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AN ARTICLE, A BOOK

UNTIL quite recently, we who live in the industrialized societies have felt and believed that ours is a world in progress—confronted, of course, by what we term "problems" but overcoming them, one by one. But during, say, the past twenty years. we have seen the problems no longer diminishing but becoming worse—much worse. Getting a decent place to live and bring up our children was simply something that everybody did in the course of one's life, but now this seems possible for only a quite affluent few, even in supposedly prosperous America. As for the rest of the world, the matter of housing is rapidly turning into a disaster. And we are being instructed by current history that our own means of living and using the world is a major cause of the poverty of the majority of people who live far away. As Gilbert F. White, editor of *Environment*, put it in the November 1986 issue:

> A salient feature of world population is the rapid growth of large cities in the Third World. Urban centers like Bogota, Chenyang, Karachi, Lagos, Madras, and Santiago now handily exceed Chicago and Los Angeles in numbers. The great concentrations of Mexico City, Chungking, and Cairo already dwarf New York. The United Nations Population Studies estimates suggest that the number of cities in more-developed countries with populations exceeding 4 million may increase from 16 to 25 between 1980 and 2000. During the same period, the number of such cities in less-developed countries may increase from 22 to 61.
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> Most of these new cities are growing rapidly in ways that generate two massive threats to the quality of their environments. The most obvious and chronic aspect of all but a few of the burgeoning populations is their deployment of "unconventional" settlements. These are vast shantytowns, bidonvilles, and barrios. With their shabby, crowded shelters often inadequate water and sewerage, smoke-laden air, and primitive transport, they are places of seething activity and of degraded environment.

This statement is in introduction to an article in the November *Environment* by Spenser W. Havlick, "Building for Calamity," who begins his review of the multiplying shantytowns of the world by saying that in the large cities of the developing world, the people "are becoming increasingly vulnerable to serious natural disasters—including floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, avalanches, cyclones, earth slides, and tsunamis (seismic sea waves)—that may cause major loss of life and massive property damage. Too often, reconstruction and recovery attempts in the poorest regions of the world are unable to provide the institutional, policy, or structural changes necessary to mitigate or prevent a recurrence of the high levels of human suffering that follow these events." In only twenty-five years, this writer says, a hundred million more of urban poor have been added to the population of the rapidly growing cities, usually on the most hazardous sites. He quotes a UN study which shows that:

> Most developing nations are doubling their population every 20-25 years, assuming national population growth rates of 2 to 3 per cent annually, while the urban population in these countries is doubling every 12-15 years (assuming urban growth rates of 4 to 7 per cent annually). Slum and squatter settlements grow at about twice the average urban rate. In Third World settlements there is a doubling of population every five to seven years and the density of slum and squatter populations is usually very high. (Up to 15,000 people per acre were found to be living along Nankin Street in the old portions of Singapore.) In many cases entire families may occupy a single room.

Mr. Havlick adds:

> Shantytown and "overnight" squatter settlements now hold up to 30 per cent of the population of many major urban centers in the developing nations. Precise figures for most squatter settlement populations are almost impossible to find—because many shantytown residents are considered to be non-citizens, they are seldom tabulated. Therefore, a population estimate of over 5 million in Hong Kong, for example, does not include the approximately 1.6 million additional refugees and squatters who live in the most hazard-prone sites of Hong Kong and Kowloon. And Bombay, India, with almost 9 million people, has 4.2 million squatters and slum dwellers.

> Seasonal changes, employment availability, and political unrest often create fluctuations in the populations of Third World slum neighborhoods. . . .
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> The exodus from the hinterland to the metropolitan center is dramatized by Jabotabek, the area Jakarta on the island of Java, Indonesia.
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> In 1961 the population was 6.7 million. During the next twenty years the growth rate of Jabotabek was significantly higher than that of the country as a whole and by 1981 the metropolitan region had a population of more than 13 million. (*Scientific American,* April 1985.)

In these days of decline in rural areas, the poor and landless people migrate to the cities, hoping to find work. Usually only the most menial tasks can be found, and this, Havlick says, "forces poor citizens further and further onto marginal land—such as hazardous flood plains, ravines, steep slopes, or already overcrowded hazard-prone sites." Government attempts to move these people around or evacuate them "could well be politically explosive for those currently living in squalor."

Havlick also points out that life in hazardous areas is dangerous in many ways.

> Tens of millions of people are vulnerable to multiple natural hazards. Sea surges, coastal flooding, cyclone-force winds, and mud slides often occur simultaneously. Volcanic eruptions are often accompanied by earthquakes, avalanches, mud flows, and toxic gas emissions. Earthquakes frequently trigger dam failures and landslides, which in turn cause major flooding or fires from broken gas pipelines that have either been torn out by flood waters or fractured by seismic activity.

But the experts who have competence to deal with such things are usually specialists who know about only one type of disaster.

> Seismologists sometimes talk to each other but almost never to hydrologists, flood plain managers, or architects interested in flood mitigation especially before a major natural disaster. Perhaps, therefore, it is too much to expect that specialists in these different areas might collaborate to produce composite risk maps that show where—at any one time of the year—cyclones, sea surges, and flooding may jeopardize urban settlement, whereas at another season brush fires, tsunamis, or volcanic eruptions may do equivalent damage. This is especially important since almost all of the major Third World cities are located on river flood plains or coastal shorelines, or are near volcanic ranges.

Havlick's article is long, giving the loss of life in numerous major disasters, and showing that we must expect still greater concentrations of population in regions where fairly frequent upsets of the sort mentioned above are not only likely but probable. He concludes:

> Starvation and malnutrition, inadequate potable water supplies and sanitary facilities, and poverty continue to rank as the great human problems in developing nations. However, as the number of people who die or are injured as a result of natural hazards continue to escalate, the leadership of the urban Third World may realize that hazard mitigation has a payoff well worth considering.

Spenser W. Havlick teaches at the College of Environmental Design, University of Colorado at Boulder. *Environment* is published monthly by Heldref Publications; subscription is $23 a year, single copies $4. The address is 4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.

By happy coincidence, about the time we were reading this article, a book came in from Harper & Row for attention, which could hardly be more welcome—*Ceramic Houses—How To Build Your Own,* by Nader Khalili, an Itanian architect who was educated in this country and developed a practice in both this country and Iran. His first book, *Racing Alone,* reviewed in MANAS for November 9, 1983, told the story of his resolve, in middle life, to give all his energies to the development of low-cost housing for those unable to afford conventionally designed homes. His quest began in Iran. He bought a motorcycle and began riding around the country, looking at the dwellings of the poor. Most of them were constructed of mud brick. They were cheap enough—the mud was free—but they didn't last very long. Sometimes the roof would collapse in a heavy rainstorm. Then, one day, the answer came home to him when on his travels he saw an enormous kiln, used to fire clay pipes for aqueducts. It was big enough to live in and water would not melt it. There it was—proof that his idea of building ceramic houses would work. Next he found a man in his sixties who had been firing large domes for forty years, and then he located a very small village a few

miles from Tehran, where one of the residents agreed to make his two-room mud brick home the place of the demonstration. Khalili tells the exciting story of firing and then glazing this dwelling in *Racing Alone*, and he tells it again in *Ceramic Houses*. Khalili has a strong poetic strain in his thinking. He begins one of his early chapters by saying:

> Midway in my life I stopped racing with others. I picked up my dreams and started a gentle walk.
>
> My dreams were of a simple house, built with human hands out of the simple materials of this world: the elements—Earth, Water, Air and Fire.
>
> To build a house out of earth, then fire and bake it in place, fuse it like a giant hollow rock.
>
> The house becoming a kiln, or the kiln becoming a house.
>
> Then to glaze this house with fire to the beauty of a ceramic glazed vessel.
>
> I touched my dreams in reality by racing and competing with no one by myself.

A little later he explains:

> Our first chance to implement this technique came to us not as a new construction, but as a rehabilitation work of a village's old housing. This village, Ghaleh Mofid, was typical of thousands across Iran and neighboring countries—houses built for farmers and their animals from the earth alone, dug out from the site. The sixty families who used to live in this village either left or were harmed by cave-ins of the mud roofs. Twelve were two-room houses still standing, and twenty-five were partially or totally ruined.
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> The twelve families living in the surviving houses became our clients. These clients had no money to give us; they could only afford part of their time and the abundant earth around the village. They were also ready with their prayers and their bread and yogurt, to help us do our work. And except for one or two who stayed suspicious as a matter of habit, we had the fortune of winning everyone else's trust and cooperation. Our small budget came partially from the new provincial government and a private organization, and partially from our own pockets.
>
> Ghaleh Mofid, like many other small villages, is almost unknown to outsiders. The typical house was built with a single-vault roof and a low partition in the middle to divide the one room into two, there were no living room or bedroom divisions. In this part of the world, the rooms are not divided into living rooms, bedrooms, and dining rooms. All rooms are for living, sleeping, or dining; they are built smaller or larger. There was no electricity or plumbing.

After the successful firing and glazing of the first house, the villagers, having watched, did their own homes. Khalili and his associates took on the job of building and firing a ten-room school house. So, with the collaboration of an experienced mason, they built a beautiful building and fired it. There is, we should say, a complete description of each step of application of their method, which they named *geltaftan*, a compound of two Persian words meaning clay and firing. And *Ceramic Houses* is filled with excellent photographs of the different stages of erecting these buildings and of the handsome finished products. Speaking of the school, Khalili says:

> It was amazing to see how a middle-aged adobe maker made over 60,000 adobe full blocks for the entire job with a single wooden form and a bucket of water refilled by his son, who was the main helper for all his work. It was even more amazing to watch the mason build the entire school with his bare hands, avoiding even simple tools. There was no form work or centering; he didn't use even a standard adz [a cutting tool with a curved blade] to break adobe—he used the hard heel of his hand. . . . And it again was a miracle to watch what the fire was doing to this structure, and then touch the result.

Apart from labor, the only out-of-pocket cost was for the kerosene to fuel the homemade burners placed in the rooms to be fired. A tank on the roof of the dwelling or on a roof nearby provided the gravity-flow fuel. The first house fired took $52 worth of kerosene; the school required $54 worth per room. At first they made a few mistakes, but these were soon remedied, and Khalili lists them all since he wants his readers to learn what he discovered in this way. We might add that after the bisque firing a homemade glaze (made from ground-up pop bottles) was applied by insecticide sprayers (which every farmer has) and the house then fired again.

Human need was the inspiration for this book, and the reader senses this from page to page. It has essentially a "how-to" content, which attracts mainly by its simplicity and the beauty of applying ideas.

Today Nader Khalili instructs at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (in Santa Monica), undertaking to teach the firing techniques to not only young architects but also Indians living in the Southwest. The adobe block structure at the Ojai Foundation site in California was the first adobe structure fired in the United States. In a concluding chapter Khalili describes the wide applications of the firing technique, such as to make earth dams permanent, the restoration of millions of earth structures around the world, the stabilization of eroding coastal cliffs, and generally as a solution to the world's housing shortage. As he puts it:

> Millions of adobe buildings in the world are in danger of destruction—not by an earthquake, or flood, but by wet weather. Many of these buildings could be saved by fire. Millions of buildings in this world made of adobe or piled mud are infested with disease, mice, and vermin. They could be made hygienic by the purifying character of fire. An entire earthen village could be cleansed of disease and vermin by fire and glaze. Fire is holy in spirit. We can learn to use it to create a better living environment, including fireproof buildings.

Khalili's concern is for the poor people of the world. He says:

> The basic philosophy of *geltaftan* is earth architecture created from the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire. It is based on human knowledge, appropriate technique, and a technology that works with gravity, the sun, and the four elements. If we extend this philosophy it becomes obvious that sophisticated equipment should not even be considered. Not that there is evil in such high technology; but it is a far-fetched reality for most of the world, and should be left alone. High technology is appropriate for societies that have it. It is easy for Western societies to use gas and fuel-injecting pumps to fire a room or a whole building. But here we consider only a basic system, based on locally available fuels or easily imported ones, which could be used anywhere in the world.
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> Even the use of imported fuels such as oil is questionable, since it may be a strain on the economy. In that case it is good to compare the available alternatives and calculate the trade-offs. We cannot say that constructing adobe and clay buildings and firing them is appropriate for every place and every condition; this would be a foolhardy claim. *Geltaftan* is an alternative—and a more valid one than many others—that could suit many parts of the world.
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> The best firing system is usually the system used locally to fire brick and ceramic kilns. The fuel can range from coal and coke to wood, grass, and weeds; from animal dung and trash to natural gas, oil, bio gas, and electricity; or even solar energy, microwave, and fusion.

The reader of this book will not be able to help himself—he will fall in love with the beauty of Iranian architecture, its lovely arches and domes and flying buttresses. Everything seems rough and coarse at the beginning, and superbly curved and graceful at the end.

After telling about a firing in Ghaleh Mofid, Khalili said:

> Our greatest reward came when a farmer's wife arrived with her incense tray and praying lips, saying, "Now I can sleep in the rainy and snowy nights without fear of the roof collapsing and killing my children and my man. It is brick. It is mud no more." This was the greatest reward for me personally, since my quest and her need had met: A safe house for her, and a dream reached for me. And we all were happy to be rewarded with the knowledge that what we were doing was right.

So, here at the end, we go back to the question raised implicitly by Spenser Havlick throughout his article "Building for Calamity" in the November *Environment.* There are indeed solutions for the terrible problems of people in extreme situations, the people who have been obliged by their poverty to live in the wrong places under almost intolerable conditions. The solutions exist, but the world lacks the motivation to apply them. There is no technological problem, only a human problem. Here and there, throughout history, people appear who see what ought to be done and set about doing it. But they are few, while the indifferent are the vast majority. *Ceramic Houses* will help readers to recognize this. Those who do will help give men like Khalili heart and inspire others to follow his example. His book is large (8½" X 11"), handsome, and delightful to read. The price (paperback) is $19.95.

REVIEW
STAR WARS . . . AND HUNGER

A BOOK recently put together by the Union of Concerned Scientists, and published by Beacon in paperback ($7.95), *Empty Promise—The Growing Case Against Star Wars,* is at once a useful and informing study and a disheartening compilation. It is informing in showing that leading scientists and engineers will have nothing to do with the research program of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), since they find it difficult to take seriously a project almost certain to fail and regard the undertaking as an outrageous waste of money. It is disheartening to find that so many politicians are willing to exploit this proposal because they are able to manipulate its requirements to personal advantage. Another discouraging aspect of the Star Wars proposal is the way in which it seems to have involved a number of scientists in activities they can hardly believe in because of the large sums of money which become available to them for "research."

There are nine contributors, all members or sympathetic to the Union of Concerned Scientists, an organization founded by a group of faculty and graduate students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969. Today it is said to be "one of the largest and most effective policy organizations in the country," with headquarters in Cambridge, Mass. The activities "include research, public education, and lobbying." UCS issued an earlier book in 1984, *The Fallacy of Star Wars,* and the leaders now feel that recent developments in the "great debate" call for examination of the arguments and claims of the Star Wars advocates in greater detail. We should say that the contributors to *Empty Promise* write with considerable restraint, which, we suppose, is suitable in a book issued by an organization. They do not go so far as Gerald Piel of the *Scientific American* went, in his article in *Science* for September 5, 1986, when he said, "The proposition that the SDI enterprise may secure a defense against a missile attack is not a mere fantasy; it is a hoax," but such terse charges are supported by the content of *Empty Promise.* John Tirman, editor of this volume, says in his foreword:

> Stars Wars is a vision of a space-based defense (weapons, sensors, computers, etc., based on satellites in outer space) that would intercept Soviet ballistic missiles in their boost phase and warheads in their postboost, midcourse, and reentry phases. The SDI is thus a *strategic* defense program, indicating that the system would defend against intercontinental weapons—in this case, missiles and warheads. . . .
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> In the actual conduct of the SDI, the president's idealistic hope is apparently not being sought. As we demonstrated in *The Fallacy of Star Wars,* the possibility of constructing a perfect, or near-perfect, defense that could save populations from nuclear attack is not a realizable goal. Limited defense, probably meant to protect military targets, is the actual goal of the program.

Considering the destructiveness of a nuclear attack, the general public is not particularly interested in the protection of a few military targets, so that this aspect of the present Star Wars program is not publicized when virtually fake demonstrations that the program will work are put on, which also cause honest scientists to leave the program when they see such political misuse of their work. Some of these demonstrations are described in detail. The "public relations" side of the entire program is examined by Tirman:

> The incessant use of technological optimism also serves another purpose: to divert attention from the most troubling aspects of the program, aspects that could be a death-knell to any form of space-based missile defense. One such problem is the "back end" of Star Wars, the very unglamorous realm of transportation and logistics. It is frequently overlooked that the Star Wars armada must first be boosted into space and, while there, repaired, changed, supplemented, and so on, as the months and years roll by. A Senate staff report puts the requirements most sharply, stating that they include "massive launch and recovery operations, an industrial complex to build the weapons and sensors, refurbish operations for maintenance and conversions . . . inter-orbit operations and intra-orbit operations, communications operations . . . plus an extensive

ground transportation." The difficulty with this panoply of tasks is not feasibility so much as cost. Boosting any material into orbit is very expensive, upwards of $3,000 per pound. If, as some SDI architecture studies suggest, several thousand of satellites are needed for space defense, then as much as 200 million pounds of hardware must be lofted into low and high earth orbits, at a present cost of as much as $600 billion for as many as 5,000 shuttle flights.

These numbers, which are now high-end estimates could nonetheless be conservative if the military does not reverse the series of failures of its boosters. In August 1985 and April 1986, Titan boosters carrying military cargoes into space exploded shortly after lift-off. A Delta booster lifting a weather satellite blew up in May 1986. And, of course, the shuttle program was set back by the catastrophic failure of the *Challenger* in January 1986. These were the vehicles the SDI enthusiasts were depending on for Star Wars deployment, yet the reliability—let alone future costs to ensure better performance—of these systems is very much in doubt.

John Tirman concludes this contribution:

> The politics of SDI do not comprise an admirable chapter in American history. It has, so far, been marred by government equivocation, even duplicity, in explaining its intentions to the American people. The informed skeptics of the program have been officially depicted as embittered Cassandras and charlatans, and even accused or disloyalty, although their skepticism repeatedly proves correct. And the very economic health and strategic security of the nation is increasingly placed in jeopardy with every day that Star Wars is allowed to proceed. Whether this bleak chapter is a brief folly or a lengthy disaster depends in large part on exactly when one of the SDI's weak links finally breaks.

This seems an adequate sample of the contents of *Empty Promise.* For the general reader, reaching a conclusion about Star Wars means reaching a conclusion as to which experts he will decide to trust, and which side gives evidences of integrity and the will to tell the truth.

* * *

In the mid-70s, Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, who had joined to write the epoch-making book, *Food First,* also produced a substantial pamphlet, *World Hunger: Ten Myths,* designed to expose as false a number of misconceptions about world food supply. The pamphlet was last year expanded into a book of 200 pages, with two more "myths" added for critical examination. *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* is published by Grove Press at $7.95 in paperback. The purpose of this book is to show that the widespread hunger throughout the world is not from "natural" causes but results from human indifference and the misuse-of power. The twelve myths have very little truth in them. The authors soon found out that

> No country in the world is a hopeless basket case. Even countries many people think of as impossibly overcrowded have the resources necessary to free themselves from hunger.
>
> Increasing a nation's food production may not help the hungry. Food production per person can increase while at the same time more people go hungry.
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> Our government's foreign aid often hurts rather than helps the hungry. But in a multitude of other ways we can help.
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> The poor in the third world are neither a burden on us nor a threat to our interests. Unlikely as it may seem, the interests of the vast majority of Americans have much in common with those of the hungry in the third world.

What *is* hunger? the authors ask. It is more than gaunted bodies and starving children. It is day-in and day-out unremitting pain. "Every year this largely invisible hunger kills as many as 18 to 20 million people—more than twice the number who died each year during World War II." The figures are awesome, but the suffering is individual. They give an example:

> A friend of ours, Dr. Charles Clements, is a former Air Force pilot and Vietnam veteran who spent a year treating peasants in El Salvador. In Witness to War, he writes of a family he tried to help whose son and daughter had died of fever and diarrhea. "Both had been lost," he writes, "in the

> years when Camila and her husband had chosen to pay their mortgage, a sum equal to half the value of their crop, rather than keep the money to feed their children. Each year, the choice was always the same. If they paid, their children's lives were endangered. If they didn't, their land could be repossessed." . . .
>
> In Guatemala in 1978, we met two poor highland peasants. With the help of World Neighbors, an Oklahoma City-based voluntary aid group, they were teaching their neighbors how to reduce erosion on the steep slopes onto which they had been pushed by wealthy landowners monopolizing the flat valley land. Two years later, the friend who had introduced us to the peasants visited our Institute for Food and Development Policy in San Francisco. We learned that one had been forced into hiding, the other had been killed. In the eyes of the wealthy their crime was teaching their neighbors better farming techniques. Guatemala's oligarchy feels threatened by any change that makes the poor less dependent on low-paying jobs on their plantations.

What are the myths about hunger and food supply? A true myth is an intuitively grounded faith in fundamental truths about life, embodied in a tale such as the story of Prometheus. But it is also, in popular usage, a shallow belief that is fostered by manipulative interests. One such belief is that U.S. food aid to other countries is meant to serve the hungry. But food, for governments, is usually a political tool. As the authors say:

> Most food aid is used to bolster politically allied governments. During the war in Indochina in the early 1970s, for example, U.S. government allies there received nearly 20 times more food aid than the five African countries then suffering famine.

But the fundamental solution is access to the land for landless peasants and small loans of enough money to buy seed and to get a start. *World* Hunger is a basic education in the kind of world we live in and how we can help change it.

COMMENTARY
WE ARE THE PEOPLE..

IN the Feb. 15 issue of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* an English writer, Keith Partington, who has been teaching in a California high school for two years, and in other high schools for nine more, undertakes to explain what he calls "American parochialism" to English readers. The fault, he says, lies in our enormous geography, our newspapers and other media, and finally our schools. Absorbing appropriate information about our own country is, practically speaking, too much for us, so the rest of the world gets neglected. (We can't do much about our size, but reading the *Guardian* helps in understanding European affairs and supplements the American media.) There remain the schools, of which the *Guardian* writer says:

> The very source of this parochialism is to be found within the American education system itself, just as the European education systems initiate the processes of a more global orientation in their respective students. Specifically, it is the American elementary and secondary schools within the public sector which must shoulder the blame for the global ignorance which is displayed by so many intelligent and educated Americans.

General world geography is studied for the equivalent of only one year out of thirteen, leaving the students just plain ignorant of the rest of the world. In most states choice of textbooks is passed on by school trustees who are themselves fairly ignorant and who may feel that their job is censorship rather than education. And all the schools are saturated with a curious egotism which grows out of the "Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag," recited every morning to begin the day. While it may be reasonable for a nation to embody its ideals in such a pledge, the idea of a single nation "under God," Partington suggests, makes it seem "as if God and the American nation are one and the same thing."

Our advanced technology, he says, leads to "computer-scored multiple choice test papers," which "requires no skills of composition and only moderate reading comprehension ability is necessary for students to be able to develop strategies suitable to deal effectively with the test items."

> Consequently, high schools spend very little time on essay or composition skills. . . . Where does the already parochially inclined and partially literate American turn to for world information when such reading becomes too difficult? The answer is, back to the TV and local papers, of course. A vicious circle.
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> There are, of course, many very learned, articulate, highly literate, and well traveled Americans who are citizens of the wider world. What is alarming is that they are but a small percentage of the nation's 240 million or so inhabitants when compared to the generally more literate and informed Europeans.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

AN editorial in *Antaeus Report*, a thoughtful 8-page quarterly issued by the Center for the Study of Education and Society, Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio 43015, raises the question of whether the schools should provide a core course in democratic values, based on the first few lines of the Declaration of Independence, which are—

"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

> Truths? Self-evident? What is truth and what is the nature of the evidence? The first two concepts in the Declaration renounce an easy pragmatism and invite us to wrestle with tough epistemological ideas. We are invited further to ponder the metaphysical problem of a creator, an ultimate source of the values we proclaim. Four of these values are listed: equality, life, liberty and happiness. Plenty to chew on here. What do all of these words mean? What did they mean to the Founders? What do they mean to us? And then there is the pregnant line about the authority that resides in the governed. What kind of authority are we talking about and what is its fate today?
>
> Does any school in the country today offer such a course?

A few moments of reflection will make it clear that only a private school *could* offer such a course! Yet the idea seems a good one, and it happens that half the pages of this issue of *Antaeus Report* are devoted by the editors to an interview with Henry Steele Commager (Simpson Lecturer at Amherst College and one of America's leading historians) which seems to supply plenty of material for such a course. The subject is "The Genius of the Founders." Following is the first question by *Antneus Report:*

AR—It is widely agreed that the Founders were, if not exactly Plato's Philosopher-Kings, at least an exceptionally brilliant group. How do you account for their genius?

Commager—The Founders were products of what we call the American Enlightenment, which in turn was part of that dazzling complex of science and philosophy of the Enlightenment period in Europe. In Europe the most prestigious achievements were in the areas of new discoveries in the sciences, literature and the fine arts. In the realm of social welfare, the Enlightenment played very little role in the countries of Western Europe and it had few consequences for the average man. In America, the Enlightenment found expression largely in the realms of politics, law, and economy. And all of these interests were designed to enhance the general welfare; designed to enhance that pursuit of happiness which for the first time went into a formal document—the document of the Declaration of Independence and which, may I remind you, is to be found in the Constitution of two-thirds of American states to this day. In any event Americans had a universality to the Enlightenment that was not found in any of the countries of Europe insofar as it was based on the concept of the general welfare—a rather general term for what we call "the commonwealth," that great neglected term of our own day. Franklin himself was its universal symbol. The proudest monuments of the Old World were, let us say, the scientific work of Newton or Diderot's Encyclopedia, the palaces of Versailles and the music of Mozart. The most enduring monuments of enlightened America were state and national constitutions and bills of rights, arid it is entirely proper that we interpret the American Enlightenment in these raw political terms.

The second question:

AR—What else was unique about the political achievements of the Americans?

Commager—What was unique was that they created a government, despite widespread opinion that this could not be done. In his reflections on the French Revolution, Edmund Burke who, after all, had traced the course of the American Revolution from Lexington down to the writing of the Constitution, asserted that most of the arguments of Americans were impossible, asserted that men simply could not make government. Governments ruled generation after generation and century after century—they couldn't be made, men could not write constitutions. Constitutions, too, were the products of hundreds of

> years of experience of one kind or another. Men could not govern themselves; they had never done so—they had always been governed by an elite of one kind or another. Furthermore, no violent revolution could possibly succeed. The Americans were experienced in politics but their experience was limited to the problems of a frontier society, and that experience had nothing to teach the Old World. So much for the greatest of British philosophers of the 18th century!

Later Commager adds:

> How paradoxical that the small and widely scattered people whose experience was largely in tilling the soil and sailing the ocean seas, should prove politically the most inventive and the most mature in the whole of history. And that a people most deeply suspicious of government should be, certainly in the 18th century, the only one whose leaders seemed immune from the temptations of politics or the temptations of military ambition. Never before in history had one generation presided over such a profusion of inventions and of creations in the public arena. And, I might say, never since that time has a people presided over such a host of inventions and creations.

Through other questions Commager goes on to discuss our present weaknesses, including what he calls our loss of creativity in politics, which he partly attributes to the extraordinary development of technology, which, he says, has made us passive. He also thinks that money is the chief villain which has undermined our political activity. "It didn't," he says, "cost Lincoln much to get elected." Meanwhile, with all our money, "we don't seem to be any better educated than people were at the time of the Founding."

The chief value of this interview with Commager is the provocation to thought which his knowledge of history gives to what he says. Such discussions would almost certainly stimulate interest in the problems and possibilities of self-government in students of a high-school age and in college. As to educating the young for citizenship, this is not, he feels, an obligation of the schools.

> That has to be the work of the whole society. That is a social responsibility. The major work of any society—the whole society—is the education of the next generation in everything a citizen should be and should know. Students don't pay much attention to what they hear in school. They listen to TV. They listen to their parents.

One consideration seems left out of this interview—the fact that the threat of nuclear war is due to the enormous power of the largest industrial powers, and that the pollution of the environment is due to the ruthless exploitation of our resources by their powerful technologies. One practical solution for both these immeasurable evils is smaller countries and pursuit of the goals of bioregionalism, which would mean that eventually even politics would naturally become a response to the laws of nature—a genuine ecological politics, in short. One hopes that in some future study of this sort, *Antaeus Report* will give attention to the ideas of Peter Berg, Wes Jackson, and among historians, to William Appleman Williams, taking off, perhaps, from Hannah Arendt's remarks in *On Revolution.* There she said that Jefferson knew, "however dimly, that the Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised."

> Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of "expressing, discussing and deciding" which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom. And since the state and federal governments, the proudest results of revolution through sheer weight of their proper business were bound to overshadow in political importance the townships and their meeting halls—until what Emerson still considered to be "the unit of the Republic" and "the school of the people" in political matters had withered away—one might even come to the conclusion that there was less opportunity for the exercise of public freedom and the enjoyment of public happiness in the republic of the United States than there had existed in the colonies of British America. . . . Only Jefferson among the founders had a clear premonition of this tragedy, for his greatest fear was indeed lest "the abstract political system of democracy lacked concrete organs."

FRONTIERS

Gandhi's "Sarvodaya"

AFTER the Boer War was ended, Gandhi was living and practicing law in Johannesburg, and at the suggestion of a friend he started the journal *Indian Opinion* in 1904, bearing responsibility for its editorial content. There was at that time an outbreak of the black plague which infected some Indians, most of whom died. Gandhi had arranged for their care in an unoccupied building. In those days Gandhi took his meals in a vegetarian restaurant and one evening a young Englishman named Albert West came to his table, wanting to talk. He had read Gandhi's letter to the press holding the municipality responsible for lack of sanitation and inadequate care of the victims, and West, being interested, met and talked with Gandhi about the need for help. He offered his help as a nurse, but Gandhi suggested that the emergency was almost over, then invited West to take charge of operating *Indian Opinion*, since he was experienced in running a press. He agreed, and took on the job. Meanwhile, Gandhi met Henry Polak in the same way he met West, and when West wrote Gandhi about the confusion of finances at the offices of *Indian Opinion*, he decided to go to Natal where the journal was published. Polak saw him off at the station, giving him a book to read on the trip. The book was John Ruskin's *Unto this Last.* Gandhi wrote in his autobiography:

> It was impossible to lay the book aside, once I had begun it. It gripped me. It was a twenty-four hours' journey from Johannesburg to Natal. The train reached Durban in the evening. I could not get sleep that night. I determined to change my life in the light of the book. I had not read a single book of Ruskin's before this. During the days of my education I had read practically nothing outside textbooks, and after I had launched into active life I had very little time left for reading. I cannot therefore claim much book knowledge. I believe I have not lost much because of this enforced restraint. On the contrary, the limited reading may be said to have enabled me fairly to digest what I did read. The one book that brought about an instantaneous and practical transformation in my life was "Unto this Last" and I translated it later into Gujarati.

There was one other immediate effect. He moved the plant and office of *Indian Opinion* to a farm in the country which he named the Phoenix Settlement, where everyone would draw the same living wage.

All this is in the way of introduction to the content and quality of Gandhi's Gujarati translation—or rather rendition—of Ruskin's *Unto This Last.* In *Gandhi Marg* for April, 1986, I. Jesudasan puts much of it into English for present-day readers. He says at the beginning:

> *Sarvodaya* was the title of a series of nine articles which Gandhi wrote and got published in Gujarati in the *Indian Opinion* weekly in South Africa in 1908. The articles did not contain any exclusively original ideas of Gandhi. Rather they were Gandhi's summary of John Ruskin's thought on political economy contained in the book *Unto This Last.* Gandhi did not want to translate this work into Gujarati, because the common Gujarati reader might be unable to follow its biblical echoes or allusions. Gandhi did not even explain the meaning of the title of Ruskin's book, because it could be understood only by a person who had read the Bible in English. But since the object of the book is the welfare of all—that is, the advancement of all and not merely the greatest number—Gandhi fittingly titled these articles "Sarvodaya." And what he attempted in them was only to present the substance of Ruskin's work to the Gujarati reader.

Actually, Ruskin's book was an account of how one who wants to live by the ideas of Socrates should conduct his life, whatever his vocation. As the writer of the *Gandhi Marg* article puts it:

> So, more than the vividness of Ruskin's description, that which made Gandhi transcribe Ruskin's ideas into his own mother tongue was Gandhi's eagerness and desire to carry to his compatriots the conviction of the truths which had gripped him first and become part and parcel of his own life or self. The "Sarvodaya" series then is as much a prose lyric of Gandhi—the self-expression of Gandhi—as it is the substance of Ruskin's work. It is Gandhi's personal testimony to the truth of the ideas or convictions of Socrates elaborated by Ruskin. In

> the very act of the written testimonial, then, Gandhi merges his life with Socrates' own, and he notes in parenthesis . . . that Socrates practices his own precepts.

For Gandhi, this writer says, the importance of these ideas was in their contrast to the acquisitive spirit then developing strength in the West, also evident in the Western education the youth of India were subjected to. The Western view is that the goal of life is material happiness, and that the means to happiness are provided by the methods advocated by the economists, who had completely separated their supposed "science" from the matrix of morality. Jesudasan says:

> To grasp the content of Ruskin's thought, which Gandhi summarizes, it is important to locate it in the context against which Ruskin wrote. That context was the birth of economics independent of philosophical ethics. From having been a part of moral philosophy so far, economics was made into a separate discipline or area of specialization in the Universities. This specialty was brought about by treating the economic situation or fact as a law of economics. In the context of the growing Industrial Revolution the situation was one of unrelieved misery on the one hand and shocking wealth and luxury on the other. . . . This state of development in economics was noticeable and represented in Adam Smith who left out of his *Wealth of Nations* the issues which he had discussed in his *Moral Sentiments* though he had wanted to keep the two together. After Adam Smith, normative philosophy of economics disappeared, yielding place to economic positivism. In defense of economic positivism or the "science" of economics, Ricardo and Malthus campaigned against the poor and the sick, who had to be sacrificed in order to get the economic theory across as a law not only of a social equilibrium, but also as the positive law of the land, doing away with the Poor Laws (1936), producing the phase of the worst misery in English history. . . . The economists have erred in treating people as mere body-machines and building their laws on this assumption. While not denying the existence of the soul, they do not take it into account in their laws. And a science which overlooks the fundamentally spiritual nature of man cannot be talking about real man at all.

This is what Ruskin saw, Gandhi saw, and later E. F. Schumacher saw, and in time Schumacher formulated a reformed economic doctrine which is now slowly spreading among those who themselves have some moral perception. It is for this reason that we put the discussion of Gandhi's use of Ruskin's book in Frontiers, since the Gandhian conception of the meaning of life is now appearing in many forms and under other names. These developments are all a part of the attempt to restore the legitimacy of moral thinking as the fundamental rule of life.