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ON MAKING WHOLES

SOME years ago, a writer whose name we have forgotten tried to estimate the amount of the average person's time—his available time—he would devote to public affairs, and the writer came up with a figure—10 per cent. He was after an explanation of why socio-political goals are so hard to achieve. The opponents of change, he decided, being comfortably fixed with existing conditions, can easily give much more of their attention to keeping things the way they are. This is certainly true all up and down the line. A homeowner in a fashionable California canyon who was bucking the real estate interests in that region, hoping to prevent their methods of subdivision and development from ruining both the beauty and the ecology of the canyon, after a long struggle said to his friends, "The most I can do is give an hour or two a day to the contest, while these people with their bulldozers waiting to go into action give 24 hours a day to their fight. Sooner or later, they are going to win." And they did.

There is of course a solution for this, although it might take a full century to accomplish. The real solution for that kind of problem is to have virtually no government but regional or local government. A century to accomplish this is probably far too optimistic since it means the end of the war-making national state, the disappearance of "national interests," and a vast simplification of cultural life everywhere on the planet. Someone may say, "But the world was once something like that." In reply all you can do is agree, but adding that since that time the world has been divided up in vast national holdings operated on the basis of political power and selfish interests, and if we can free ourselves from the tentacles of national power and develop natural instead of national interests, we will have *learned* something and will be too intelligent to allow another great cycle of control by power centers to supervene. The model of the ambitious man will have been replaced by other exemplars who know and understand how life should be lived. We then would have a literature which reaches back to men like Gandhi, Aldo Leopold, Wendell Berry, and pioneers who as yet we haven't heard of, but who will surely come along if we are ever to get out of the mess we are now in. They are the writers who will set the tone for a life when we will look back on the present as the real dark Ages. How will we get to that stage? By undergoing the discipline of a transformation of character. There is no other way to do it.

In the present, we are fed a diet of books which offer a program of tinkering with arrangements which are to be made without any notable alteration in how we live, on the ground that we have to be "realistic," which is the same as arguing that people can't be expected to change, that actual growth has never taken place, and is really impossible. In saying this, we may laugh at ourselves at times and remark that only the marines are able to do the "impossible," and vote for giving our last dime to pay for the latest improvement in our weapons for war.

Yet people are slowly learning. There are those who in increasing number are revolting against paying for war—withholding their taxes, and more and more young men and women who are refusing to serve in the armed forces.

This is a way of speaking about the time in which we live, when we can no longer live "normal" lives. What is a normal life? Does anybody know? Those among us who are old enough to remember what it was like before World War I are able to recall what most people then regarded as a normal life and feel a great nostalgia for those days. The decencies were then commonplaces of existence, hopes were modest and ambitions sensible. Patriotism was

spontaneous and sacrifices were made willingly. Then the war came on. We watched it for three years, and then, fired up by propaganda we got into it and our youth learned at first hand the horror of combat in the trenches. And then, after another year, it was over and the men came home, victorious and proud, hoping to go fishing for a while, rest, and go back to a normal life. Some of them, perhaps, were able to do just that, but others had wrecked nervous systems and others lacked an arm or a leg. And the European survivors were in much worse condition. Many if not most of the best young men of England were simply dead. Books have been written about them. The French paid an equal or greater price, while the Germans, perhaps, suffered most of all; apart from the slaughter of the German army, a generation of German children grew up with rickets from the food blockade, and after the Versailles Treaty laid the basis for another World War it infected neurotic and resentful adults with the Nazi fever.

Sisley Huddleston, a British journalist of that time, contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* for May, 1920, an article, "The Menace of the World," in which he said at the end:

> Turn where one will, one finds only that the war has worsened mankind. Those who speak of the heroic virtues which are born on the battlefield, which spring, like the Phoenix, out of the ashes of war, are uttering the most stupid claptrap. The dominion of darkness has spread over Europe, and a slimy progeny of cruelty, of bestiality, of insensibility, of materiality, has crawled into the light of day—a noisesome brood, of which it will be long before we can dispossess ourselves.

Some months later Huddleston wrote another article for the *Atlantic* of November, 1990, "The Human Spirit in Shadow," in which he said:

> There have been crimes perpetrated by the politicians—by all the politicians—which no condemnation could fitly characterize. But the peoples must be blamed. The people support the war-making politicians. It is my business to follow the course of events day by day, and it is sometimes difficult to stand back and take a general view. Whenever I do so, I am appalled at the blundering or the wickedness of the leaders of the world. Without party prejudices or personal predilections, an impartial observer, I cannot conceive how it is possible to be always blind to the truth, the glaring truth, that since the Armistice we have never sought to make peace, but have sought only some pretext and method for prolonging the war.
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> Hate exudes from every journal in speaking of certain peoples—a weary hate, a conventional hate, a hate which is always whipping itself into a passion. It is, perhaps, more strictly, apathy masquerading as hate—which is worst of all. The people are *blaisé*, they seek only bread and circuses for themselves. They regard no bread for others as a rather boring circus for themselves. Every morning there is another war, though the news has almost lost its power to excite; every evening there is a fresh revelation of some warlike menace about which the jaded fancy may play. The key of all the folly and all the unhappiness in Europe is the fact that we cannot do without wars any more than a drug-maniac can do without cocaine or morphine.

If defining a normal life requires us to remember what it used to be like, we find ourselves less and less able to recall. While the high emotions recorded by journalists in the *Atlantic* in 1990—Huddleston was only one among several remarkable writers—reconstruct how people of conscience felt then, only a decade passed in America before the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. Those who can remember those days—when having a job felt like some kind of fortunate miracle—would never speak of the accompanying fear of being without work as permitting any sort of normal life. The irony that large expenditures by the government for armaments for the next great war finally pulled us out of the depression was largely unnoticed. The crimes of the Nazis and the surprise attack of the Japanese on Pearl Harbor swept the country into the war on a wave of righteous emotion. Since then we have not even had a normal environment, to say nothing of the possibility of a normal life. Instead, the culture rapidly adjusted to abnormal conditions as though this was the way things ought to be. All that can be said about the period since the end of

World War II that is in any way encouraging is that a handful of remarkable people became active during this time. We speak of writers like Lewis Mumford and Ortega y Gassett, who had appeared earlier, Aldo Leopold, then the psychologist, Abraham Maslow, then Rachel Carson, who was followed by Wendell Berry, a philosophical agriculturalist, and by his friend, Wes Jackson. As a result of the work of all these people, and some others as well, we now have the outline of a normal life in the form of a literary creation. And yet . . . and yet . . . would you say that these writers live "normal" lives? They are continually pressed into activity by what they believe in, with little or no time for themselves. Can that be "normal"? Such questions open up the subject.

We live, it seems clear, in a sick society. This means that those who diagnose the ill more or less correctly have their lives pulled out of shape by their heroic efforts to straighten things out. To their way of thinking and acting, the world seems tragically mixed up, so that for them it becomes normal to make abnormal efforts to remedy the situation wherever and however they can. Their friends, some of them, while admiring what they do, say to themselves, "I don't want to live like that."

But meanwhile what these writers say and write in books and articles is having an effect on the intellectual and moral atmosphere of the times. People are beginning to open their minds, to look at the fabric of the common life and to see many flaws in what is commonly regarded as normal. They have long been tired of what people call "the rat race" and are beginning to want out of it. Some, as enthusiasts, make a leap into situations for which they are not ready and have bitter lessons which may or may not lead to a better life. But the questions keep on emerging, and some of the answers may have been proposed, so that the conditions of our lives are being examined anew. Call, then, our time the onset of a period of transition, the kind of alteration in human feelings about what is good and what might be possible—a wondering if, after all, there is a connection between what one thinks is right and how his life turns out. Then there are those who consider that they ought to do what they think is right, no matter how it turns out, in a world that has become as abnormal as ours.

The present, then, is a period in which frightening decisions have to be made. The decisions are frightening because there are no longer any authorities to tell us how things will turn out. It used to be the Church. The church sanctioned wars of conquest so long as priests accompanied the warriors with the avowed purpose of saving the souls of the heathen. Then, in later centuries, to add to the wealth of nations was the motive for exploration and conquest, and the natives of the lands so conquered were regarded as "primitive people" who really had no rights because they were not developing the land but merely occupying it—"wasting" it—so that it was reasonable and right to dispossess and if necessary exterminate them. Finally, the right to land and its resources was held to belong to the strong. That is still the practical "ethic" which prevails in the relations between modern nations, although belief in this rule is gradually diminishing.

Meanwhile, through the centuries, as organized religion lost its power through the rise of scientific knowledge, the rule proclaimed by Francis Bacon became the guiding principle of all practical enterprise in the West. Knowledge, he declared, is power. Truth is what enables humans to apply science to the world in order to secure utilities for man. Bacon, indeed, converted philosophy into science, since he identified truth with utility. No breath of moral responsibility remained, since all truth and knowledge were in doing whatever increased man's power over nature. And this for over four hundred years has been the only guide for scientific and technological activity, although a great many

physical benefits have been brought to the human species by scientific invention.

Yet today, with so many things going wrong in so many different ways, and with growing awareness that the Baconian principle is a partisan approach that loses all sight of the welfare of wholes, an emerging few are declaring that a new morality must become the foundation of the rebirth of civilization. The ground of action, they say, must be the welfare of wholes, not parts. This is one great result of the loss of authority in the world of both individuals and societies. In the past we looked to someone to believe, to rely on, to be loyal to, to be obedient to—either a God or his prophet who had authoritative instruction. In the present all such gods are dead, and the lesson of experience is that in his place we must put an understanding of the higher laws of nature to which we will look for knowledge of what to do and how to do it. And this too is a frightening situation, since how shall we know what is right with no supreme authority to instruct us? History has thrown us back on ourselves and we must think as we have never thought before. Happily, there are those who are accepting this responsibility and are doing what they can. We find them in several parts of the world, meeting, conferring, and beginning to take action. They are responding to an insight that seems to come naturally; partly because of the breakdown of all external authority, so that intuitions, once neglected or suppressed, are beginning to be heard; partly because ancient wisdom, once in large part the guide of high civilizations of the past, is being remembered and listened to; and finally because the constraints of current history demand action.

We have space for only one or two illustrations. One may be found in a paper presented at a conference held in Santa Barbara, California, earlier this year, sponsored by the Center for a Post-Modern World, the topic considered being "Toward a Post-Modern World." The speaker we have in mind is C. Dean Freudenberger, of Claremont, California. He began his discussion of "The Problem of Modern Agriculture" by saying:

> Forty years ago, no one within the agricultural research and educational establishment questioned the assumption base of contemporary agriculture. When I was an agricultural student within the California State University system, we assumed that a capital and petrochemical intensive approach to agriculture was without fault. We were experiencing the heady days of high production yields during and following the Second World War. The so-called "Green Revolution" was in its infancy, suggesting great promise. Few people expressed concern about the future welfare of the farm family and the rural community. . . . Today, the old colonial and post-war world has gone by. I observe that in agriculture, we are already moving into a post-modern world. I observe this to be true because the modern world in which I was trained and served is in advanced stages of collapse, and in this crisis, alternative futures are being envisioned.

Prof. Freudenberger now turns to diagnosis:

> Technologically, economically and socially, modern agriculture everywhere is in disarray. There is now the realization that its technology is almost entirely dependent on heavy inputs of a non-renewable, exhausting and toxic resource: fossil fuel and petro-chemicals. We now ponder the necessity of a post-petroleum technology. . . . Today, nearly 85% of all food consumed by the human species comes from fourteen plants! . . . Historically, losses in topsoil are unprecedented. Given the fact that humanity has eroded away 50% of the earth's soil deposits and the contemporary magnitude of desertification will take another 30% by the end of this century, we are wondering how human populations numbering beyond six billion will be able to sustain themselves on between 5% and 4% of the earth's surface.
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> Economically speaking, modern agriculture is bankrupt. In the U.S.A., the farm debt, resting on the shoulders of 3% of its national population, equals the combined international debts of Mexico, Argentina and Brazil . . . about 220 billion dollars.

We have not yet, this writer says, "invented an agriculture that preserves its essential resource base," adding, however, that "Out of our present agricultural crisis, so firmly rooted in a long and

irrevocable destructive tradition, the challenging idea of the creation of a regenerative self-reliant agriculture is being born." He offers this way of setting the problem:

> Agricultural research educational and extension establishments must ask: (1) What did the original eco-system look like before extensive human intervention? (2) How did humanity relate to those earlier environments? (3) What are they like today? (4) What caused the transformation? (5) What can be considered an analogue of those earlier communities? and (6) What are our strategies for moving from where we are to these post-modern approximations?

In answering these questions he remarks: "In other words, the economy, science and technology of our time must make a shift from power acquisition and maintenance, to serve the land and those who relate to the natural system in direct ways that agriculture requires." Freudenberger says:

> In this nation I believe that the work of Wes Jackson of the Land Institute, at Salina, Kansas, is an illustration of a profound beginning toward a post-modern agriculture. As a plant geneticist, his approach is in enhancing certain perennial grasses in a polycultural setting. The vision is seeing the end of wheat, oats and barley on the great prairie lands of America and establishing an analogue of the more original grassland communities.

Here the concern with the welfare of wholes becomes self-evident. And the "normal life" of those who work for agricultural regeneration is a life intensified by the hope of restoring a natural agriculture.

Working for a world at peace means working toward a world which is naturally at peace. Here the best examples are of individual humans, since it is hard to find in nature illustrations of human societies that are truly at peace. The most peaceful individuals we know of are men and women who are devoting their lives to the service of wholes in particular areas, such as agriculture and health. One such man, Ed Lazar, was recently the author of a pamphlet called *Common Sense,* available from Sassuma Publications, 2125 Oberlin Street, Palo Alto, Calif. 94306, at $4. "We don't need experts," he says at the beginning, concerning nuclear war, "to explain this most pressing of all human issues. All we need is average people using common sense." He says in this pamphlet:

> The nuclear age challenges us to define our values and live up to them. Do we wish our way of life to be based on official massive state terrorism? . . . If we are to reject as we must, small-scale terrorism of airport bombings, must we not as well reject the large-scale terrorism of war and nuclear threat? . . . We need to start creating the elements of a new society right now in our communities and regions.

This is the project on which the pamphlet elaborates. It is devoted to making whole the human society of the present.

REVIEW
VARIOUS SAGES

THE contents of *Leaning on the Moment* are interviews which amount to essays which have appeared in the quarterly *Parabola* during that magazine's existence, and published last year by the Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition, which also issues the quarterly. The price of the book of $13.95. Among the contributors or interviewed are Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, Peter Brook, Laurens van der Post, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and the Dalai Lama. There are seventeen in all. While these individuals all come from different backgrounds and have studied different things, they seem to have grown together rather than apart, and they seem to think in the same way, giving the book considerable unity. Yet it may be said that all those talked to and questioned have approaches distinctively their own. A unity achieved in this way is somewhat exciting.

A good example is Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, who was interviewed in 1982 in Jerusalem. Steinsaltz is head of the Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications and is engaged in translating into modern Hebrew the Babylonian Talmud. The interviewers were William and Louise Welch. Discussed as themes were the idea of hierarchy and the part played by choice in human life. The Rabbi said in one place:

> There are many discussions in Jewish mystical tradition about interrelations between mind, or intellect, and emotion. In our view, in the hierarchy of the soul, emotions are below mind, because mind gives meaning and direction to emotions. The powers of conceptualization and of thinking are called the father and mother, the emotions are called the children. It is a common way of describing them; but even so, we know that in the working of the soul there are instances when the mind cannot do anything. The intellect is powerless to achieve things. That which emotions can achieve, the mind cannot, but the emotions cannot operate without some kind of subject-object relationship. Emotions, dependent on information and direction supplied by the mind, can only work within that context. The mind works as a watcher, or censor, of things without and within.

Now the rabbi waxes Socratic:

> In the Middle Ages [he doesn't say whose "Middle Ages"] people said that the peak of knowledge is "I don't know." The question is: if that is so, what is the difference between the person who has no knowledge whatever and the person who knows? The difference is that the person who knows, knows that he doesn't know. The person who does not know, doesn't even have knowledge of his ignorance. So the feeling of reverence is enhanced by knowing the distance. . . . To know that I don't know is more than just making a statement, to be emotionally involved in it I have to have an idea of what the meaning of it is. Newton supposedly said that he felt like a small child playing with pebbles on the shore of the sea of knowledge—to feel that really and truly, you have to know as much as Newton did. Those who don't know it may say it, but they don't feel it emotionally.

The question of choices came into the discussion by way of something said by Louise Welch. She said that there is a wonderful order in our bodies and all nature: all is perfect except me. Why am I not perfect?

Rabbi Steinsaltz replied:

> Free will is an element of disorder. It is also the only element of advancement. Any kind of movement is a way of destroying a system of order. Walking, for example, is *becoming unstable.* . . . Movement destroys equilibrium all the time; the power to move is also the power to destroy order. The imperfection is inherent, because I am the only creature that has independent volition, and the only creature in the universe that can distort. These distortions are part of our common human work for coming to a higher point, because other creatures, seemingly, cannot move of their own volition, and we can. And being able to move means that we can move in different directions. We don't have the same biological point of view as other creatures; we are free of instinct—not entirely, but to a very great degree. That is our power, and that is our downfall.

He was interrupted by William Welch who interjected, "You almost say *choice,* don't you?" The rabbi went on:

> Yes, I am always saying *choice.* Animals and plants don't have that element of choice. It used to be a habit of mind, when I felt angry or discontented, to go to the zoo and watch the animals; animals have a certain type of perfection that we don't.

Yet, who among us, for the static perfection, and beauty, of the animal, would give up the power of choice? This seems the answer to a number of wonders or mysteries.

The book has two Tibetan contributors, the Dalai Lama and Tara Tulku, the latter being one of the last Buddhist monks to receive complete training before the Chinese invasion and the flight to India in 1959. He taught Westerners in India at Bodhgaya, at the request of the Dalai Lama and later came to the United States where he taught ethics at Amhurst College. He was interviewed there by *Parabola.* Bodhgaya was the place where Gautama became enlightened under the Bodhi Tree. Asked about "pilgrimages" to such places, he said:

> . . . I am talking first about the ordinary level of pilgrimage. For example, we have Bodhgaya, a place to which anyone can go, but an especially sacred place. And if one has faith in the Buddha, and practices and meditates and proceeds on the path from ignorance to enlightenment, the place gets greater and greater power for one. Now, this is what we mean by ordinary pilgrimage.
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> As for extraordinary pilgrimage, we believe that there is a place, made by the Buddha's merits, realizations, and vows and prayer for all sentient beings, which exists on a subtle level. He has created this place from his achievement of the timelessness in which past, present, and future are equally accessible. In this place, he receives those beings who go there. But the place is practically impossible for us to encounter from our ordinary level.
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> The Buddha left there an inconceivable body, an extraordinary one which has not passed away as the ordinary one has. These are the two major foci of pilgrimage on the extraordinary level. Why is that? Because the Buddha has said that if one reaches ethical, meditational, and intellectual achievement of a certain kind, then one can come to have such a dwelling, such a body and mind. One becomes a Buddha himself. If one practices according to those teachings, one can transform one's world, one's body, and one's mind. That is the true inner pilgrimage—the attainment of enlightenment; to change the body and the world as well as the mind. . . .

Asked about the dissemination of Buddhist ideas in the West, Tara Tulku replied:

> Since America is a new area for Buddhism, it is hard to see how one can conceive of it as a pilgrimage in the conventional Buddhist sense. However, in an unconventional sense, in the context that the metaphor of the Buddha's teaching is the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, and there definitely is a progression of the Dharma around the planet—it does seem that in Asia it has had a time of decline, although it is still very much there, while it is growing in the West—it can be seen as a pilgrimage. The expression for pilgrimage in Tibetan is "to turn around the place," to circumambulate a place, and we can see the Dharma itself is circling around the globe. The whole globe is becoming a Wheel Dharma.

Toward the end of the book Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr is interviewed. He was born in Teheran in 1933, and graduated from M.I.T., then obtained a doctorate in the history of science and philosophy at Harvard in 1958, and then taught for over twenty years at Teheran University. He is now professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. In reply to a question as to what "the whole man" is, he said:

> The whole man is a person who realizes fully what it means to be man. That is, he has, or she has—and throughout this essay when I say "man" I mean both sexes—within himself realized all the possibilities of existence, the perfection of all the qualities with which God—ultimate reality—has embellished human nature, but which is not fully manifested in all members of the human race. This idea goes back, of course, to the central Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man or the Universal Man, *al-Insan al-kamil,* according to which every creature reflects in its own way some aspect, or quality, of the Divine Nature in its specific Islamic reference. . . . Only man is the mirror of all Divine Names and Qualities. Therefore, to say "Man" is to say "totality" and "wholeness": that is, all aspects of the Supreme Divinity which have manifested themselves in the cosmos. Now to be whole is to realize this fullness of our own nature. The Sufi answer to your question would be very simple: in order for a man to be whole,

> all he or she has to do is to be himself or herself; that is, to realize what we really are in our ultimate reality, which is to be the total reflection, total image, total theophany of God's name and Qualities.

The last question in this interview returned to the beginning subject: "Have you any practical advice for someone who's beginning to sense the need for more wholeness in his or her life?" Dr. Nasr made this reply:

> The person who already feels a lack of wholeness has received a gift from heaven. We say in Sufism that the only person whose ignorance is incurable is a person who doesn't know that he is ignorant. To know that one is ignorant is already the first stage of cure from ignorance. In the same way, to realize that one is lacking in wholeness is already a blessing from heaven. The important thing is, to be true to oneself; never to relent from one's quest for wholeness.

Leaning on the Moment is a surprisingly enjoyable book, considering the depth of its content.

COMMENTARY
RETURN TO CIVILIZATION

A THOUGHTFUL reader has supplied us with a photocopy of an article on cultural criticism by James Boyd White in the June 1986 *Michigan Law Review.* Some things said by this writer seem worth noticing here, mainly because he sees that we are now moving into a world in which hardly any certainties exist, yet where this rather sudden emancipation from virtually every authority has afforded us the opportunity to return to the method of the humanities for making up our minds. He sets the problem clearly:

> In many different ways, for a great many decades, it has been claimed that the great characteristic of the modern world is the collapse of order. God is dead, or so we are told, and the fixed doctrines and traditional practices of religion no longer offer truths upon which we can confidently rely for a clear sense of ourselves, of our world, and of our duties. Science was once thought to promise a firmer ground, and some think it still does, but upon examination it too proves to be culturally determined and shaped, in some cases almost a form of poetry. From Darwin we discover that the categories of nature itself—the species into which life is formed—are impermanent, constantly shifting, and they carry us into a future we cannot possibly imagine. Our psychological experience—the first and last datum of the neo-Cartesian skeptic—is shown by Freud to be delusive, incomplete, part of a larger structure of motive and meaning of which we can grasp only the dimmest outline. Wittgenstein shows us that language, the very material of our thought and the means of our expression, is contingent and variable, laden with meanings of which we are imperfectly aware and which we cannot wholly control, . . . How can we possibly judge the worth of anything?

Mr. White, however, does not regard all these losses as discouraging. It is only, he suggests, that we suffer from the loss of a false hope—the assumption we once had of "fixity and certitude." In other words, we are restored to our authentic condition. Using other words, Mr. White suggests that we have no more authority in what we do than the artist has in following his inspiration, and this, he proposes, is by no means negligible. Speaking of our best practice he says that "what one learns in such a process is not a set of repeatable rules or maxims or portable insights, not a set of theories and arguments and conclusions, but a way of understanding and being. . . . This is true not only of poetic texts but of intellectual and argumentative texts, even of judicial opinions."

Mr. White, in short, is arguing for a return to the mode of classics in discourse.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
BUILDING A GREAT SCHOOL

IN the last issue of MANAS in 1968—December 31—our lead article quoted from Donald Worster the story of how back in the middle thirties, when the dust bowl was created, Hugh Hammond Bennett, who became director of the Soil Conservation Service, was in Washington, D.C., trying to stir up interest among Congressmen to giving help to the farmers who were losing their soil to water and wind. He heard that a great storm was blowing in from the western plains and he put off a speech he had scheduled "until a copper gloom settled over the capital city and blotted out the light." In the midst of the growing haze, he then announced, "This, gentlemen, is what I have been talking about." The Congressmen saw and acted, giving Bennett the money he needed to try to change the conditions that caused the dust bowl.

But the impoverished farmers—Okies, we called them—had already begun to migrate to California, a population movement that lasted for at least another five years. Much has been published about what happened to the soil of those denuded western states, but we know very little, now, of what happened to the people who fled their homes in those days, except for the books of California writers like Carey McWilliams (*Factories in the Field*) and John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*). But in the *Los Angeles Times* of January 18, this year, Ann Japenga tells the story of what happened to some of the children who migrated with their parents from the dried-up land in Oklahoma. A total of some 350,000 settled in California, or tried to, and many of them came to the San Joaquin Valley in the central part of the state. These people who arrived in rattling jalopies were in no way welcomed by the prosperous Californians. One man, eight years old at time of the migration, now a middle-aged insurance agent in El Toro, recalled, "Nobody wanted us around." This man, Carlton Faulconer, gave the *Times* writer background for her story.

> Because they were thought to be unwashed and slowwitted, the Okie children had to sit at the back of the classrooms. They were bullied by classmates—and they fought back. Carlton Faulconer's older brother, Roley, was one who had the reputation for replying to classmates' taunts with his fists.

They weren't wanted, but there they were, thousands of them, and the law said they must go to school. At that time, Leo Hart was superintendent of Kern County schools. He watched the dust-bowl refugees accumulate in migrant camps, under bridges and in ditches throughout his jurisdiction. Most of them were children. "It was a real problem," said Hart. "It affected our schools seriously." (Hart is now ninety and living in Shafter, a small farming town north of Bakersfield.)

This story is really about Leo Hart and what he was able to do. Most of what we write about in MANAS is not admiring of schools, but the school that Hart brought into being is a glorious exception. The school was really needed and it became a great place. Ann Japenga says:

> Although the newcomers weren't wanted in existing schools, Hart was determined to provide the migrant children with an education. "It was really my job," he said.
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> Hart leased 10 acres of land and two condemned buildings from the federal government for $10. The site was next door to the migrant camp near Weedpatch where the Faulconers were living, the same camp made famous in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath.*
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> The shovel and hoe-swinging superintendent, along with 50 underfed children and a crop of hand-picked teachers, proceeded to build their own school. Roley and Carlton Faulconer helped dig water lines; their sister Joyce sewed curtains for the home economics room.
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> Arvin Federal Emergency School opened in September, 1940. With very little in the way of state emergency funds, Hart and the students made their school one of the best in the county. It got so that local farmers who had once ostracized the migrant families eventually demanded to send their own

children to the school. (In 1944, the migrant school merged with a facility for non-migrant children. It's called Sunset School and operates today at the same site where Arvin Federal once stood.)

Hart has been retired since 1959.

Ann Japenga tells about his memories after interviewing him at his home in Shafter:

He got into education in the first place for practical reasons, he recalled. "What made me go into education was I didn't have any money." . . . Hart came back from his service in France during World War I with tuberculosis and was sent to a sanitarium in Tucson to recover. After leaving the hospital, Hart attended Arizona State University, graduating with a master's degree in education. He was offered a job in Bakersfield, taught high school there for a while, then ran for county superintendent of schools.

He was elected in 1939 and served two terms. That was the year when Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* was published—when thousands more of the migrants from Oklahoma, Texas and Missouri were pouring in to California.

When Hart took over as superintendent, local farmers and migrants had already faced off in angry confrontations. Some migrant camps nearby were ordered burned by health officials for unsanitary conditions. And *Grapes of Wrath*—a sympathetic dramatization of suffering and injustice in the migrant camps—was banned in Kern County public libraries.

Pete Bancroft, who served as principal of the migrant school, said that like undocumented workers today, the refugees were both needed and hated. Local farmers, with their neat homes and routinized lives, were threatened by the starving migrants.

As they began to organize, the laborers were perceived as desperate agitators, yet the farmers required their cheap labor to bring the crops in on time. "The farmers wanted the laborers, but they didn't want them to stay," said Bancroft, who now lives in Fallbrook.

When Hart attempted to place migrant youths in existing schools, some local residents accused him of being a communist, and said he was not fit to hold his position.

"The feeling here was pretty bitter (toward the refugees)," Hart said. "Local residents were not inclined to help these people. They were more inclined to wish they'd move on."

Peter Bancroft said that Leo Hart "made himself a one-man team" in support of the migrant children. "He really had to do a lot of it alone."

Hart was able to convince the Arvin-Lamont School District of the fact of the emergency and he was allowed to set up an emergency school for the children from the Weedpatch camp, but the emergency designation was to last for only five years, so the buildings were to be temporary.

The school district donated an old auditorium. "We had it sawed off and hauled down here," Hart said. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) assisted students in molding 125,000 adobe bricks to form the walls of temporary structures. They converted a boxcar and a war-surplus airplane into classrooms. They used old fruit crates for desks. During recess, students formed teams and made a competition out of digging what became Kern County's first community swimming pool.

A teacher at Hart's school faced exceptional challenges because many of the children were behind in their studies. They'd been out of school for several years as their families moved around in search of work. Hart said he recruited gifted teachers from all over the country—"Mostly attitude was what I was looking for."

Lessons were designed to help students civilize migrant camp life. A janitor taught the youngsters shoe cobbling so they could repair their own worn shoes. Girls learned to sew so their families need not go about in over-sized clothes or rags. The children learned to make toothpaste and shampoo. . . .

When teachers noticed that the students often brought nothing more than dried bread and a cold potato for their lunch, the school opened a cafeteria where youngsters could get a hot breakfast for 1 cent, a hot lunch for 2 cents.

In a school with a spirit like that, no wonder the children studied and learned. Faulconer said that if he were to write a book about those days, he'd call it "The Grapes of Opportunity."

FRONTIERS

How To Poison a Large Region

A STORY nobody ever hears about at all, unless someone learns about and writes about it, appeared in the Jan. 19 *High Country News.* The writer is Steve Hinchman. It begins:

> Sometime in the pre-dawn hours of July 16, 1979, an earthen dam holding back wastes produced by United Nuclear Corp's uranium mill parted in Church Rock, New Mexico. From the widening breech poured 94 million gallons of highly contaminated effluent and 1,100 tons of wet slurry sands.
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> The spill filled the nearby Pipeline Arroyo and flowed south into the Rio Puerco. The flood deposited streaks of yellow sand and "hot spots" in the riverbed for miles down stream, contaminating surface and groundwater as far away as Arizona. About 115 miles downstream, in Holbrook, Ariz., monitors registered chemical alteration at the junction of the Rio Puerco and the Little Colorado rivers. Although most Americans probably think of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor first, it was the largest release of radioactive waste in the history of the U.S.

On the morning of the spill, a Navajo Indian woman, Flora Naylor, crossed the Rio Puerco to find her family's sheep, a common practice. She lived with her three sisters and their families in a valley on the North Fork of Rio Puerco, five miles down stream from the United States Nuclear mill and 20 miles east of Gallup. A day later Indian Health Service officials came to her home to tell them to stay away from the river and to keep their animals from watering there. But the warning came too late for Flora. She died on Nov. 8, last year. Her niece, Bernice Coleman, told Hinchman:

> "She didn't know that the water had spilled and she walked in the water. Not even a month later her feet started getting sores; open sores with pus, in between her toes. She went to the Indian Health Service in Gallup. Since then it just got worse. They treated it, washed it, but it just got all black. They amputated below her ankle. It was cancer. They said it was because she had diabetes. A month later they amputated again, above the ankle. Then a year later below the knee. Two years ago they cut the other side. . . . It got worse. She was in a wheel chair in the care center in Gallup."

From the family Hinchman learned that the sheep drank the water and their lambs were born damaged. If you touched the nose of one of the lambs, it fell off. Most of the lambs died within a week and only ten survived. Their entire herd has diminished from 155 to sixty. Meanwhile the warnings are still in effect, although officials now say that the contamination levels have dropped so that only long-term exposure brings a risk. Hinchman continues:

> The Navajo are not the only ones affected by New Mexico's uranium industry. Almost 60 miles to the east, near the mining and ranching community of Milan, another group of New Mexicans have long been exposed to dangerous levels of contamination. Just outside of Milan is the Homestake Mining Company uranium mill, which was built in 1958 and is now the second largest facility of its kind in the nation. Bordering on the mill site are four housing subdivisions.
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> Radon gas levels in the area often top New Mexico limits of allowable exposure, and radon daughter levels in many homes are elevated, possibly as a result of being built on foundations of uranium waste. Occasionally, when the wind blows from the wrong direction, some homes get dowsed with radioactive sands from Homestake's 170-acre tailings pond.
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> In 1974, the Environmental Protective Agency discovered that seepage from the tailings pond was contaminating an alluvial aquifier underlying both the mill and the housing subdivisions. The aquifer had been the main supply of drinking water for residents for many years, and in it the EPA found concentrations of selenium 500 times federal standards as well as elevated levels of uranium and other radionuclides.
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> Homestake initiated a voluntary groundwater cleanup in 1976 that was monitored by the Environmental Improvement Division of the New Mexico Health Department. The reclamation began to show good results in 1980, says KID water resources specialist Bruce Gallagher, but today the cleanup remains incomplete. So despite the effort, the EPA placed the site on their Superfund list in

1982 and required Homestake to pipe water to the community.

The Church Rock and Milan sites, Hinchman explains, are both in New Mexico's Grants Uranium Belt, "the most productive and possibly the most polluted uranium mining and milling district in the United States." About a million years ago, volcanic eruptions in what is now western New Mexico brought large amounts of minerals to the surface of the land, while streams carried minerals down from the mountain and left them on an area a hundred miles long and 20 to 30 miles wide now called Grants Uranium Belt. Some 40 per cent of all the uranium mined in the U.S. comes from the Grants region.

> At its height, the industry employed nearly 8,000 people in New Mexico, most of them at the five mills and more than 200 mines in the Belt. Today, fewer than 500 people are working in uranium in the Grants Belt and only one mill, at one-tenth capacity. . . . Sitting idle are the four other mills, some 80 million tons of tailings, and hundreds of abandoned and flooded mines. . . . There are five mills in the Grants Belt, three of which were built in the 1950s and now have the largest uranium tailings ponds in the nation. A tailings pond is composed of solid wastes at the bottom and around the sides and liquids in ponds in the center. Because ores in the Grants Belt contain several other radioactive elements besides uranium (all isotopes in the uranium decay series), and because the mills only extract the uranium, the tailings ponds retain 85 per cent of the ore's original radioactivity.

One Navajo family living in the Navajo Indian Reservation along the Rio Puerco has herded sheep and goats all their lives. They used to water the animals at shallow wells, but now truck in water for this purpose from sources up to fifteen miles away. But even with this clean water, "they say it is almost impossible to keep the animals away from the river when they get thirsty." These Navajos, the Begays, "still find red spots on the pancreases of butchered animals." They eat the meat anyway. "We are afraid," they say, but can't help it because we can't afford to buy meat from the grocery stores."

The contaminants are slowly going down, but the river bed still has large concentrations of radium, some greater by thirty-six times than EPA drinking water standards. Some people get cancer, others don't. The prospects for the future in this region are far from good. For the people in the area are, as Peter Berg put it recently, living in poisons up to their waists.