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STEPS IN TRANSITION

THE *Whole Earth Catalog* was an inspired idea; not only was it as much fun to read as the Sears Roebuck or Monkey Ward catalogues of fifty years ago, but it had the added advantage of being on the side of the angels. Written in the hip language of the new world acoming, it gave its subscribers a delighting sense of participation in radical cultural change. Unabashed, daring, candid, it called attention to a lot of good merchandise and some excellent books. It had its day in the sun and then, quite properly, folded. It was not an idea or a document for the ages, but a very lucky tract for some unlucky times. Its yeasty messages accomplished a lot of leavening for a great many people.

But it also needs to be said that *The Whole Earth Catalog* told you where, how, and why to spend your money, not how to earn it. There was some advice on saving it—with directions for building your own home (or dome) or growing your own garden (or herbs)—and the texts listed gave instruction on how to become a leatherworking or ceramic craftsman, but there was no frontal attack on the problem so definitively set by Paul Goodman in *Growing Up Absurd.* Why not a catalog on interesting and constructive ways to make a living?

Obviously, there are difficulties here—all the difficulties implied in the difference between reading a book and writing one; or between buying a product and making one that someone else will need and want to buy. A producers' guide is very different from a buyers' guide, but a producers' guide would be a handy thing to have around.

What might be the guidelines of a producers' guide? To discuss this question with any profit, it is necessary at the outset to distinguish between the utopian ideal and the realities of individual and social transition. For an account of the ideal, we need an answer to the question: "What's a non-polluting culture, a non-growth, a non-Faustian culture going to be like?" Suppose we say that the British magazine *Ecology's* recent compilation, *Blueprint for Survival,* is an acceptable answer to one side of this question. We lack space to summarize the material in *Blueprint,* but several paragraphs, taken from the section, "The Goal," will illustrate some of the consequences of moving toward the ideal which is proposed. This part begins by stressing the great difference between "economic value" and "real value":

> Our standard of living is calculated in terms of the market prices of the goods that it includes. These do not distinguish between, on the one hand, the gadgets that we do not really need and such essentials as unpolluted water air and food on which our health must depend. In fact it tends to place greater value on the former, as we usually take the latter for granted.
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> It is in terms of these market prices that the GNP is calculated, and as we have seen, this provides the most misleading indication of our well-being. Edward Mishan points out that ". . . An increase in the numbers killed on the roads, an increase in the numbers dying from cancer, coronaries or nervous diseases, provide extra business for physicians and undertakers, and can contribute to raising the GNP. A forest destroyed to produce the hundreds of tons necessary for the American Sunday editions is a component of the GNP. The spreading of concrete over acres of once beautiful countryside adds to the value of GNP . . . and so one could go on."
>
> In the same way, many of the machines whose possession is said to increase our standard of living are simply necessary to replace natural benefits of which we have been deprived by demographic and economic growth. We have pointed out how true this is of the ubiquitous motorcar. Also, many labour-saving devices are now necessary because with the disintegration of the extended family there is no one about to do the household chores. The fact that both husband and wife must, in many cases, go out to work

to earn the money to buy the machines required to do these chores can serve only to render these devices that much more necessary.

In a stable society, everything would be done to reduce the discrepancy between economic value and real value, and if we could repair some of the damage we have done to our physical and social environment, and live a more natural life, there would be less need for consumer products that we spend so much money on. Instead we could spend it on things that truly enrich and embellish our lives.

In the manufacturing processes, the accent would be on quality rather than quantity, which means that skill and craftsmanship, which we have for so long systematically discouraged, would once more play a part in our lives. For example the art of cookery would come back into its own, no longer regarded as a form of drudgery, but correctly valued as an art worthy of occupying our time, energy and imagination. Food would become more varied and interesting and its consumption would become more of a ritual and less a utilitarian function.

The arts would flourish: literature, music, painting, sculpture and architecture would play an ever greater part in our lives, while achievements in these fields would earn both money and prestige.

A society devoted to achievements of this sort would be an infinitely more agreeable place than is our present one geared as it is to the mass production of shoddy utilitarian consumer goods in ever greater quantities. Surprising as it may seem to one reared on today's economic doctrines, it would also be the one most likely to satisfy our basic biological requirements for food, air and water, and even more surprisingly, provide us with the jobs that in our unstable society are constantly being menaced.

Actually, the "accent on quality" which this plan proposes would probably find allies among engineers with designing and production responsibilities, many of whom are conscientious men who despise the compromises imposed upon their work by marketing imperatives. If manufacturers could learn to be satisfied with smaller markets, then excellences deliberately omitted from their products by reason of the necessities of mass distribution could be restored. Prices would go up, of course, and this is what stops a general trend in this direction, although, as people begin systematically to eliminate non-essentials from their purchases they will have more money to buy the things they do need. Such broad changes will take time, but simpler lives for all of us are certainly on the way, and to adopt them by choice would make them appear an advance instead of retrogression.

But this is no more than modest trend analysis, while the young are still confronted by the paucity of jobs which promise something more than growing up absurd. Perhaps this is poorly expressed. It might be better to speak of jobs which give the freedom not to grow up absurd, since no job will of itself bring a human being to maturity. It isn't really the job, but the part it plays in a person's life, that determines its quality or influence. We think, for example, of a book salesman we know, a man who calls on book stores in behalf of a number of medium-size publishers. Being literate and having learned the book business, he is able to counsel the dealers and also his publishers, and to make a good living in the process. Such a man can do something to encourage the distribution of good books, although far less than might be imagined. The value of this job for him is that it gives him a great deal of free time, during which, some years ago, with the help of his wife and some other parents, he was able to start an elementary school which has since grown to be an important contribution to the community where he lives.

Another man we know of, a machinist and model-maker by trade, became an amateur lawyer and campaigner for minority groups whose rights were being abused. Through his efforts, a doomed public park in a large Western city was restored to public use. Still another man, an itinerant *Volkswagen* mechanic, has the mobility he wants and can always find work wherever he goes. His freedom permits a choice among many other activities.

If "the system" seems a deliberate enemy to a long list of social integrities, and if the ideal arrangements such as *Ecology's Blueprint* describes have not yet come into perceptible

being, there is still a field for the exercise of the minor integrities of the individual, which would grow into a major influence by multiplication. Wendell Berry says along these lines:

> Odd as I am sure it will appear to some, I can think of no better form of personal involvement in the cure of the environment than that of gardening. A person who is growing a garden, if he is growing it organically, is improving a piece of the world. He is producing something to eat, which makes him somewhat independent of the grocery business, but he is also enlarging, for himself, the meaning of food and the pleasure of eating. The food he grows will be fresher, more nutritious, less contaminated by poisons and preservatives and dyes than what he can buy at a store. He is reducing the trash problem; a garden is not a disposable container, and it will digest and re-use its own wastes. If he enjoys working in his garden, then he is less dependent on an automobile or a merchant for his pleasure. He is involving himself directly in the feeding of people.
>
> If you think I'm wandering off the subject, let me remind you that most of the vegetables necessary for a family of four can be grown on a plot of forty by sixty feet. I think we might see in this an economic potential of considerable importance, since we now appear to be facing the possibility of widespread famine. How much food could be grown in the dooryards of cities and suburbs? How much could be grown along the extravagant right-of-ways of the interstate system? Or how much could be grown, by the intensive practices and economics of the small farm, on so-called marginal lands? Louis Bromfield liked to point out that the people of France survived crisis after crisis because they were a nation of gardeners, who in times of want turned with great skill to their own small plots of ground.

The popular magazines now and then report on the gradual revival of old crafts, such as fine cabinetry and furniture-making, and everyone knows about the spread of jewelry-making and leather goods such as sandals, wallets and totebags, etc. Unfortunately, such products require quite affluent purchasers—they are for the luxury trade—but an increasing number of people are able to make a living in this way. But so do stone-masons, and this is an uncrowded calling as well as a highly individualized craft.

Little by little, through the simplification of life and the reduction of needs, there will be a restoration of taste and a natural demand for individual services, on a regional instead of a national basis, and meanwhile many practical necessities may be left to mass production as a matter of common sense. *Culture* will then regain the rich differentiation and variety it ought to have, while technocratic management can be left to the colorless political figures who are attracted to work of that sort.

Blueprint for Survival suggested that the arts would flourish in an ideal, no-growth society. What might this mean? To make the idea more concrete, we quote from Gaston Bachelard's *The Right to Dream* (Orion, 1971) on the art of a sculptor who works in iron:

> A piece of iron that you think the metallurgist's skill has brought to perfection is, in fact, secretly alive. Little by little it takes on a mysterious inner patina which then comes out in the forge under the blows of the hammer. But how much more complicated is the life of a piece of iron that has been left lying around! When he made the doors for the Franciscan basilica of the Virgin of Arangazu, Eduardo Chillida decided to use old, derelict iron that had deteriorated. He hammered the iron with the rust still on it. Now the rust is inside the metal, harmless, reconciled, ready for the wonders of an iron which is incorruptible. It lends a tawny quality to the implacable gray of the metal. And the marvelous thing is that the doors are both young and old simultaneously, standing solidly at the threshold of the modern church.
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> No doubt the time is past when the good cutler used to leave buried for years and years the steel he intended to work. But you can still read the following passage in what is a very practical book devoted to the locksmith's craft: *Iron and steel appear to improve in quality when kept for long periods away from light in a dark place. . . . The smith who requires a particularly tough piece of iron will employ by preference scrap which has been embedded in a wall for a long time, such as the hinges of doors or gates. . . . In Spain the best gun barrels are made from old mule shoes; hence all the most highly prized carbines bear the word* herraduras *on the barrel.*

Is it conceivable that the people who make cars could feel similarly about the materials they use? If this is possible, and you have to have a car, then it is equally conceivable that such a car might last a man a lifetime. Certainly engineers could take pleasure in making cars like that, and designers in designing them.

In a contribution to *The Man-Made Object* (edited by Gyorgy Kepes, Braziller, 1966), an English architect, Michael Blee, wrote:

> For the primitive his wooden bowl is valued, fingered, felt known; a true man-made extension, his spoon a prehensile projection of his own anatomy. Each of his few possessions has a similar intense reality, each is necessary and life-enhancing. It is surely experientially relevant to ask to what extent such identity can be offered by or demanded of the trivia of materialistic society, the paper plate, the plastic spoon.

The examples chosen for this contrast are melancholy and extreme, but they make the point. Certainly the *user* of paper plates and plastic spoons makes no great demands upon the designer. But one doubts that a person who had grown up in the environment suggested by *Blueprint for Survival* would ever want to use such implements; a big leaf and chopsticks would do in an emergency. In short, the world would once more be filled with beautiful things that men have fashioned, and they would be cherished and long-lived.

We said earlier that *Blueprint for Survival* gave an acceptable answer to one side of the question of what a no-growth, non-polluting, non-Faustian culture would be like. The other side of the question has to do more with attitudes than with economics. It seems quite evident, for example, that such a culture will come into being only through a growing reverence for life and a progressive enrichment of the imaginative, emotional, and spiritual or deeply intellectual forms of human culture. For then the sort of economics we have been trying to suggest would come about naturally.

Wendell Berry, in his suggestion of cultivating a garden, was talking about what each man might do as an individual in behalf of better relations with the earth. A similar course for individuals in respect to personal discipline and growth is described by Plato in the ninth book of the *Republic,* after a critique of the ways of the tyrannical and self-indulgent man. At the end of this book Socrates says:

> Then the wise man will bend all his endeavors to this end throughout his life; he will, to begin with, prize the studies that will give this quality [sobriety and righteousness together with wisdom] to his soul and disprize others.

Clearly, he said.

> And then, I said, he not only will not abandon the habit and nurture of his body to the brutish and irrational pleasure and live with his face set in that direction, but he will not even make health his chief aim, nor give the first place to the ways of becoming strong or healthy or beautiful unless these things are likely to bring with them soberness of spirit, but he will always be found attuning the harmonies of his body for the sake of the concord in his soul.
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> By all means, he replied, if he is to be a true musician.
>
> And will he not deal likewise with the ordering and harmonizing of his possessions? He will not let himself be dazzled by the felicitations of the multitude and pile up the mass of his wealth without measure, involving himself in measureless ills.
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> No, I think not, he said.
>
> He will rather, I said, keep his eyes fixed on the constitution in his soul, and taking care and watching lest he disturb anything there either by excess or deficiency of wealth, will so steer his course and add to or detract from his wealth on this principle, so far as may be.
>
> Precisely so, he said.
>
> And in the matter of honors and office too this will be his guiding principle. He will gladly take part in and enjoy those which he thinks will make him a better man, but in public and private life he will shun those that may overthrow the established habit of his soul.
>
> Then, if that is his chief concern, he said, he will not willingly take part in politics.

> Yes, by the dog, said I, in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in the city of his birth, except in some providential juncture.
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> I understand he said. You mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is the ideal, for I think it can be found nowhere on earth.
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> Well, said I, perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other.
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> That seems probable, he said.

We have quoted this passage at length for the reason that, in a world like ours, to bring into being an ideal society will require a similar persistence. Imagination and a great deal of resourcefulness are required of anyone who sets out to live in the present *as if* more ideal conditions already existed. He has to find, if he can, the openings and constructive aspects of existing relationships and work with them. Underneath the façades of commercialism and convention are people whose best human qualities long to find expression. Ingenious entrepreneurs are sometimes able to provide them with channels, and then there is a flowering of culture, as, to take one example, in the spontaneous qualities of listener-sponsored radio. The entire organic gardening and health food movement is another. The years to come may see inventive engineers and designers develop the basis for small-scale, autonomous, intermediate technology to go with the development of more healthful regional economic relationships aimed at freeing individuals and families from dependence upon enormous and increasingly unmanageable economic systems. With changes in philosophy come changes in wants and tastes and preferences, and the world and human life will finally become manageable through the simplicity that is gained by a complex understanding of both.

REVIEW
GEORGE ORWELL

IN William Barrett's new book, *Time of Need*, the author presents pictures of three pieces of sculpture—the head of the Roman leader Agrippa; a thirteenth-century head of John the Baptist; and a faceless block of marble titled "Head" by Giacometti. The Roman countenance is sullen, arrogant, and proud, belonging to a man who had power and was used to it. The face of St. John reflects a vision which reaches beyond the world, but Giacometti's modern man has no face at all. Barrett comments:

> We look at the ancient and medieval figures, and we say "There is the face of Rome. There is the face toward which the Middle Ages aspired." Someday in the future men will look backwards and say, "There is the confused and questioning face of the twentieth century."

A brief but eloquent essay on George Orwell by Raymond Williams (*George Orwell*, Modern Masters paperback, Viking, $1.65), gives temporary features to that questioning face by Giacometti, but Orwell's books, which had so much impact, now seem almost irrelevant. Why, then, give him attention? Because his qualities as a man are not irrelevant at all. His attempt to understand his times was not successful, but a man who tried as hard as Orwell did should not be forgotten. Mr. Williams says in conclusion:

> We are never likely to reach a time when we can do without his frankness, his energy, his willingness to join in. These are the qualities we shall go on respecting in him, whatever other conclusions we may come to. But they are real qualities only if they are independent and active. The thing to do with his work, his history, is to read it, not imitate it. He is still there, tangibly, with the wound in his throat, the sad strong face, the plain words written in hardship and exposure. But then as we reach out to touch him we catch something of his hardness, a necessary hardness. We acknowledge a presence and a distance: other names, other years; a history to respect, to remember, to move on from.

Orwell—whose real name was Eric Blair—was born in India in 1903, to a father in the Indian Civil Service. He was trained in the family tradition, to become a British administrator. After schooling in England he served for nearly five years in the Indian Imperial Police. For the next ten years he sought experience in the grain of the life of the poor, in Paris and London, and his first book, published in 1933, was about this. He fought on the side of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, was wounded, and went to France. Conflicts among the Loyalist groups sharpened his anti-communism, but it is a mistake to assume, as is often done, that this disillusionment was the only basis for *Nineteen Eighty-four*. He had no use for Stalinism, but some direct anticipations of his last book were, Williams says, based on Nazi theory and the Nazi labor camps. "Nothing could be more false than the quite general idea that Orwell returned from Spain a disillusioned socialist, who then gave his energy to warnings against a totalitarian socialist future." Similar misconceptions have arisen concerning Orwell's reason for writing *Animal Farm.* In the preface to a special edition printed for Ukrainian refugees, he said:

> Nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original ideal of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated. And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. On my return from Spain I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages.

There is a sense in which Orwell was a man who wanted very much to become a "writer," but whose intentions in this direction were interrupted by the events of his time. His life was invaded by current history. But Orwell, unlike many writers, went out to meet the invading forces. As Williams says:

> He developed as a writer through the years of the Depression and of fascism. At every point in

> these years he exposed himself to these facts in their most direct form. He became unemployed and penniless, partly because of the early difficulties of being a writer but also deliberately, as a way of cutting his connections with an established and unacceptable social position. He went to Spain to fight fascism, partly, to begin with, as a way of being a writer but then deliberately, as a way of setting his life against an evil and destructive social force. His courage and persistence in this repeated exposure to the hardest facts of his time are by any standard remarkable. Yet in and through this exposure there is an unresolved problem: that of the other self, the other writer, that he had wished and still wished to be.

Orwell's own sense of what happened was expressed in a late essay:

> The invasion of literature by politics was bound to happen. It must have happened, even if the special problem of totalitarianism had never arisen, because we have developed a sort of compunction which our grandparents did not have, an awareness of the enormous injustice and misery of the world, and a guilt-stricken feeling that one ought to be doing something about it, which makes a purely aesthetic attitude towards life impossible. No one, now, could devote himself to literature as single-mindedly as Joyce or Henry James.

A decent man, writer or whatever, would have to do something about the ugly things that kept happening in the world, but Orwell's strong moral sense made him feel that whatever he did, or the causes with which he allied himself, were simply not sufficient. The world was an unspeakable mess, while the solutions known to him all showed a seamy inadequacy that contributed to a growing sense of despair. After getting a bullet in the throat in Spain and suffering from a tubercular illness, he grew weary of the controversies of parlor radicals. In a review of Muggeridge's *The Thirties*, he wrote:

> It is the emotion of the middle-class man, brought up in the military tradition, who finds in the moment of crisis that he is a patriot after all. It is all very well to be "advanced" or "enlightened," to snigger at Colonel Blimp and proclaim your and proclaim your emancipation from all traditional loyalties, but a time comes when the sand of the desert is sodden red and what have I done for thee, England, my England? As I was brought up in this tradition myself I can recognise it under strange disguises, and also sympathise with it, for even at its stupidest and most sentimental it is a comelier thing than the shallow self-righteousness of the left-wing intelligentsia.

Orwell was able to understand the withdrawal of a man like Henry Miller, on the ground that progress and reaction have "both turned out to be swindles," but withdrawal was impossible for him. Not unnaturally, then, he wrote in 1946:

> It is not easy to believe in the survival of civilization. I think one must continue the political struggle, just as a doctor must try to save the life of a patient who is probably going to die. But . . . we shall get nowhere unless we start by recognising that political behaviour is largely non-rational, that the world is suffering from some kind of mental disease which must be diagnosed before it can be cured.

Here, perhaps, is an explanation of the excessive pessimism which finds such convincing embodiment in *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Raymond Williams is especially good in his comment on this final work of fiction by Orwell. He completed it in 1948, during renewed attacks of tuberculosis, and he died in January 1950. During these last years of his life, Williams says, Orwell "could see only authoritarian communism, in the future, with no alternative or countervailing social forces." The first title proposed for the book was *The Last Man in Europe*, and Winston Smith, it must be admitted, was not much of a man. Yet the book had sufficient resemblance to various political realities to produce, as Williams says, "a genuine terror." Several of the expressions Orwell invented have worked their way into our language. "Big Brother" now has mostly an ominous connotation.

Raymond Williams says of *Nineteen Eighty-four:*

> In projecting an all too recognizable world Orwell confused us about its structures, its ideologies, and the possibilities of resisting it.
>
> This point about resistance has a further importance when we remember Orwell's earlier work. At the most general level, his projection has

> undoubtedly been falsified. Under controls as pervasive and cruel, many men and women have kept faith with each other, have kept their courage, and in several cases against heavy odds have risen to try to destroy the system or to change it. We can write Berlin, Budapest, Algiers, Aden, Watts, Prague in the margins of Orwell's passivity. He himself could have written St. Petersburg, Kronstadt, Barcelona, Warsaw. It would be right to acknowledge that many of the risings were defeats, but Orwell goes further, cutting out the spring of hope. He projects an enormous apathy on all the oppressed: a created mood, if ever there was one.

The *proles* are the great majority of the population, and they are an apathetic mass, seen by the Party as "natural inferiors . . . like animals." Williams feels constrained to say "that if the tyranny of 1984 ever finally comes, one of the major elements of ideological preparation will have been just this way of seeing 'the masses,' 'the human beings passing you on the pavement'."

Why was Orwell so overwhelmed by the events of his lifetime? He lacked neither courage nor determination. Perhaps the answer must be that he did lack a tragic sense of history, and a feeling for multiple lines of historical causation. His perspective did not take into account the extraordinary capacity of men to endure and to revive their energies through moral rebirth. Complex currents of motivation are already at work in the formation of the future, but there was no room for anticipation of them in Orwell's intensely politicalized outlook. He could not break through the tangled and encircling web of alienation. But the final comment on Orwell should be as Williams puts it:

> Yet Orwell tried again and again to affirm, putting his life on the line. That is what makes him much more than a passive figure in this dominant structure of feeling. He shared it, but he tried to transcend it. As clearly as anyone in his generation, he sensed that this was, after all, a historical crisis, not a human condition or a metaphysical fact. His mobility, then, had a dear social intention. He was traveling light, but it was sureness of instinct, not chance, that took him to all the critical places and experiences of his epoch; and he was not only a visitor, either, but a man wanting and hoping to join in. He made a single life contain, at first hand, the experiences of imperialism, of revolution, of poverty. He had no theory to explain them and no rooted positive beliefs extending beyond his own role. But with great stubbornness and persistence and courage he went to the centers of the history that was determining him, so that it might be experienced and differently determined. This, above everything, was his individual achievement. He was the writer who put himself out, who kept going and taking part, and who learned to write as a function of this very precise exploration.

COMMENTARY
NORMATIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

IN a now forgotten pamphlet, *The Communities of Tolstoyans,* published in Canada in 1944, Henri Lasserre quotes the following from Tolstoy's *Intimate Diary:*

> To withdraw into a community, to live this community life, to preserve in it a certain innocence—all this is a sin, an error! One cannot purify oneself alone or even in a small company. If one wishes to purify oneself, it must be done with others without separating oneself from the rest of the world. It is like wanting to clean a place by working at the edges where it is already clean. No! He who seeks to do good work must plunge right into the mire. At least if he is already in it, he must not think that he should escape from it.

This outburst, taken by itself, could be read as strong opposition to the Tolstoyan communities, of which there were many during Tolstoy's lifetime. But as Lasserre points out, few of these communities were characterized by egoistic retirement and separation from the world. Actually, Tolstoy rejoiced in the spirit represented by these communitarian efforts, although he never joined one. He was tormented by what he saw as the moral contradictions involved. Asked some questions by an English group, he replied:

> . . . There can be no such thing as a group of saints among sinners. . . . We are so made that we cannot become perfect each for himself, nor one by one, nor in groups, but only all, yes, only all together. The heat of a drop of water passes to other drops. If it were possible to retain the heat in a drop of water without its passing to neighboring drops, that would prove to us that it was not true heat."

A totally "uncompromised" community or group seemed impossible to Tolstoy? and there is deep psychological insight behind practically every question he raised. The history of intentional communities shows that such questions, even if formulated in less moralistic terms, have been consistently neglected, requiring the most elementary lessons of close, interdependent human relations to be learned over and over again. There have been very few gains in what might be called a normative social psychology.

Part V of A. H. Maslow's *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature,* titled "Society," has in it five papers which are all relevant to communitarian undertakings. Now available in paperback (Viking, $2.95), this volume would be a valuable addition to community libraries.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

BACK in 1927, a young woman who was in her second year at Syracuse University happened to read Upton Sinclair's *The Goosestep.* Already in trouble with the Syracuse chancellor for her efforts to arrange for radicals to speak to student groups, she wrote to Sinclair asking him if he knew of a college anywhere in the country that was *not* dominated by the people who had endowed it. Sinclair said that he was on the advisory council of such a school, and told her about Commonwealth College, located near Mena, in Arkansas, which had been started in 1923. She arrived with knapsack and was assigned to work in the office, then joined the faculty to teach typing and office routines. A year later she became the school's executive secretary, and two years after that she became the wife of Raymond Koch, who had obtained his education there and was now teaching. Some forty years later, she and her husband, Charlotte and Raymond Koch, wrote *Educational Commune—The Story of Commonwealth College* (Schocken Books, 1972, $6.95). The title isn't quite right, since in this case the older term, community, seems more appropriate than commune, although this adventure in labor education which lasted for seventeen years had many things in common with the communes of the present. The authors were at Commonwealth for most of this period.

The book tells the intimate story of a school put together by people who were determined to bring the advantages of education to working class young, and to maintain their own independence while doing it. This meant seeking economic self-sufficiency. In the Preface the authors say:

> We think Commonwealth College's distinction lay in its ability to operate full time as a residential educational community, with a permanent faculty and stable curriculum, and in its special attention to giving its students both a historical review of society and a searching examination of and preparation for the roles they might play in social transformations.
>
> Before 1931 our emphasis was on self-support to insure independence from the influence of endowers. We wanted to be a free marketplace of ideas for sons and daughters of workers.
>
> Between 1931 and 1937, our participation and service in peoples' movements increased. Students were encouraged to choose particular niches and ponder their special roles. Such purposefulness highlighted a built-in anomaly. Because we were organized as a commune, some people concluded that we were in search of an idyllic utopia, and some visitors imagined they were observing a new monastic order where devotion to labor was a substitute for prayers and good works. What they did not understand was that the founders of Commonwealth College had been effectively immunized from notions of an ideal society by their association with the Newllano Cooperative Colony in Louisiana, where the college was born in 1923 and where they had hoped to find a convenient physical home for the school. The union created more problems than it solved and had to be annulled. The college was then free to organize its own commune (near Mena, Arkansas), in which the communal aspect could be properly subordinated to the educational aims. We were never interested in becoming a haven of escape from the evils of capitalism. One of our premises was that the entire structure of our society would have to be reformed and transformed to eliminate the disorders of an unplanned, competitive society.
>
> We did not seek accreditation. However, several of our students, some of whom had not even completed eight grades of formal schooling, were accepted, upon our recommendation, as candidates for graduate degrees at major American universities. The teaching methods that seemed to work best for us were those that left room for exploration of all dogmas. Discussion among people committed to differing viewpoints and approaches had important learning value. We were encouraged to seek the background to our study of current events. In the process of tracing economic evolution and political revolution, we were helped to develop historical perspective and comprehension of past social transformations.

The curriculum focussed on labor history and problems, public speaking, law, and journalism, but there was also instruction in the practical arts of farming and other skills such as carpentry,

electrical wiring, and the variety of things that need to be done in a self-sufficient community. The teachers were all volunteers who were paid no salaries, but had subsistence. Koch relates: "Most of our clothes came in the proverbial 'missionary barrels.' I recall that, when we were married on campus on the last day of 1930, my wife wore a pale green, worn dress she found in a package from a supporter in Philadelphia."

The idea for Commonwealth developed among three or four people who had gathered to consider what could be done for Ruskin College, a Christian Socialist school in Florida which had lost its students, most of them pacifists, during World War I. Present were Frank and Kate O'Hare, socialist publishers of the Debs tradition, and a young educator named Edward Zeuch. These three began to think about the possibility of a college which would appeal to and serve the needs of trade unionists, socialists, and members of the co-op movement. Meanwhile the branch of Job Harriman's California Llano Colony which had moved to Louisiana, reorganizing as the Newllano Cooperative Colony, invited the founders to start Commonwealth College in Newllano and deeded them forty acres. This got the plan for the college off the ground, and there was financial help from the Garland Fund. However, friction developed with the Colonists and the College moved to Arkansas where land was cheap.

Through the years, the College found some great friends. Einstein paid for the schooling of one young man. The home of Louis Brandeis in Washington became a headquarters for a fund-raising campaign to make possible a special educational program for share-croppers. Christopher Morley wrote about it in the *Saturday Review*.

What was it like at Commonwealth College?

> The mountain setting, rural living, and the great variety of experiences nurtured our minds and bodies. The cooking crew beat with a horseshoe on a worn plowshare secured to a tree with baling wire to wake us for 6:00 breakfast. . . . The day started with a quick wash with cold spring water in a basin. A full belly was important in the morning, this meant a rotation of fried mush, hot cakes, French toast, plenty of sorghum molasses, limited amounts of butter, eggs, occasionally, and, very rarely, a slice of fried pork. Our meals tended to be light on meats and other proteins, and high on such starches as rice and sweet potatoes. . . . There was a good selection of fresh vegetables in season, and canned ones out of season. . . .
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> Fifty-minute classes started at 7:30 A.M. and ended at 11:30 A.M. This left half an hour for washing up and maybe changing into work clothes before lunch, though we tried to save most before-meal moments for socializing or heckling and applauding the public-speaking scholars as they practiced. . . .
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> I had never been to high school so I entered the Preparatory Department (which was later abandoned). I remember taking courses in the outline of world history, economic history, economic geography, advanced mathematics, general science effective writing and English and journalism. When I advanced to the College Department I studied psychology, sociology, labor history, political economy, creative writing, public speaking, and typing. . . .
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> The second half of a Commoner's day was the working half. . . . The big departments were farm, garden, construction, wood crew, laundry, and, during giant mailings, the office. Harvesting and canning crews were diverted from other departments for quick action as needed.

The goal of self-support was always before them and they tried different ways of increasing the school's income, including special summer lecture programs. People like Oscar Ameringer and Carl Haessler spoke for them. The career of Commonwealth College was never an "even" affair, and the writers of this book hold nothing back, since the people involved and their efforts, whatever the shortcomings, were always good enough to be described. The last part of the book tells of the period when the director, Raymond Koch's older brother Lucien, involved the school more and more in social struggles, bringing help to striking miners and education to black sharecroppers. The frequency of red-baiting attacks on the school grew, but this also brought

evidence of the spreading fame of Commonwealth College among distinguished people in other parts of the world. At a critical moment the Arkansas legislature received a telegram from France signed by Henri Barbusse and a thousand French artists and writers, saying, simply, "Hands off Commonwealth."

One interesting aspect of this heroic effort to bring learning to depressed laboring classes was the lack of enthusiasm shown by both Socialist Party "bigwigs" and union officials. "The last thing the average bureaucratic head of an organization wants is leadership training for its members." But the Commonwealth College went right on with its programs. It had no party line and wanted none. The school was obliged to close its doors in 1940.

FRONTIERS

New Community Magazine

A NEW magazine, *Communitas,* fills a real need and should soon find many readers interested in the theory, practice and present prospects of community living. It comes out every two months and is available at $5.00 a year from Communitas, 121 West Center Street, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. The first issue appeared in July. It is staffed by five people, one of whom grew up in Yellow Springs in close contact with Arthur Morgan, founder of Community Service, Inc. While the paper was independently conceived, it may be recognized as in some measure a fruit of Morgan's lifelong efforts and inspiration in behalf of community, which also made Yellow Springs a place hospitable to such undertakings. Griscom Morgan, who now directs Community Service, is a contributor.

The first issue of *Communitas* has articles which describe in some detail at least a half dozen existing and growing communities. A department called Grapevine reports on the activities and fortunes of communities around the country, listed by states, and a Calendar gives the dates of conferences and get-togethers of interest to communitarians. There is a section for letters called Community Clearing House and a list of the magazines concerned with community. The book review section reports on new paperback editions of Wendell Berry's *The Long-Legged House* (Ballantine) and Ralph Borsodi's *Flight from the City* (Harper), the enthusiasm for Berry's work giving indication of the underlying spirit of this magazine. A low-cost "unclassified" ad section should prove a service to readers.

A column by two young men with medical degrees who will discuss "Pioneer Health" ought to be of substantial value to communitarians. These doctors believe that medicine, in new communities, "must humanize, not dehumanize; it must teach self-sufficiency, not dependence; it must deal with health, not simply disease." The writers hope to act as resources "for people who are interested in learning to care for themselves as much as possible," and they invite specific questions.

The first article in *Communitas* tells about several of the new communities which have taken root in Virginia, mainly because it is a large state with a mild climate, a long growing season, and has low population density in rural areas not too far from Washington, D.C. Cost of land, however, is thought to be high—$200 to $500 per acre but those who have looked around for land in California might think these prices low. A community called Springtree, half an hour by car from Charlottesville, is made up of families with children of grade-school age, including twelve adults. They have a hundred acres, half in oak woods, a long river frontage, and are now building. They acquired the land about a year ago and most of the members are keeping their jobs until they are able to live on the land. But they are busy:

> Springtree folk are putting many hours into organic gardening. Around Thanksgiving they dug asparagus trenches and planted 100 asparagus crowns and six rhubarb plants, mulching them with old hay. They also set and mulched 36 fruit trees (dwarf apple and pear, cherry, plum, nectarine, peach and fig). They bailed ice water out of the huge tree holes, and set the trees in a mixture of leaf-mold, old sawdust bone meal, lime, rock phosphate, cow manure and topsoil. This spring they eagerly awaited the resurrection of last fall's work.
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> In addition to early and late vegetable gardens, there are sites for berry plants and a grape vineyard. They plan to produce most of their own food, with some left over for cash sale. The grape experiment, 560 French hybrid vines on one acre, is their first step toward major cash income from the land. They hope to break even within three years and then have an income of $1000/acre of grapes. If the first acre is successful, grapes will provide their *primary* source of income within ten years.
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> Although they espouse no particular ideology, Springtree people share beliefs in natural, organic foods, permissive child rearing (e.g. learning to stay out of the kids' fights), interest in the human potential movement, and a desire to live harmoniously with

nature. Issues like political or sexual activity are weighed as they come up.

Relationships with local people are good. They say, "our new neighbors are gentle, friendly and helpful. Our ignorance in such matters as tractors, goats, thistle eradication and dairying is abysmal, and we have gotten good advice . . . they agree with us about the horrors of city living and realize that one of the farmer's greatest difficulties is finding reliable labor. The sharing of tools and labor is a common practice here. . . ."

Another quite "young" community described is Alpha, started by nine people, on a 280-acre farm in Oregon, west of Eugene. Ages of the members range from a new-born infant to a fifty-three-year-old with knowledge of farming. How they got going, with very little capital, makes a good story. This article, by Glen Hovemann, one of the participants, describes the planning, the social and economic thinking of the members, and the living arrangements. For income in addition to the farming, some of the members plan cottage industries. One man, for example, is developing a loom-making business, using wherever possible the native woods on Alpha's land (it is timber-producing country). They also plan to have a general store since its operation would bring them into closer relations with the surrounding neighbors and could grow into a regional community center.

What is it that holds Alpha together? Perhaps a shared sense of "manifest destiny" more than anything else. The group has a strong compatible Ouaker/Unitarian/Eastern/eclectic religious base, but it is not a shared ceremony or dogma that binds us.

An interview with Jud Jerome, an effective writer on modern communes, gives insight into the changing temper of the commune movement. Since 1968, he says, more serious intentions seem evident in the communes, which he attributes to a "growing up" of the young who are involved and to an influx of older people who are looking for ways to institute radical changes in their lives. The kind of change he is talking about might be illustrated by his own experience. In one place in this interview he said:

When I got a Ph.D., it was a document that guaranteed that I didn't know how my body worked, how my car worked how my society worked, how my family worked—I didn't know anything but 17th-century literature. In that situation, it became very necessary that I perpetuate institutions in which people who knew about 17th-century English literature were needed, and were rewarded. I just had to kick the habit of perpetuating those institutions. So, it was a considerable personal risk in many ways. . . . I'm now planning to retire at age forty-five. My family bought a farm, and we're planning to build a life which is outside the system to as great an extent as we can make it.

Well, it seems good to have some English majors in the community movement.