti or pro "progressive," for instance, they become guilty of indoctrination, and cannot then serve adequately as inspiration for the awakening of young minds. A good teacher's mind must be fluidic, and a good school board must strive to raise itself above partisan issues.

One method of examining the relative values of differing public schools is to procure some of the textbooks from each and compare them. A school board or a faculty that will allow inferior texts to be used is obviously one to avoid; also to be avoided is a school favoring, in *every* instance, the "latest" text developed, especially if they all issue from writers of similar social and political persuasion. (Most parents are not aware that subtle differences in the approach of history texts often reveal a preponderant bias for "capitalism," "socialism," "religion," etc. The best schools will *not* be completely unified as to such points of emphasis, and, as a result, either contrasting or reasonably unbiased texts will be selected to reflect healthy differences of opinion among teachers.)

We have recently discussed attempts at religious education in the public schools, and we would suggest that parents be particularly on guard against any school or school system practicing *sub rosa* indoctrination in "Christian" values. Schools concerned with the problem of formulating an intelligent approach to the *study* of religions place themselves on quite a different basis, for in such instances the recommendations of teachers, and all experiments undertaken, are in the open for all to see; consequently, parent-teacher meetings make possible the interchange of suggestions and arguments, pro and con, in which parents can participate.

In respect to religion—and we might also say, incidentally, in respect to many subjects in the scientific field—what students need more than anything else is an atmosphere of *inquiry*, and we should have good reason to be more in favor of those

teachers who are less concerned with trying to give children the Right Answers than with trying to get them to ask the *right questions*—and to continue asking them. Visits to classrooms will often reveal much in this regard, for intellectually authoritarian attitudes on the part of teachers can hardly be concealed.

Our subscriber is not interested in evaluations of private schools, which he feels are often too "expensive and exclusive." Expensiveness and exclusiveness are, so far as we can see, bad things. But the best private schools will *not* be the most expensive. Those who know anything of the early days of Black Mountain College from a reading of Louis Adamic's *My America* will see that inspiring work can often be done without benefit of any endowment. We might even say that there seems something perverted about expensiveness in connection with education, unless technical laboratory training is involved. Knowledge cannot be bought or sold, and while social position *can* be bought and sold, something of a tragedy is enacted in the case of parents who feel they are getting the "best" for their children by putting them with the children of other well-to-do-families also primarily interested in social prestige.

There is another reason for having our children attend public schools, though one not so obvious. Part of our most necessary education is that of learning what other people are learning. To think and act intelligently in our society, we need to be aware of the psychological elements of which it is composed, of the typical habit-patterns and opinions expressed and felt by the majority. When a child goes to a public school he is at least learning a lot about his environment. An environment of typical ideas is important to a child's comprehension of social forces, even though these may require critical evaluation in the home.

We obviously need to have a critical perspective for evaluating what most people study and think and do about life in general, but it is also very worthwhile to be in a position to make such evaluations at first hand. The child who attends a private school and overhears snobbish remarks about the inferiority of "the public school system" might find it difficult to

arrive at an understanding of the "outside world." Even if everything reported and insinuated to him by his superior teachers were true, it would not be true *for him* of his own knowledge. One of our most natural social and national obligations is to understand the experiences and conditionings of the majority—something that can never be satisfactorily accomplished at long range.

It is really the parents' task to supply tentative bases for evaluation and criticism of what is taught in the public schools. Every parent ought to read his child's textbooks, or at least scan them—every last one of them. And he should read, too, in connection with them, other more comprehensive works dealing with the same fields of study.

Parents need to know public school teachers better, as can easily occur if there is a determination to keep up with the children's education—not just through parent-teacher meetings, but through some study and thought expended upon the particular subjects the child is taking. Interest and curiosity generated may subsequently provide means for contact with teachers. The teachers, we must realize, often become mentally isolated in their community simply because no one takes an interest in discussing with them the fields in which they teach; a teacher can be very thoroughly "isolated" even when invited to all the better-set social functions.

To find *one* good teacher in our child's school, to *know* he is a good teacher and why he is good, and to encourage the child to make the most of a learning relationship with him, is a fitting and rewarding task for the parent. And there are few schools or communities where good teachers cannot be found.

FRONTIERS

New Ideas at Work: VII

THE story of the Community Service Organization, which came to birth in Los Angeles in 1947, has been called "the story of one of the most dramatic movements that has ever existed in the history of Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest." This may well be so, although we have little to compare the story with. But the concrete achievements of CSO in barely four years are enough to merit attention, regardless of comparisons.

The CSO is a politically non-partisan, religiously nonsectarian group made up largely of members of the Mexican-American population in the city of Los Angeles. Its purpose is to carry on self-help activities in behalf of the Spanish-speaking community and in behalf of other racial, national, and cultural minorities which have been politically voiceless and socially impotent in relation to matters of minimum welfare and civil rights. Besides persons of Mexican ancestry, these groups include American citizens of Jewish, Negro, Japanese, Italian, and Philippine descent. One striking achievement of the CSO has been its foundation work of securing practical and friendly cooperation among the members of these different groups—to the extent that, on May 31, 1949, the people of the ninth councilmanic district of the city of Los Angeles elected Edward R. Roybal to represent them on the City Council. Mr. Roybal is the first local citizen of Mexican-American ancestry to serve as a Los Angeles councilman in more than 70 years. While the CSO does not take political "sides," it is natural that Edward Roybal was elected as a result of its activities, for he was one of the most active founders of the organization.

The scope of the CSO program is largely defined by its working committees. There is, first, the Registration Committee. Within three months of the beginning of the work of this committee, the so-called "Mexican" vote in the ninth district

had been tripled. "Vote for whomever you please," the voters were told, "but please register and vote." In 1950, due to the efforts of the CSO's volunteer field workers, 39,000 new voters were registered in the Lincoln Heights and Boyle Heights areas of Los Angeles, and in the unincorporated district of Belvedere, most of whom were Mexican Americans. In the election which placed Roybal in office, the proportion of turnout of registered voters on election day in the ninth district was considerably better than the city's average turnout. On this occasion the liberal Los Angeles *Daily News* declared editorially:

Roybal's election . . . says that after nearly a century of civic silence Los Angeles' Spanish-speaking citizens—who constitute the city's numerically biggest minority—have raised their voices clearly and unmistakably. The estimated 250,000 residents of Mexican-American descent—those who comprise the Latin one-eighth of metropolitan Los Angeles and make it the largest Spanish-speaking city outside of Mexico—are learning to make use of the most effective channel open to democracy's cultural minorities—the ballot. Through this channel they may succeed in drawing the attention of the rest of the community to the needs of their neglected neighborhoods.

The Latin minority is more numerous than this figure suggests. Actually, there are some 900,000 Mexican-Americans in California, about half of whom live in Los Angeles County. Thousands of these people can trace their ancestry back to the days of Spanish dominion over the Pacific Coast. Most of them, however, are separated from the larger "Anglo" community by the gulf created by language, custom, economic and cultural factors. In 1941, the Los Angeles Coordinating Council reported that, on the average, the income of the Mexican American family was about \$790 a year—about \$250 less than the minimum necessary for basic food and housing.

The struggle of the Mexican-American community to rise above the marginal existence which these conditions imply has been a struggle against a number of bland assumptions on the part

of the dominant population group concerning the qualities and potentialities of Mexican-Americans. CSO's education committee repeats the story of a young college student—now one of CSO's 3,000 members—who recalled what had been said to him in school about his "future." As the student tells it:

"I attended a predominantly Mexican-American Junior High School here in the East side. On one occasion, after reaching the eighth grade, we were counseled on our future curriculum. The Counselor stood before the class and coldly announced that Mexicans and Negroes might as well not take academic majors because there would not be any openings for them in the professional fields, and that they would be wasting their time."

Having a representative on the City Council has helped the Spanish-speaking community to undermine this assumption. The education committee is also working to obtain sensible norms for the IQ ratings of students of low-income, bilingual backgrounds.

A CSO "Civil Rights" report sums up:

Until about three years ago, police bullets cut down one of our neighbors nearly every month. Our streets were the scene of the blaring siren, the nightly roust and pinch on suspicion of loitering.

Remember the "Zoos Suit" riots of 1943? The terror on East First Street, Ford Boulevard, and Mott Street? The Mexican-Americans dragged from movies, autos, and street cars and brutally beaten?

Then three years ago the CSO was born and began to move within the area. A constructive program was developed to secure for the people just treatment by the law-enforcement agencies.

Another "bland assumption" was evident in the comment of a civic-minded citizen of Los Angeles who, learning of the ramshackle homes, the unpaved and unlighted streets, and the muddy walks of the "blighted" areas of the city, suggested a quaint artsy-craftsy solution. Mexicans, he said, "as we all know," are very clever with their hands. He thought that if the people living in the blighted areas would "fix their homes in a typically Mexican fashion," opening shops and stalls such as are found on Olvera Street—a Mexican quarter

"show window" with a slightly honky-tonk flavor—the tourist trade would bring "tremendous wealth" to the Mexican people and "the problem would be solved." Mexican-American listeners to this proposal that they put on a mild sort of circus for the folks from Ioway, instead of demanding their civil rights, smiled in amazement. A few months later, while the list of registered voters grew with Spanish names, representatives of the CSO passed petitions, interviewed county officials, talked to local property owners. Today, curbs and sidewalks are appearing in these areas, and paved streets and street lights are ceasing to be a sensation.

There is hope that, some day, Los Angeles may become a truly cosmopolitan city, when the provincialisms of "Native Sons" and pride of race and origin are forgotten—what, after all, have people of Anglo-Saxon origin to be proud of, these days?—and when complexion and brow-structure, blond hair or kinky black, are of no more importance than the color of shoes a man chooses to wear. But that the simple rights of citizenship have had to be demanded and sought after, against public lethargy and bureaucratic resistance, is enough to explain why our great "democracy" is having such a difficult time, these days. It remains a fact, however, that the power of the ballot is still a power by which people can obtain their rights in the United States, provided there are enough people, and provided they get together.

But the struggle toward equality is only the elementary-school phase of a democratic education. After equality, and the power that goes with it, are gained—what then? Will the minority groups simply become imitators of the majority, after they get what they want? Will their sense of justice remain as keen as it was in the old days, when they were fighting "the good fight"? The rewards of victory will be meager indeed, unless equality remains a principle that applies to everybody. There are always new minorities coming up.