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THE FORMATION OF AMERICANS

THE business of historians—the value of their work—lies in the contribution they are able to make to the self-knowledge of human beings. That is the fundamental reason for reading history, for what it can teach us about ourselves. We discover what men are by what they do. That, at any rate, is the beginning of understanding of what we are. There are doubtless other ways to self-knowledge—more advanced in certain ways, perhaps, than the instruction of history—but they require a kind of thinking at levels of abstraction where, for most of us, the mind simply flattens out and goes blank. Only very rare thinkers, such as Plato, Plotinus, Nicholas of Cusa, and Leibniz, have been able to maintain their balance in this sort of thinking, and they are indeed the ones who have given philosophical foundation to our reflections along this line. The historians, however, help to prepare us for this difficult work.

One such historian we have been reading lately is William Brandon, who lives in Cambridge, England. His latest book is *New Worlds for Old,* devoted to reports of European visitors to America, from 1500 to 1800, on the quality and character of the Indians of the New World. It was published in 1986 in paperback by the Ohio University Press. The purpose of the book is to show that, while the men of the Old World who came to America placed the stamp of Old World ways on the continent Columbus had discovered for them, Europe was also largely impressed and altered by what it learned from travelers to the New World. Brandon explores an immense literature of these travelers' reports, showing how it fed both the dreams and the fears of Europeans. Radicals and utopians made capital of the idea of the Noble Savage who had no king, who lived simply and happily without laws or churches, and who, for some observers, surpassed the warlike and conquering Europeans in both dignity and decency. One of the many writers about America was a young French former officer of the marines, Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce, baron de Lahontan, who had been robbed of his inheritance (he said), had gone to Canada in 1683 with troops attached to the Navy, and there he eventually became commander of an outpost near the present site of Detroit. Having trouble with the French administrators, he returned to Europe, locating at The Hague in Holland, and there, in 1703, he published a book of two small volumes on Canada, the first volume made up of letters said to be to a relative, the second a discussion of subjects mentioned in the letters. He, Brandon says, "repeated the usual virtues of American Indian society, although rather more trenchantly than usual."

> The Americans are born free; they are all equal, with no superiority and no subordination, even the women are free, even the girls, to do as they please, "mistresses of their bodies," free by their "right of liberty", the Indians know no thine nor mine; they have no cares; they are ferocious toward their enemies in war but among themselves they never quarrel, never do each other wilful harm, the reason for this being that each is as much a noble lord as the other.
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> . . . this fine New World is used as a springboard for jumping with both feet upon the sinful Old. But here the more than customary vehemence has still something further added—the Old World is called upon directly to think of applying these new ways to its own corrupt old soul. The tyranny of "Ministers of State or of the Evangels" says Lahontan in a Preface, will last "until that Anarchy may be introduced among us that exists among the Ameriquains, of whom the least feels himself more than a Chancellor of France." . . .
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> . . . (in the *Memoires* of Volume II), the author indulges in a long diatribe supposedly summing up various Indian criticisms of European ways. Money, they say, is the serpent of the French: for it is the civilized Europeans [who] kill, pillage, defame one another, sell themselves or their wives and daughters.

Those Indians "who had been in France," says the narrator, taunt him with the wickedness they saw there perpetrated for money. "They mock at our Sciences and Arts, deride us for the servility they observe among us. They call us slaves, they say we are wretches who can't call our lives our own, that we degrade ourselves in our servitude to one sole person who rules everything, and who has no other law than his own will." They charge "that we fight and quarrel incessantly . . . that we are never in agreement, that we imprison each other and even publicly destroy each other. They esteem themselves beyond anything one can imagine, alleging that they are all equally great lords, because men being all made from the same clay they owe no distinction or subordination whatever to anyone. They claim that their contentment of spirit far surpasses our riches; that all our Sciences do not equal knowing how to live one's life in a perfect tranquility; that a man is not a man among the Europeans unless he is rich."

Even if Lahontan made some of this up—as some historians suspect—it was persuasive indeed to dissatisfied European intellectuals and potential revolutionists.

Whatever the origin of his tales, there was substantial truth in his accounts of Indian life, confirmed by other reporters. In his first two volumes Lahontan speaks of a Huron chief he came to know, residing for a time in his village. Giving the Huron the name of Adario, he issued a third volume filled with reports of dialogues with him.

Every sacred Old World institution from Holy Writ to holy wedlock is mocked and berated by the worldly-wise Adario, shown to be not only false but oppressive, and above all the absence of liberty and equality in the Old World is denounced as an iniquity that should be, for men, unbearable. All this always in comparison with the New World Hurons, a society blessed with the incomparable benefits that flow from liberty and equality. . . .

The author, Lahontan, piously defends the Old World ways against Adario's castigation (even to a tartuffian defense of the Jesuits) and heroically loses every round to the Huron philosopher.

It is impossible for you Europeans to follow the ostensible teachings of your religion, says Adario, "as long as *Thine* and *Mine* remain to commit all sorts of Crimes." Until they can do without Thine and Mine Europeans cannot hope to live like men. Their money is the demon of demons, their true tyrant, the source of evil, the thief of souls and the sepulcher of the living dead; to hope to live in the Land of Money and conserve your soul is impossible; this money is the father of viciousness, falseness intrigue, lying, treason, bad faith, and generally of all evils in the European world. "Why do we have no lawsuits?" demands Adario. "Because we do not accept the use of money . . . We are born free and united brothers each as much a great lord as the other, while you are all the slaves of one sole man . . . I am the master of my body, I dispose myself, I do what I wish, I am the first and last of my Nation . . . subject only to the great Spirit." While the European's life and body are subject to his king and "to a thousand people who are placed above you" and he can never dream of being his own master and doing as he himself might wish. But "you would still rather be a French Slave than a free Huron, O what a fine fellow is a Frenchman . . . since he remains in slavery and subjection" while even animals are enjoying "this precious Liberty . . ." Adario does venture to hope that some day the Europeans will gradually change, "that an equality of wealth will gradually appear, and that at last you will detest this greed that causes all the evils one sees in Europe, and thus having no *thine* nor *mine* you live with the same felicity as the Hurons . . . Would one see changes and distinctions among men if there were no *Thine* and *Mine?* You would all be equal, as are the Hurons."

Brandon comments:

None of these bold ideas were new, of course. All of them have been cited repeatedly in the foregoing pages. Even the airs of superiority assumed by the "Savages" had been remarked upon by previous observers, in, for example, the Jesuit Relations at the beginning of the seventeenth century: "You will see these poor barbarians, notwithstanding their great lack of government, power, letters, art, riches, yet holding their heads so high . . . regarding themselves as our superiors." Or from another missionary at the end of the century, after twelve years' acquaintance with the people of the Gaspe Peninsula, quoting an Indian as explaining that "there is no Indian who does not consider himself infinitely more happy and more powerful than the French." Lahontan merely summed up the principal strong points made by his predecessors down through the centuries—but he related them so effectively to the actualities of his own time that echoes of his hard language are discernible in numbers of landmark works by, as says

> Chinard, the most daring thinkers of the eighteenth century.

Lahontan's volumes, brought out in 1703 at the Hague, Brandon says, were "the trumpet blast of a revolutionary journalist . . . and that ten years before the death of Louis XIV." In his concluding chapter Brandon says that the main point of his book is "that ideas of liberty and equality associated with the New World were abstracted less from long familiar Old World literature than derived from the New World itself via reports that were for the most part seriously recorded and largely factual. . . . And it does seem the equality, the masterlessness so often spoken of in these reports, the utter liberty that became a headline item of New World News, may have been, in a fairly concrete sense, a new idea for Europe."

In America, towards the end of the eighteenth century—the time of the war for Independence—this "new idea" had become part of the everyday thinking of the American people, learned and practiced on the frontier under conditions that produced both independence and self-reliance. The great majority of the migrants who came from Europe to America had backgrounds in farming. Here they learned much from the Indians about methods of agriculture in the New World, and they gradually evolved methods of their own, forming habits which, as Wendell Berry has pointed out, later became disastrous.

They would not practice the intensive cultivation of European farmers. "It was simpler to move on to new fields when the fertility of the old was exhausted," as Arthur M. Schlesinger remarks in his essay "What Then Is the American, This New Man?" The American was also obliged to become an inventor. Schlesinger says:

> Though the colonial agriculturalist owed much to the Indians, his European heritage restrained him from imitating them more than he must. Unlike the aborigines, he thirsted for the simple mechanical aids and other amenities which he and his kind had enjoyed in the Old World; and lacking other means, he proceeded as best he could to reproduce them for himself. Besides wrestling with the soil, every husbandman was a manufacturer and every home a factory, engaged in grinding grain, making soap and candles, preparing the family meat supply, tanning skins, fabricating nails, harness, hats, shoes and rugs, contriving tools, churns, casks, beds, chairs, tables. Occasionally he did some of these things for his neighbors for hire. Such activities were supplemented by hunting, trapping and fishing. As cold weather closed in, the men used their spare time in getting out rough timber products, such as shingles and planks, or spent long winter evenings before the open fireplace carving gun stocks or making brooms while the womenfolk knitted, spun or wove.
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> Under the pressure of circumstances the farmer became a Jack-of-all-trades. As Chancellor Livingston later wrote "being habituated from early life to rely upon himself he acquires a skill in every branch of his profession, which is unknown in countries where labour is more divided." Take the case of an undistinguished New Englander, John Marshall of Braintree, early in the eighteenth century. Besides tending his farm, he was a painter, brickmaker and carpenter, turned out as many as three hundred laths in a day, bought and sold hogs and served as a precinct constable. The primitive state of society fostered a similar omnicompetence in other walks of life, as the career of Benjamin Franklin so well exemplifies. Lord Cornbury, the governor of New York, characterizes Francis Makemie as "a preacher, a Doctor of Physick, a Merchant, an Attorney, or Counsellor at Law, and" he added for good measure, "which is worse of all, a Disturber of Government."
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> The pioneer farmer of later times was the colonial farmer reborn. Up and down the Mississippi Valley he faced the same difficulties and the same opportunities as his forefathers and he dealt with them in much the same way. As time went on, he managed to secure from independent craftsmen and factories certain of his tools and household conveniences; he took advantage of newly invented labor-saving appliances such as the iron plow and the reaper; and more and more he raised crops for sale in a general market. Along the Atlantic seaboard similar alterations occurred. But whether in the older or the newer communities, these innovations affected the surface rather than the substance of the traditional way of life. Nor did the advent of towns and cities at first do much to change the situation. Mere islands in a sea of population, they long retained marked rural characteristics and depended for a large part of their growth on continued accessions from the countryside. . . .

These ex-Europeans and their descendants became a race of whistlers and tinkers, daily engaged in devising, improving and repairing tools and other things until, as Emerson said, they had "the power and habit of invention in their brain." "Would anyone but an American," asked one of Emerson's contemporaries, "have ever invented a milking machine? or a machine to beat eggs? or machines to black boots, scour knives, pare apples, and do a hundred things that all other peoples have done with their ten fingers from time immemorial?" As population increased and manufacturing developed on a commercial scale, men merely turned to new purposes the skills and aptitudes that had become second nature to them. Thus Ely Whitney, who as a Massachusetts farm youth had made nails and hatpins for sale to his neighbors, later contrived the cotton gin and successfully applied the principle of interchangeable parts to the making of muskets; and Theodore T. Woodruff, a New York farm boy, won subsequent fame as the inventor of a sleeping car, a coffee hulling machine and a steam plow. In this manner another trait became imbedded in the American character.

Add a century of development and what happened?

In 1940 the American owned more motor cars than bathtubs. The pursuit of happiness was transformed into the happiness of pursuit.

Schlesinger ends his essay:

The long tutelage to the soil acted as the chief formative influence, removing ancient inhibitions, freeing latent energies, revamping mental attitudes. The rise of the city confirmed or strengthened many of the earlier attitudes while altering others. Probably none of the traits is peculiar to the American people; some of them we may regard with more humility than pride; but the sum total represents a way of life unlike that of any other nation.

Except for the rich planters in the aristocratic South, the new Americans learned to work very hard and their attitudes toward one another were based on belief in work. "After the Civil War," Schlesinger says, "General W.T. Sherman found public occasion to thank God that the overthrow of involuntary servitude enabled the Southern whites at last 'to earn an honest living'." A visitor from Europe remarked to an American hostess that it was a defect in our society that we have "no leisured classes." She replied, "But we have them, only we call them tramps." The traveler then reflected that "America is the only country in the world where one is ashamed of having nothing to do." Americans developed a business-like attitude even in their recreation. "We play games," Schlesinger notes, "not for their own sake but in order to win them."

We attend social gatherings grimly determined to have a "good time." Maxim Gorky said of Coney Island, "What an unhappy people it must be that turns for happiness here." . . .

The importance attached to useful work had the further effect of helping to render "this new man" indifferent to aesthetic considerations. To the farmer a tree was not a symbol of Nature's unity, but an obstacle to be reduced to a stump and then quickly replaced with a patch of corn or vegetables.

American freedom and inventiveness largely eliminated from the character of the people a natural sense of restraint. Wanting something, people set out to get it however they could, not bothering to think about the cost. The continent was wide, its resources apparently infinite, and they saw no reason to choose balance rather than acquisition. So the country, after a fashion, grew "rich," proud of its voracious achievements. Yet, paradoxically, America also produced Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and others of like mind in New England. Search as you may, you will not find the likes of William James anywhere else in the world. And in our own century we have men like Aldo Leopold, Lewis Mumford, and Theodore Roszak. It is as though America has an underground of philosophical inspiration and thoughtful common sense which strongly resists the tide of both the acquisitive and the commonplace, the ruthless and the irresponsible. Where does it come from, what feeds it, and what makes it grow? We hardly know, yet it makes a current in our lives that is slowly growing stronger as the voices, in the present, of Wes Jackson and Wendell Berry, both philosophers of agriculture and the land, are heard, respected, and carefully listened to. Do these individuals bring something with them from

an unknown egoic past? Has our continent hidden moral resources which keep flowering in a few extraordinary individuals?

Here, too, are sources of self-knowledge for us all. The Earth, it seems clear, is more than a pile of resources for men and women to digest as rapidly as they can; it is also, as John Keats declared, a Vale of Soul-making where men and women of a quietly heroic mold come to exercise their talents and work toward their dreams. Who are these people and where do they come from? Are they, perhaps, members of the Tribe of Heroes of which Synesius spoke in his *Wisdom of the Egyptians*—men and women of the quality and character of Ammonius Saccas and Hypatia—saying:

> For there is indeed in the terrestrial abode the sacred tribe of heroes, who pay attention to mankind and who are able to give them assistance even in the smallest concerns.
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> This heroic tribe is, as it were, a colony from the gods established in order that this terrene abode may not be left destitute of a better nature.

Who are the gods? One might think of them as graduated human beings, ones who do not go on to other adventures in other worlds but remain in this one to give what instruction will be accepted by people suffering increasing misery and confusion.

REVIEW
THERAPY FOR TIRED SPIRITS

WE have for review a book about ordinary Americans who have been overtaken by anxieties about what the government of the United States is doing at home and around the world—preparing for utterly destructive war with nuclear weapons at home, and interfering with other governments and peoples in distant areas. Before they heard about these things they were pleasantly busy doing what other Americans were doing—making themselves comfortable and in some cases rich, enjoying their lives, leaving government alone to do its job, or what it thought was its job—without paying much attention to what the experts, civil and military, decided was the thing to do. But then, through the counsel of a friend, or the publicized action of a small group of demonstrators, they learned about nuclear war, learned about what many think of as its imminence, and were struck by the unimaginable horror of it all. They were moved to join the demonstrators and to study the possibilities that the peace demonstrators told of. Thus they became veterans of a sort—anti-war veterans.

The book we have, then, is *Hope in Hard Times,* published by Lexington Books for $10.95 in paperback, written by Paul Rogat Loeb, author of the recent *Nuclear Culture,* a study of the people who live and work in Hanford, Washington, where the government has established factories for the making of plutonium for use in nuclear bombs. To write this book Loeb lived in Hanford for a time, and now in his account of the peace movement around the country, he reports on how these people feel, think, and act, having spent considerable time with the most active members of each group.

The question fully occupying them is: How can we move the country to stop preparing for a war that will only destroy us all? Most of them have given up on the idea of appealing to men active in government and are concentrating on the hope of moving the people themselves to demand other policies. Various sorts of demonstrations, including civil disobedience, marches that attract attention, and whatever means they can think of to arouse public concern are the methods adopted.

The book begins with the story of the ten days in jail spent by Erica Bouza, wife of the Minneapolis Chief of Police. Her "crime": Obstructing entry to the brick building headquarters in Minneapolis of Honeywell, manufacturers of cluster bombs which in the Vietnam War hailed down on Indochinese peasants, deadly pellets with delayed release fuses, slaughtering people in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and later have been used in Lebanon, Angola, and E1 Salvador. Honeywell also makes mines, jet fighter components, and "major systems for missiles like the Trident, Pershing, MX, and cruise." Erica Bouza took part in the second blockade in front of the Honeywell building, in April, 1983, and was arrested along with 134 others. She had hoped to plead guilty quietly, pay her fine or do her time, and go home without notice, but the papers found out she was the wife of the chief of police and ran sensational stories. There was a heavy mail at the Bouza home, some nasty but most of it supportive and admiring from other women. She also had a kindly attitude from her husband, who believed she was sincere and really doing no harm to anyone. He drove her to the demonstration early in the morning—he had to be there too, to supervise the police.

She had been gradually moved to take part by peace literature given her by a new friend in Minneapolis. (The Bouzas had recently moved there from a suburb in New York, where Tony Bouza had been a police official in the Bronx.) Erica's jail term of ten days was the result of taking part in a second blockade of Honeywell; for the first she had only a suspended sentence. After a day or so in jail the superintendent put her in solitary for her own protection because some death threats against her had been received After eight days she was released for "good behavior."

Erica was now a member of Women Against Military Madness, accepting the responsibility of her small fame, including invitations to speak in behalf of peace—before the League of Women voters, for example. Like many other competent women of similar mind, she continues to work for the abolition of nuclear war.

Loeb turns next to Florence, South Carolina, where an atomic bomb fell near a farmhouse in 1958 because of a mechanical fault in a B-47. Part of it exploded on impact, digging a hole 100 feet wide and 35 feet deep. The nuclear bomb, however, did not go off, but three children were wounded. Most of the people in Florence forgot about the incident, but 25 years later "sixty respectable local residents engaged in 'protest march'—a fund-raising walk for the national Freeze campaign." In all 200 people took part, walking six miles to the atomic bomb site, ending on the campus of nearby Francis Marion College.

> For the marchers and for the town, such public dissent was a first. For almost everyone involved, this day marked entry into a country of new vulnerability and exposure. So they walked past oaks, pines, and poplars, slightly timid but proud, while neighbors watched from the Midas Muffler shop, Piggly Wiggly supermarket, from porches and storefronts. . . . Among those walking for the first time was Southern Baptist minister Bill Cusak. Bill proudly wore a square sign, reading "Peace Now" on all four sides, above a straw hat on his bald head. . . .
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> At the end-point rally, a rabbi led an ecumenical prayer and a local historian recalled the day the bomb fell. Ingram Parmelly, an Episcopal minister, who also taught sociology at Francis Marion, filled in for a hoped-for congressman—salving possible disappointment by saying that this was a movement determined not by star speakers but by ordinary citizens "insisting that we don't wish our children to be incinerated." He ended by quoting Isaiah, promising a day "when nation shall not lift up sword against nation." . . .
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> How is a movement born in a place where none existed before? How does a community of conscience oppose a once-accepted culture? A year and a half before the October 1983 march, Florence had no peace movement. Fears of the atomic arms race remained mute. Then a Francis Marion biologist named Jack Boyce got a Common Cause mailing detailing the consequences of a nuclear war, the developing weapons, and suggestions for citizen action. Boyce began researching the issue in books, government reports, and publications like *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.* He wrote letters to the editor of the local paper on the MX vote, the chances of surviving an atomic blast, and the escalating global crisis.
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> Around this time Bill Cusak saw the scientists speaking on nuclear war. It was an hour-long public TV discussion filmed by the British and it stirred him to consider the almost incomprehensible possibilities they discussed. Remembering a few of Boyce's letters in the paper, he decided to call Jack to talk.

The two got together, drew in others, began putting on programs of their own, and a movement was born. Loeb discovered that things like this have been happening all over the country. People drawn in are making their voices heard. Not everybody likes it, of course. "Letters to the papers talked of the 'darkness of Communist hell' and said ministers should not 'promote moral causes' but rather 'preach salvation only by Jesus's love for sinners and hatred for sin.' Police were urged to revoke the march permit." The marchers were attacked by some newspapers but supported by others and slowly the movement grew.

Loeb's book has over three hundred pages on these movements, which start small, all over the country, and are now growing larger, working together, putting on national campaigns, all of them with different origins, but all with the fundamental purpose of putting an end to war.

In the latter part of his book Loeb gives ample attention to the forces which campaigners for peace must overcome. He says:

> The arms race continues in part because maintaining power becomes its own end. In the words of the British historian and peace movement leader, E.P. Thompson, "the cruise and Pershing missiles have got to come [to European deployment] because they are symbols of America's hegemony over its clients and their acceptance is demanded as proof of NATO's 'unity.' They must be put down in noxious nests in England, Germany, Sicily in order to hold the old decaying structure of life-threatening power

> together. . . . Nuclear weapons are not for the continuation of policies by other means; they are the suppression of politics and the substitution of the symbolism of extermination."

There is also reduction to cynicism to contend with.

> With enough vision, individuals can fend off official lies and betrayals by keeping their hopes and trusting instead the admittedly fallible dreams of their fellow ordinary humans. Our culture's ills can breed resistance as well as fatalistic cynicism. But the very illicit actions of state can also be seen as easy, bitter proof that nothing can be done. . . . In part this cynicism stems from a general isolation. We have become ruled by America's traditional get-what-you-can individualism, and dislocated by an economy that simultaneously promises entrepreneurial glory while shunting more and more of us into bottom-rung jobs as orderlies, clerks, and MacDonald's cashiers. We are left with few notions of common good beyond those embodied in the rhetoric of national security militarism, pork-barrel dependency.

Yet despite the opposition coming from both government and, sometimes, one's neighbors, Loeb's book offers uneasy encouragement. The people who oppose war seldom give up, increase in number, and go on working. They overcome in themselves the fear of being an oddball, a dissenter, and go on making themselves heard. This book is a strong encouragement to join them.

COMMENTARY
NO JOB FOR SOCRATES

THIS week's "Children" review of Albert Shanker's discussion of teachers and the teaching profession drives home a lesson that has been taught by experience, yet is consistently ignored by the professionals of education. They do not read and quote John Holt; you seldom hear or see a reference to E.F. Schumacher; no serious attention is paid to Gandhi's views on education, nor do the journals of education ever reprint the seminal suggestions of Vinoba Bhave based on ancient methods of teaching practiced in India.

What did Schumacher say? He said that *small is beautif ul,* that the bigger an institution gets, the less real teaching takes place. If confronted by charges of this sort, school administrators will doubtless say that we are confronted by facts, not theories; we have a school population running into many millions and we *can't* have small schools, small classes; on the contrary, we must try to educate large groups of children, whatever the difficulties. This is like saying that because we can't do things the way they ought to be done, we must do things in ways that cannot possibly work.

But if doing things wrong is sure to produce a nation of passive, unthinking illiterates, this only means that we do not really *care* about education; that, somehow or other, the children will have to educate themselves. That, in other words, is what is now happening. And, read between the lines, that is really what Albert Shanker is saying. There are a few teachers who are trying, against great odds, to do what they can; and there are a growing number of parents who do care about their children and are teaching them at home—showing them how to teach themselves; but the great majority rely on big institutions.

The writer of an article in the Winter 1986 *Teachers College Record,* Madhu Suri Prakash, confirms these views by a brief reference to Socrates in a discussion of "Reforming the Teaching of Teachers." He notes that "history's best-known teacher, Socrates, who left an abysmal research record, could not secure himself an associate professorship today." Yet "testimony to his pedagogical effectiveness is reflected in one of his pupils, Plato, whose 'publications' remain treasures of Western civilization." But the rules of our institutions are such that he could not now get a job.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AN EDUCATOR'S DREAM

IN the fall 1986 issue of *American Educator,* Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, presents his view of what can or should be done to improve education in the public schools of the country by improving the performance of the teaching profession. In reporting what he says, we shall leave to one side the question of whether or not his program is really possible, mainly because of the clarity with which he describes what should be done. His proposal is that the country needs to become more civilized and intelligent, a bootstrap operation which only a handful of people know how to begin. One way to begin is to state the goal, and he has done this very well.

He starts out by acknowledging the validity of much of the criticism of public education made in 1983 in *A Nation at Risk,* the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Summarizing, he says:

> . . . the overall picture was not encouraging. Standards had fallen. SAT scores had declined rapidly over two decades. Although there were isolated gains, significant numbers of our children were growing up without basic literacy and numeracy skills, and even larger numbers could not craft a well-structured sentence, explain basic concepts of science, or advance a logical argument. Discipline problems, particularly in urban settings, were draining and demoralizing teachers. High schools had too many electives, and too many of those were frivolous. In many places, student grades promotions, and graduation certificates were becoming devalued currency.

The efforts of the union at reform, Mr. Shanker says, were widely respected, but didn't go far enough because they couldn't.

> They told us where to go but not how to get there. It is fine to call for three years of math and science. We're for that. But simply sounding the alarm will not produce the thousands and thousands of math and science teachers without whom those classes can't be taught. We don't have nearly enough math and science teachers to teach the classes now required. . . . The same is true of the other recommendations. The reports called for children to write more—a paragraph a day, a paper a week, two papers a week, three papers a week, more writing all across the curriculum. We're for that. We know that writing is important not only as the development of a craft in its own right, but also because it is probably the best way to teach children to think clearly, cogently, critically. But for a teacher with five classes a day and thirty kids per class, where is the time going to come to really help a child learn to write? The marking and critiquing of a paper and the coaching of children—how to organize their thoughts, how to build an argument or create an image, how to know when to end—takes time. . . . So we agreed with the reform reports on the necessity of more writing, but the much harder question of how to structure our schools to make that possible went unanswered, indeed, unasked.

Unless we face the question of where the teachers will come from, Shanker says, "we are dealing only with slogans and wishes."

> One can always fill a shortage by lowering standards. Shortages are always relative to standards, and if you have no standards, there is never a shortage.
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> Consider what happened last year in Baltimore, Maryland. The school district there instituted a new examination for all its prospective teachers. Although it was elementary, we should keep in mind that thousands of other districts don't even bother to test their applicants. The Baltimore exam was a simple writing test. But some of those who took it couldn't compose a simple note to a parent without making errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Since they failed the test, they were not supposed to be hired. But on the opening day of school, they were given the jobs anyway because there were no better candidates available.

In such circumstances, what should be done? Shanker would have the country follow the recommendations of two recent reports: that of the Carnegie Foundation and that of the American Federation of Teachers, which have, he says, the same thrust. "At their core are two ideas: First, we must seek the full professionalization of teaching. Second, and interwoven with the first,

we must redesign our schools and rethink the way we approach teaching and learning." He explains:

> Professionalizing teaching means all the things this union has long stood for and worked for: higher salaries; smaller class size, a manageable work load, and relief from non-teaching chores. It means working conditions that other professions so take for granted that they often go unmentioned: an office, a desk, a telephone, a quiet place. It means enough to go around, equipment that doesn't fall apart, school buildings that are clean and safe. It also means time for preparation and new learning and for discussion and work with one's colleagues.
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> But true professionalism requires an even more basic prerogative than these, and it is the recognition of this that distinguishes the AFT report and the Carnegie report from those that preceded them. The central recommendation of the new reports is to *empower* teachers, to give teachers control over the standards of their profession and conduct of their work. . . .
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> Top-down management does not work. Neither does top-down reform. We cannot help Johnny overcome his reading problem by turning to page 234 of a state regulation. The people who wrote these regulations are not qualified teachers, nor have they spent six months in the classroom observing Johnny and trying out and discarding four different approaches to solve his particular difficulty. The fifth approach—the one that may work—is not to be found in a state law or a school district's administrative directive. It can only come from the mind and hands of a creative and sensitive teacher.
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> Teaching, like medicine, cannot operate by remote control. There is no formula that fits all children. The only treatment that works is one that is constantly adjusted and fitted and fine-tuned by the people on the scene. Intelligent change has its best hope in teachers because nobody knows better than teachers what is going on in the schools.

It seems necessary, here, to point out a difficulty with the comparison of teaching with other professions. When you are sick, you have got to have a doctor, and you want a good one, which is to say, some professional in whom you can place your faith. A similar situation prevails when you retain a lawyer. A lot is at stake, and a second-rate lawyer may cost you, personally, a lot of money. But alas, no such compulsion is behind your decisions when you are voting about the schools. Are you willing, really willing, to keep politics out of the schools, or do you have your own notions of what and how children should be taught? Are you actually *ready* to let a professional teacher make all the decisions? What kind of a voice do you want? Professionalism has many good qualities which we admire, but it also has limitations, especially when it expects the public to be obliging true believers. This problem could probably be handled, and well handled, by the kind of professionals Shanker has in mind, but getting such teachers who establish their own dignity and promise may take a long time. Mr. Shanker of course knows this, but the slack aspect of public motivation is a real obstacle. His program actually needs more home-schooling as a partner in the enterprise of finding and paying better teachers. This would help to cut the problem down to size.

Shanker devotes the rest of his article to ways in which teachers can be helped to measure up to the high standards that are required. As he puts it:

> . . . we cannot assume the prerogatives of a profession without also assuming the responsibilities. This brings me to one of the key recommendations of both the AFT and Carnegie reports: the creation of a national board of professional teaching standards. This will be a national, non-governmental board composed of a majority of outstanding teachers. It will set standards of what teachers ought to know and be able to do. Based upon those, it will examine and administer a national certifying examination for teachers comparable to the bar and other professional exams. . . . The creation of such a national board would put teaching standards in the hands of the profession. After all, isn't that where they belong?

In this Mr. Shanker is exactly right. But again there will be arguments. Well, the arguments might just possibly accomplish some education of parents.

FRONTIERS

Two Papers

TRANET is a quarterly newsletter published in Rangely, Maine. *Tranet* is short for Transitional Network for Appropriate/Alternative Technologies. It is edited by and for people who are "trying to change the world by changing their own lives." It has sixteen pages of small type made up of mostly brief entries naming groups and organizations with a few words on what they are doing and why. The first entry in the Winter 1986 issue (No. 43) is a long review of what sounds like a very good book—*The Cultural Transition,* edited by Merry White and Susan Pollak, published by Routledge & Kegan Paul.

The remarks of the reviewer are a good clue to the temper and intentions of *Tranet.* Richard Katz has in this book an essay on the economy of the African Kung. He compares the "synergistic" economy of the!Kung to the "scarcity" economy of the Euro-Americans. The !Kung function as guardians, not possessors of the resources and are guided by the motivation of service to others.

> Rather than assuming that resources are scarce and individuals must compete to gain access to them, the !Kung assume that resources are interrelated and a greater whole is created through synergy. Collaboration rather than competition makes more available to all. . . . While this book is limited to "social transformation in the Third World and Japan," the studies suggest an area of research relevant to the social revolution of modern industrial society. Our own survival depends on a major cultural transition away from the individualistic, materialistic, military, nationalistic culture which has formed us. To escape from our cultural bases we need to examine our institutions from a new perspective In books such as *Deschooling Society, Medical Nemesis* and *Tools for Conviviality,* Ivan Illich like other social critics has examined our cultural institutions from an historical perspective.
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> A second perspective could come from comparing our paradigms to those of other cultures. For example, the aborigines have no concept of land ownership. They are the "owners" of the land, the land owns them. The land is not only the soil and territory but also the spirits of their ancestors, the environment, the cosmos and of all else which has created them. They are part of the land and cannot conceive of being separated from it.
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> In Papua New Guinea different people have different rights on the same land. One may hold ceremonial rights, another fishing, another hunting, another netting bats, another dwelling rights, and another the right of passage.
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> In Ghana "trade" is not practiced except where introduced by the colonials. People merely give with no measure of what might be returned but know that the more they give the more will be given to them.
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> "Poverty" was the "insurance" policy of the Northwest Coast American Indians. The more they gave away the more esteem they gained for themselves and their family and the more was society beholden to them.

The viewer remarks, "More studies like *The Cultural Transition* could open our eyes to cultural options for a future era," then turns to another book, David Howarth's *Tahiti—A Paradise Lost* (Viking, $7.95):

> By carefully rereading the logs and diaries of early "discoverers" of Tahiti, Howarth reconstructs the culture of 100,000 people crowded on a small island before the influx of the Euro-Americans. The islanders had no concept of ownership; what was needed for living was freely given and openly taken. . . . The culture of paradise, which had been stable for many centuries, was destroyed in a few decades by the excesses of the visitors whose cultural paradigms were based on "scarcity" rather than "enoughness."

The value of such books is that, little by little, readers become persuaded that the way "we" do things is not a "law of nature" but simply habits inherited from our ancestors, which could possibly be changed for the better. It will of course take us a while to get used to the idea that "ownership" has in many cases in the past not been essential to either security or survival—that the fellowship of community might well take the place of individualistic "provision for the future"—and finally lead to constructive social change. But this would involve the sharing of responsibility for one another, and mutual trust. Stirring people to begin thinking along these lines is perhaps the greatest contribution of papers like *Tranet.* An

individual subscription is $30. One may write to *Tranet* at P.O. Box 567, Rangeley, Maine 04970.

Another journal especially worthy of attention is the *Newsletter* of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. For example, the contributors to the Fall 1986 issue (100 pages) include William H. Whyte, Robert Swann, Ivan Illich, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Lapham, Hazel Henderson, and three substantial articles (or extracts) from Wendell Berry. The editor is Robert Sardello.

Bob Swann, who lives in Great Barrington, Mass., proposes a bioregional currency to make the communities of a region independent of oscillations in prices of the world market. Since more than half of people in Vermont, and probably in his area, burn wood to heat their homes, they decided on cord wood to back their currency, which they called Burkshares. His argument is based on the fact that

> . . . cities are being stifled by national currency. National currency works to depress cities because cities belong to natural bioregional complexes which have their own life, their own development, their own directions. It does not go up and down with the national economy. . . . A national economy, completely issued from one source, can only deal with economy in a general way. It can't deal with it specifically through the region. It increases or decreases interest rates according to the data that comes in at the national level. But that might be very bad for Dallas and it might be very good for Detroit, or vice versa at any given moment. What has to be done, what is essential for the further development of cities is that cities must have their own currency so that they can develop in their own ways. . . .

One of Wendell Berry's contributions is an extract from a forthcoming book. We quote from his critique of industrialism:

> The industrial mind is a mind without compunction. It simply accepts that people, ultimately, will be treated as things, and things, ultimately, will be treated as garbage. . . . One works, not because the work is necessary or valuable or useful to a desirable end or because one loves to do it, but only to be able to quit—a condition that a saner time would regard as infernal, a condemnation. This is explained, of course, by the dullness of the work, by the loss of responsibility for, or credit for, or knowledge of, the thing made. But what can be the status of the working small farmer in a nation whose motto is a sigh of relief: "Thank God its Friday"?

A general membership in the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture brings the biannual *Institute Newsletter* for $25 a year. Subscription only is $5.00, The Dallas Institute, 2719 Routh Street, Dallas, Texas 75201.