

TOWARD ACTUAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

WE have for this week's lead article a reprint of Vinoba Bhave's views on government and revolution, in the form of an interview with him by Satish Kumar, which first appeared in *Resurgence* for July-October 1969, and was also published in the *Peacemaker* for Aug. 15, 1970.

Since space permits, some introductory comment may be made. To some extent, all proposals for social change are tracts for the times. Vinoba's thinking, previously titled "Vinoba Bhave on Revolution," reflects the need to restore independence and freedom to initiate action to the common people, thereby reducing the power of the nation-state and its tendency to bring disaster on the world. The difficulties to be met in achieving what Vinoba proposes are obvious enough, yet these are far from being a reason for ignoring the force of his arguments. We may some day realize that striving to achieve an apparently *impossible* ideal is nonetheless the only way to reach the truly *tolerable*; and then we will be able to recognize our enormous debt to the authors of all the Utopian dreams and romances, from Plato on.

The conception of what is socially desirable or practical, in any age, is almost always in some measure a reaction to manifest evils. We define our goals by rejection of the ugly features of the status quo, often neglecting to understand the subtle developmental processes by which any social goals will have to be reached. Yet the lucid outline of goals is nonetheless valuable. Simone Weil's book, for example, *The Need for Roots*, is filled with social and moral insight, even though we can hardly imagine the construction of a society which would embody the principles she declares.

Indignant and aggrieved at the abuses to which we are victim, we habitually define social

objectives in terms of a social order in which opposite conditions prevail, omitting attention to the symmetries which Plato sought to embody in the *Republic*, and to which he gives attention in the *Statesman*, also. Thus the French Revolution demanded recognition of the Rights of Man, but said little or nothing about the responsibilities of all individuals, as Mazzini pointed out half a century later. Similarly, there is much talk today of "Power to the People," but no understanding in evidence of how the people must qualify themselves to make intelligent and just use of whatever power they gain.

This omission was anticipated, in principle, by Plato in the *Statesman*, where he remarks that the greatest mistake that men make in their political thinking is to base their dreams on nostalgic recollections of the happy and wholesome days of the Golden Age, neglecting to note that a "god" ruled in that fabled time, not mortal, fallible men. This error is indeed the commonest one in political utopianism, and the most costly, since the order of the Golden Age can hardly be achieved except by people who approach the godlike in their individual development.

In corrupt times, Plato said, democracy is the best form of government, for the reason that it is least effective and therefore reduced in its capacity to work disaster. Is the modern world "democratic"? Well, various claims are made, but it seems evident that there has been a great deal of one-man rule lately, even (or especially) in the United States, and oligarchies (the corrupt form of aristocracy) are recognizable everywhere, hidden behind the forms of representative government. In any event, present-day "democracies" are not working very well. This is precisely Vinoba's point. In his favor is the fact that what he proposes cannot succeed except through social and moral evolution by the people themselves.

This, in the nature of things, is the self-limiting effect of a non-violent program. By the same rule, when elections or other means to power are rejected, every step of progress by the people becomes structurally significant and enduring, since it no longer depends upon gaining political control.

As the editors of *Peacemaker* say, the following interview puts of record Vinoba's conception of the Gramdan movement as "a sustained and expanding nonviolent campaign to replace central governmental power with small-scale people's power based on functional democracy and practical need."

SATISH KUMAR: For the last fifteen years you have been on the march. What are you aiming at?

VINOBA BHAVE: At revolution. In other words, I am aiming at the liberation of people from all kinds of suppression and exploitation. We need to be liberated from the institutions which exercise authority in the name of service. Institutionalized religion, for example, is an oppressive obstacle to the free experience of spirituality. Similarly, institutionalized politics in the form of state, parliament, and parties have killed the sense of participation.

SK: You want to liberate people from the government, but some good governments do a lot of good work.

VB: Good work which is done by government services is very far from good in its effects upon the minds of the people. When elections take place the ruling party will ask for your votes because of all the good work they have done. If it is true that they have done good work, the people will be oppressed by the sheer weight of their charity and that is exactly what saddens me.

SK: Why don't you protest strongly when the government does something wrong?

VB: It is true that I do not make such protest, but I do raise my voice when the government does something good. There is no need for me to protest against the government's faults, it is against its good deeds that my protests are needed. I have to tell the people what sheep they are. Is it a matter of rejoicing if you all turn into sheep and tell me how well the shepherds look after you? What am I to say? It seems to me that it would be better if the shepherds neglected their duty. The sheep would then, at least, realize that they are sheep. They might then come to their senses and remember that they are, after all, not sheep but men, men capable of managing their own affairs. This is why my voice is raised in opposition to good government. Bad government has been condemned long ago by many people. We know very well that bad governments should not be allowed but what seems to me to be wrong is that we should allow ourselves to be governed at all, even by a good government. To me the politics of government is not people's politics. We must find the courage to believe that we are capable of managing our own affairs and that no outside authority can stop us.

SK: It seems that you want no government at all, Vinoba.

VB: I want self-government.

SK: What is the characteristic of self-government?

VB: The first characteristic is not to allow any outside power in the world to exercise control over one's self and the second characteristic is not to exercise power over any other. These two things together make self-government and people's politics. No submission and no exploitation. This can be brought into being only by a revolution in the people's conscience and mind. My program of giving and sharing is designed to bring it about. I am continually urging that believers in nonviolence should use their strength to establish a government by the people and put an end to government by politicians. There is a false notion in the world

that governments are our saviors and that without them we should be lost. People imagine that they cannot do without a government. I can understand that people cannot do without agriculture or industry, that they cannot get on without love and culture, music and literature, but governments do not come into this category. I would suggest that all our administrators and politicians should be given leave for two years, just to see what happens in their absence. Would any of the ordinary work of the world come to an end? Would the dairyman no longer make butter or the market gardener not sell vegetables? Would people stop getting married and having babies? If the government were to take leave for two years it would destroy the popular illusion that a government is indispensable.

SK: But some kind of government will always exist. Can you give some constructive suggestion to make governments better?

VB: It is difficult to make governments better, but if there is any ideal form of government then I would say that the best kind of government is the one where it is possible to doubt whether any government exists at all.

We ourselves should be seeing to the affairs of our own village, or community, or town, or locality, instead of doing just the opposite and handing over all power to the center. The less activity, the better the government. An ideal government would have no armies, no police force, and no penalties. The people would manage their own affairs, listening rationally to advice and allowing themselves to be guided by moral considerations.

SK: The need for government varies when we have conflicting situations and a clash of interests between the classes.

VB: It is impossible for the real interests of any one person to clash with those of others. There is no opposition between the real interests of any one community, class, or country and those of any other community, class or country. The

very idea of conflicting interests is a mistaken one. One man's interests are another's, and there can be no clash. If I am intelligent and in good health, this is in your interest. If I get water when I am thirsty it benefits not only me but you also. If we imagine that our interests conflict, it is because we have a false notion of what constitutes our interests.

SK: You command a significant influence on the government. Why do you not insist that the government passes a law to socialize the land? Why do you have to wander so from village to village?

VB: The spreading of revolutionary ideas is no part of the government's duty. In fact, revolutions cannot be organized and brought about by the established institutions of politics. The government can only act on an idea when it has been generally accepted, and then it is compelled to act on it. We say that in India we have democracy, then the government is the servant and the people are the masters. When you want to get an idea accepted, do you explain it to the servant or to the master? If you put it before the master and he approves, he will instruct his clerk to prepare the deed of gift. That is why I am putting my ideas before you—it is you, the people, who are the masters.

SK: If the revolutionaries are in power they can bring revolution in the society.

VB: As I explained, the authority of the government is incapable of bringing about any revolutionary change among the people. The day revolution gets the backing of the government it declines, becomes bureaucratic, institutionalized, and conformist. A very good example is the Russian revolution. You can see how revolutionaries become power mongers and office-seekers. Similarly, the decline of the Buddhist faith in India dates from the day when it received the backing of the governmental power. When the Christian faith was backed by the imperial power of Constantine, it became Christian in name only. The power of religion

practiced by the first disciples of Christ was seen no more and hypocrisy entered the life of the church. In our own country history shows that when the movements of revolution and religious reforms won royal favor they were joined by thousands who were not really revolutionaries at all but merely loyal devotees of the ruling king. Therefore, do not allow yourself to imagine that revolutionary thinking can be propagated by governmental power. On the contrary, if there should be any genuine encounter between them, revolution would destroy the power of the state. The two can no more exist together than darkness and the sun. The exercise of power over others is not in accordance with revolutionary principles. It is clear from a study of history that real social progress has been due to the influence of independent revolutionaries. No king exercised the influence which Buddha exerted and still exerts on the life of India. The Lord Buddha renounced his kingdom, turned his back on it, and after his enlightenment the first person he initiated was the king, his own father. Later came the emperor Ashoka and a political revolution took place in India.

SK: Until we achieve this utopia what should we do?

VB: We should do everything at our command so that the need for a government should progressively diminish. In the final analysis the government would give up all executive power and act in a purely advisory capacity. As the morals of the people improve, the area of the authoritarian government will be reduced and government orders will be fewer and fewer. In the end it will issue no orders at all. The ultimate goal of my movement is freedom from government. I use the words "freedom from government" and not absence of government. Absence of government can be seen in a number of societies where no order is maintained and where anti-social elements do as they please. A society free from government does not mean a society without order. It means orderly society

but one in which administrative authority rests at the grass roots level and every member of the community has active participation and involvement. For this reason the purpose of my march is to rouse the people to an awareness of their own strength, to get them to stand on their own feet. I want to see all the village lands in the hands of the village and not under private ownership. And to that end I am trying to get the common people to realize their power and organize it independently.

SK: How will you go about bringing this people's power?

VB: The establishment of such a participatory, nonbureaucratic, self-directing society calls for a network of self-sufficient units. Production, distribution, defense, education, everything should be localized. The center should have the least possible authority. We shall thus achieve decentralization through regional self-sufficiency. I do not expect that every village should immediately produce all its own needs. The unit for self-sufficiency may be a group of communities. In short, all our planning will be directed towards a progressive abolition of government control by means of regional self-reliance. Our goal should be that every individual becomes as self-reliant as possible.

SK: Is that what you call freedom?

VB: Yes. Because no real freedom exists today and we shall not get it so long as we carry on with our representative democracy. We shall not get it until we decide to make our own plans with the use of our own brains and carry them out in our own strength. As long as a few individuals are given all the power and the rest of the people hope that the government will protect them, this is not real freedom. The present kind of democracy is a guided democracy, whereas in a free society we will have a direct democracy. We shall not hand over all the public services to the few representatives. In America all the power is in the hands of the President. If he should make an error of judgment he might set the whole world on fire.

It is a terrible thing that such power should be entrusted to any representative. That is why throughout the world today there is no real freedom but only an illusion of freedom. To obtain this real freedom, we must form village councils, community councils, peasants' councils, workers' councils, on a small scale, and these councils should run their own affairs, settle their own quarrels, decide how their children should be educated, undertake their own defense, and manage their own markets. This way there will be a general renewal of self-confidence and common people everywhere will get experience of public affairs.

SK: The proposal you are making will turn the whole system upside down and social life will be upset. Does this fit in with your philosophy of non violence?

VB: To many people nonviolence has come to mean that society should be disturbed as little as possible. Our present set-up should continue to function without hindrance. Some people understand by nonviolence merely that the changes necessary will be carried out extremely gradually. Let there be no painful sudden change and so nonviolence is rendered innocuous. But this way revolutions are never carried out. Things remain pretty much as they are and people get satisfaction by adopting an ideal, paying it lip service, and talking about it. This concept of nonviolence is very dangerous for revolution and very convenient to the cause of lethargic society. So I beg you not to adopt any "go slow" methods of nonviolence. In nonviolence you must go full steam ahead, if you want the good to come speedily you must go about it with vigor. A merely soft, spineless ineffective kind of nonviolence will actually encourage the growth of the status quo and all the forces of a violent system which we deplore. A non-revolutionary nonviolence is a conservative force and, therefore, it is not nonviolence. Nonviolence is an active and effective weapon to fight against injustice and at the same time to build an alternative society.

REVIEW

THE FLORENTINE SCHOOL

LAST month (Jan. 2), in our review of Ernst Cassirer's essay on Pico della Mirandola, we mentioned John Sandys' *Harvard Lectures on the Revival of Learning* as giving an account of the Florentine School. We now have Sandys' book (Cambridge University Press, 1905) and find it, as we suggested, informing and pleasurable reading. Sandys says that "the Platonic Academy of Florence" was "the prototype of all the Academies that, in process of time, sprang into existence in every town of Italy."

What is the origin of the name "Academy"? Sandys tells us that the land on which Plato's school was established was once owned by an Attic hero, Academus. A legend relates that in gratitude for a service he rendered to Castor and Pollux, "the Spartans ever spared that spot in their repeated invasions of Attica."

It had been surrounded with walls by Hipparchus, the son of Peisistratus; it had been planted with plane-trees by Cimon and under the shade of the sacred olive trees, in the days of Aristophanes, the youths of Athens might be seen running races, "breathing of smilax and heartsease too, and of poplar shedding its leafage, . . . and rejoicing in the spring-tide, where the plane-trees whisper to the elm." In the spring, the earliest notes of the nightingale might there be heard in the green coverts beside the waters of the Cephisus.

The place was known as *Academia*; and, amid the trees, there was a gymnasium furnished with alcoves and seats. The "gymnasium of the Academy" was long the favorite resort of Plato until he left it for the seclusion of his own garden below the hill of Colonus.

It was natural for Cosimo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence and a lover of Plato, to call the school he founded to grace his city the Academy. This school, Sandys relates, was an unexpected consequence of the Council of Florence of 1439—one of the attempts to unite the Western and Eastern branches of the Christian Church. The Council failed, but it brought together the scholars

of both regions. One of the Greek envoys to the Council was a white-haired, bearded ancient, Georgios Gemistos, a devoted Neoplatonist who had lived near the site of ancient Sparta for most of his life. Sandys says he was chosen to represent the Eastern Church on "patriotic grounds," and that he was a pagan at heart (present-day scholars dissent somewhat from this view), and the Florentines who heard him speak came to regard him as a worthy descendant of his philosophical forebears, even though at first his shaggy appearance had made them laugh.

Cosimo was then in the fourth of the thirty-four years of his rule. He heard Gemistos pour forth his Platonic lore and hailed him as a second Plato.

Gemistos modestly refused the title, but playfully added to his name, Gemistos, the equivalent, Plethon, which approached more nearly his master's name. According to one of our primary authorities, "the lively style of Plethon inspired Cosimo with such enthusiasm that his lofty mind immediately conceived the thought of forming an Academy, as soon as a favourable moment should be found. Such is the language used many years later by Marsilio Ficino, who was only six years of age, when he was selected by Cosimo to be the future translator and expounder of Plato, and thus to become the intellectual centre of the Academy of Florence. Ficino studied Platonism and Neo-Platonism, learnt Greek, and began his translation of Plato.

What this was to mean to Cosimo is told by Sandys in a charming passage:

Late in life, Cosimo spent most of his time at Careggi, a villa which, with its long machicolated parapet and its noble loggia, still stands among the pines and cypresses on the slopes of the low hills, little more than two miles north of Florence. It was there that he studied Plato with the aid of Ficino. One of his favourite dialogues was the newly-translated *Philebus*, and he found delight in listening to Orphic hymns sung to the accompaniment of Ficino's lyre. We find him writing to his instructor as follows:—"Yesterday I arrived at Careggi, not so much for the purpose of improving my fields as myself. Let me see you, Marsilio, as soon as possible, and forget not to bring with you the book of your favourite Plato, *De Summo Bono*—which I presume, according to your

purpose, you have ere this translated into Latin. . . . Come, and forget not to bring with you the Orphean lyre."

Before Cosimo died, Ficino had translated ten of Plato's dialogues. Ten more were completed during the brief five-year rule of Cosimo's son; and by 1477, under the patronage of the illustrious Lorenzo, Cosimo's grandson, the manuscript of the translated dialogues was complete. Sandys remarks:

It must be remembered that there was then no printed copy of the Greek text of Plato. The translation was made from manuscripts supplied by Cosimo and by Amerigo Nenci, while, among experts in Greek and Latin, consulted by the translator, was Giorgio Antonio, the paternal uncle of the explorer of the Atlantic, Amerigo Vespucci who owed to Giorgio Antonio much of his borrowed Latin lore. The Latin Plato was printed in 1482.

Sandys says that we don't have much material on the Florentine Academy, but one thing of interest, related by Ficino in his introduction to the translation of the *Symposium*, is that "the ancient custom of celebrating the memory of Plato by a banquet held on the seventh day of November, the date of his death as well as the date of his birth, had, after an interval of twelve hundred years, been revived by Lorenzo."

Pico joined the Florentine Academy in the winter of 1483, at the age of twenty. Three years later he confronted the doctors of the church with his nine hundred theses, to which his essay *On the Dignity of Man* was introduction. He lived only until 1494, dying in the flower of his youth at thirty-one, yet a reading of Ernst Cassirer's essay in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (April and June, 1942) will show the extraordinary productiveness of this man in terms of both ideas and written works. Ficino died in 1499, and since Lorenzo had then been dead seven years, the Academy could hardly survive. When, in the second decade of the sixteenth century, it was reanimated by Bernardo Rucellai, while still called the Academy, it was no longer Platonic. The new

members were host to a reading of Machiavelli's discourses and engaged in political conspiracy.

Edgar Wind, in *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (Penguin, 1967), not inappropriately speaks of Pico as the disciple of Ficino, since the latter was thirty years older than the young nobleman from Mirandola, but it was not long before the superior philosophic grounding of Pico became evident. Ficino seems to have been mainly concerned with the reconciliation of Christianity with Platonism, while Pico had broader objectives and was of more independent mind. Ficino was happy to find in Plotinus that the joys of earthly passions were made an analogue of spiritual delights, and he urged this argument against "the more priggish among the Christian moralists." He maintained that it is "their transitory, not their enjoyable nature which needs to be amended; and for that purpose the intellect is indispensable." Pico was more searching in drawing this parallel, speaking of the blindness to earthly beauty which overtakes those who are "rapt to the vision of spiritual beauty." Wind adds, beginning with a quotation from Apuleius:

"For Plato writes in the *Symposium* that the eyes of the mind begin to see clearly when the eyes of the body begin to fail." When Psyche succumbs, in the story of Apuleius, to the desire to see Amor with her eyes, she learns that this causes the God to vanish, and it is only after she has atoned for her curiosity, and produced the vessel of beauty from the realm of death, that she is allowed to rejoin the transcendent Amor.

Plotinus says something similar of Psyche in the sixth *Ennead*:

Whilst she is Yonder she knows the Heaven-passion. . . . But when she enters into generation . . . , then she likes better another and a less enduring love. . . . Yet learning afterwards to hate the wanton dealings of this place, she journeys again to her father's house, when she has purified herself of earthly contacts, and abides in well-being.

Pico insisted that the achievement of the highest form of love entailed "a doctrine of mystical self-annihilation," which can be

understood as the death of personal longing. Here, he maintained, any analogy with personal, earthly love must break down, since no reciprocity of affection can be spoken of in relation to Deity, which is beyond feeling and unknowable. Ficino held to the analogy, causing Pico to suspect him "of a Narcissus-like self-love through God." One might call it a sentimentalizing of the conception of mystical union. Pico dissented, saying that his understanding of the Platonic theology was "not as Marsilio thinks." He believed that the purely human qualities represented by the Graces "would altogether vanish into the One," contending that Marsilio "should have greatly guarded himself from erring because on it depends the entire subject, and he that errs on this one point necessarily deviates in all the other parts not a little from the truth." Wind summarizes the two views:

Ficino's idea of an amiable God, who sustains friendships among men by entering into them and endowing them with an ideal perfection, is perhaps more Grecian in spirit; and it also recalls . . . St. Augustine's idea of "friendship in God"; whereas an Averroistic note may be detected in Pico's refusal to conceive of "ultimate peace in God" and "all-embracing friendship" as anything but human self-effacement. . . . As the acumen and youthful intransigence of Pico detected many more flaws in Ficino's system, the celebrated harmony between master and pupil was of a remarkably short duration.

Indeed, it does seem, after reading Wind carefully, that Ficino was using philosophy mainly as material to overcome Christian prejudice, while Pico was resolutely demanding the maintenance of philosophic rigor.

COMMENTARY

COMMUNITY "GOVERNMENT"?

THE first 1974 issue of *Community Comments*, issued by Community Service, Inc., Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387 (founded by Arthur Morgan in the 1930s), reports on the activities of the staff of mostly young people, five in number, who have been working together for a year. One of the things they are doing is conducting a Community Infant Center in Yellow Springs for children from one to two-and-a-half years. They now have fifteen in the morning and seven in the afternoon. Learning how to order this activity has been instructive:

Although we have little difficulty agreeing on goals we have had to struggle to develop a governing body that is responsible to the desires of the parents, and still get the work done with a minimum of bureaucracy. From a completely unstructured body of whatever parents came to meetings and various tasks we have changed to having a steering committee whose members are responsible for various committees and functions. The steering committee has not been functioning long enough to judge its efficiency but so far our general experience has been that so much energy is tied up in meetings that little is left for the tasks which need to be done to develop a really good program. One wonders whether an anarchical situation would not be more efficient in which each did what he or she saw fit in carrying out the tasks at hand.

Most of our areas of conflict revolve around things over which we have little control: lack of money (of course) and stringent requirements for licensing which force us to do such inane things as either knock out a wall to make an exit or spend the \$100 necessary to install a lighted exit sign. A lot of tension is created because people are not used to dealing with a situation in which they have group responsibility. Gripes, instead of being dealt with directly and openly, are often dumped on the easiest scapegoat—the coordinator. It is often a weary struggle, but it is very exciting to be a part of a grassroots effort to develop a community service.

Good government is probably never easy—perhaps "government" is a bad word here—but the difficulties of being a link between old social forms and a new community kind of self-

regulation sometimes loom very large. Experiences of this sort, whether in behalf of infants or adults, are probably essential to developing the patience and understanding that any real social progress will involve.

Keeping track of what goes on at Community Service is a good idea for all community-minded people. Yellow Springs, Ohio, and the zip is enough address.

The current book catalog of Harvest House Publishers, 4795 St. Catherine St. W., Montreal H3Z 2B9, Quebec, Canada, reminds us of two fine paperbacks available from Harvest House—both by Thoreau. One is *Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* (\$2.50), which includes *Civil Disobedience*, *Life without Principle*, and the especially good review of the works of Carlyle, along with other reviews and papers. The other is *A Yankee in Canada* (\$2.25), which not many people know about. Thoreau went on a walking tour there, and in this book says some of his choicest things about the trip—such as, after watching British soldiers marching stiffly: "It is impossible to give the soldier a good education, without making him a deserter. His natural foe is the government that drills him."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

MISCELLANY

WE borrow from *New Schools Exchange Newsletter* for Dec. 15 (now published at P.O. Box 820, St. Paris, Ohio 43072, at \$10 a year) the following review of the paperback edition of Elwyn Richardson's *In the Early World* (Pantheon, \$4.95):

This abundantly illustrated book is an anthology of children's writings and art work, documenting many aspects of their creative process. It is also a passionate guide for encouraging and enabling children to "discover art through crafts." The author speaks from his many years of experience at the Oruaiti School in New Zealand. It is a rich book, revealing the evolution of Richardson as a teacher who integrates all aspects of the child's reality through creative expression. The real beauty of the book lies in the pictures of the children's work—block prints, fabrics, ceramics, masks, silk screening, and photographs of interpretive dances relating to various craft projects. Richardson traces the process of learning through active nature study, the introduction of new materials, and the development of criticism and support. . . . The children themselves are intensely involved in a serious way with this creativity, in fact it formed the whole focus for the curriculum. Interestingly, all of the crafts were done on a very primitive level of technology, and it evolved, it was experimental, as with the first kiln of pottery they fired. As the children were all rural, but some were Maori, native people of New Zealand different valleys were represented, different and strongly identified communities. The basic respect for children as craftspeople, artists and scientists is consistent with the underlying view of the school place as a workshop, a cooperative of creators.

For another account of this useful book, with description of the teaching, the pottery project, and some quotation, see the reviews of the hardback edition in MANAS for March 3 and May 12, 1971.

A broad critique by S.P.R. Charter of modern tendencies in education appeared in a recent issue of *Man on Earth* (Olema, Calif. 94950):

Within man-made systems there is an increasing dependence upon synthetic ingredients, and such dependence is taught and extolled as a virtue both of

the system and for those within it. Synthetic ingredients may indeed be uniform and pure, without stain or taint. But nature is neither uniform nor pure—and Man is always a part of and never apart from Nature.

The more synthetically mechanistic the system, the less important to the system does the organic become. Since the past was more organic than synthetic, the man-made system rejects much of the past in terms of cultural enrichment. (Young people within educational systems, for instance, know much of the technology of the present, and little of the literature of the past; they know much of present events throughout the world, and little of their own history—and there is a removal, indeed contempt, for the cultural enrichments from the past despite increasing availabilities from the past. To many of them who do attempt a reconciliation, the past seems to embrace only a nostalgic early America. And yet, the capabilities of the young are enormous today despite their being embraced by enormous man-made systems.)

In the *Saturday Review/World* for Jan. 12, James Cass, education editor, reports publication of extensive educational research in a number of countries by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. This report, called the IEA Study, "strongly supports the conclusions of the Coleman Report concerning the powerful influence of home background on success in the classroom," but also assigns measurable significance to the quality of school and teaching. Schooling is especially important for academic achievement in science and language study. As Mr. Cass says, these conclusions are no surprise, save for the fact that they are not in the Coleman Report. The IEA Study is mainly valuable, he thinks, for what it will lead to in further investigations. He quotes Benjamin Bloom as saying that there is likelihood that "the involvement, or the per cent of time in class that the student is actively learning the subject, is a significant element in student learning." Some students were actively engaged 90 per cent of the time, others for only about half. So the hours devoted to instruction tell only half the story.

This research combines reports from twenty-two countries on the reasons for student success in the subject areas of science, reading, literature,

English, French, and civics. The data relate to children of ten, fourteen, and eighteen, and there is enough raw material, Cass says, to keep analysts busy for years.

The rare good sense of Fred Rogers, who has been doing television programs for three- to six-year-olds for some ten years—first in Canada and now in Pittsburgh, Pa.—comes as something of a surprise. The *Intellectual Digest* for January has an interview with him in which he observes that "basic trust" has to be established for the child in the home. If it hasn't been developed there, Rogers says, the child "cannot trust what I have to give." Asked what is wrong with television for children, he said:

I don't think any television news department would hire a person to go on the air if he didn't know how to pronounce the names of Cambodian or Russian leaders. Yet over and over again, people are chosen to communicate with children who have no knowledge of the inner needs of childhood. Oh, they know how to entertain in a fragmented, sometimes very sophisticated way. For instance, they know that the chase has to come at a certain point in every movie.

Children have great fear of certain things, such as fires falling, separation and the hurting of animals. And the so-called children's entertainers invariably use these things when they think the child's interest might be waning. Consequently, I feel people follow formulas in preparing material for kids. . . . Which play upon their fears . . . but which do not help them resolve these fears. Because the child has no real understanding of the basic fears when he or she has finished watching.

Mr. Rogers also thinks that television takes away from children's playtime, which is essential for the reason that "learning to play is probably the most important thing in childhood, because through creative play, children really are able to explore their inner and outer worlds." By learning to feel at home in his own inner world, the child, Rogers says, "can have a sense that he or she is all right as he is." He learns to accept similarities and differences and that he has feelings and can talk about them.

These tasks need to begin in childhood and continue through old age. These are the roots of wisdom. I think the beginning of the understanding

is that the human being has a certain integrity, a certain integrity that no one can invade. In other words, nobody's wishes can do anything for us, and our wishes cannot do anything to anybody else. Beginning to learn this is essential.

The important things for young childhood, Rogers believes, do not include "the alphabet and numbers." Asked about the "cognitive skills" some programs focus upon, he said:

What concerns me is that with so much promotion, many people believe learning the alphabet and numbers is essential for kids in their early years. If people think that's all a child should have for a learning experience, they're crazy. . . . children under the age of five or six really do not need adult symbols. I just don't think there is any reason to force a child unless he is anxious to learn to read. . . .

It's much easier for adults to be involved with their children on the level of the alphabet and numbers. . . . I will not blame parents for things like that. So much is unconscious. . . . It is our job to help adults realize that there are other growth tasks. Educators will tell you how quickly children who are emotionally prepared learn the alphabet and numbers, especially when they are six or seven and ready to go to school.

Rogers makes an important comment on programs children ought not to see:

A child watching a closeup of a child's maimed body in Vietnam thinks that there are children in the world who don't have anybody taking care of them. It's very frightening, and not a necessary thing for a three- or four-year-old to be feeling about the world. Some adults say, "Oh no, kids should be exposed to it the minute they can see and hear." Those people have negative feelings about their own childhood that they pass on.

He doesn't think that television for children can improve "so long as it is used primarily as a huckstering instrument." Meanwhile, he has his own plans for specialized programs for children. At present, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" is seen over Pittsburgh's educational television station, which he helped to found.

FRONTIERS

The Useful Press

NOBODY can subscribe to all the good magazines—there are too many of them—and selection by particular interests is inevitable. If we had to cut down our periodical reading to a few essentials, we'd probably end by taking the *American Scholar* (for all-around cultural coverage); the *Nation*, for non-academic sociological material; *Environment*, for the constructive and reformist use of scientific knowledge; and the *Smithsonian* for unexpected bonuses in a variety of fields. Newspapers are more difficult; just now we are managing with the *Manchester Guardian* (for a contrasting view of international affairs) and the *Christian Science Monitor* for thoughtful if sententious coverage of national and world news. We should add the *Saturday Review/World* for Norman Cousins and the book reviews, along with other useful features.

Just now we have been enjoying the December issue of *Smithsonian*, which has an account of the urgent reasons for the Boston Tea Party, by Edward Parks. Hemmed in by confining and stupid laws, the patriots could see no other way to make their point. Sam Adams and Paul Revere and the others who took part probably had better justification for what they did than most of the "imitation" tea-party coups of recent times. Riding on a celebrated event of the historic past seldom duplicates its reasoned intelligence. Also in this issue of *Smithsonian* is a report of G. Etzel Percy's eminently sensible proposal for a reduction of the fifty states of the U.S. to thirty-eight—on grounds of geographic and economic compatibility and socio-economic efficiency. The present inherited political divisions create numerous practical difficulties—New York City, for example, in effect straddles three states, and various bureaucracies have had to be created to solve the resulting problems. A lot less government would result from Mr. Percy's plan, saving the people, he estimates, about \$4.6 billion

a year—or about \$100 for each citizen. Today there is too much sovereignty and not enough utility in the old divisions.

The article on the comet Kohoutek and when to look for it in the sky lost interest from the fact that this bit of cosmic fireworks fizzled unpredictably; but the detailed account of how, in 1938, Otto Hahn in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, and his former associate Lise Meitner, then in Stockholm, and Otto Frisch, her young physicist nephew, working together through correspondence, discovered nuclear fission makes fascinating reading. The writer might have added that French physicists who kept track of Hahn's work later honored him for refusing to reserve for German use the secret of access to nuclear power, since he made the discovery known to scientists in other countries and himself resisted the pressure of the Nazis to help the German government develop the military applications of nuclear fission. The physicists around the world with whom Hahn corresponded immediately recognized the implications of his discovery. As a result, a little more than six months later, Albert Einstein wrote to President Roosevelt about the possibility of constructing atomic bombs.

Many readers will recall that the action in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel, *The First Circle*, takes place in one of Stalin's prisons for political offenders. Solzhenitsyn spent many years in these prisons and camps, and his most recent book, *The Gulag Archipelago*—smuggled out of Russia and published in Paris in the last week of last December—tells in direct autobiographical narrative what these prisons were like. According to the *Manchester Guardian* for Jan. 5, Solzhenitsyn authorized the book's publication in the West after the Soviet secret police seized a copy of the manuscript in September. The *Guardian* account relates:

In *The Gulag Archipelago* the Nobel prize-winner says the men who man Stalin's prison camps should be tried in the same way as Nazi war criminals. "Why was Germany able to judge its criminals after the war when this opportunity was not

given to Russia? In West Germany 86,000 Nazi criminals were sentenced by 1966. On a proportionate calculation, that would correspond to a quarter of a million for our country."

According to the French publishers, in this book Solzhenitsyn has made Gulag—the central administrative group for the camps from 1934 to 1960—the symbol of "an immense archipelago in the Soviet Union in which millions of detainees found themselves brought together at the same time." He speaks of the shame that will overtake Russians for having permitted the criminals who ran these camps to live on unpunished, even glorified, to a "secure old age." The *Guardian* account continues:

While calling for punishment of those involved, he said: "We must be generous and not shoot them, not blow them up with salt water, not beat them with blows from boots, not grip their skulls in steel bands, not shut them up behind fences where they lie one on another like luggage. No, none of that should be done."

But the guilty should be tried and made to admit: "Yes, I was an executioner and a criminal." . . . We must publicly condemn the very idea of vengeance exercised by men on other men, otherwise young people may believe that baseness on earth remains unpunished and earns well-being.

Solzhenitsyn has apparently thrown personal caution to the winds in publishing this book, which includes a documented history of the camps from 1918 to 1958, and tells much of what went on in them. Even the incomplete figures he provides show that "the Bolsheviks executed many more people in the first two years of their rule than had the Tsars in the previous century."

In reflecting on this report one thinks, first, of Solzhenitsyn's courage in giving an example of what he had advocated as the duty of writers in his Nobel Prize address; and then of the old saying, quoted a few years ago by Loren Eiseley, that "the revolution devours its children." We can only hope that Solzhenitsyn's integrity will come to be at least tolerated in Soviet Russia, if it cannot yet be recognized and admired.