VOLUME XXXIII, NO. 8
FEBRUARY 20, 1980

THE FORMATION OF VIEWS

HOW do people change their opinions? No one who has worked for a while for some good but unappreciated cause fails to wonder about the answer to this question. There are callings in life that depend upon finding at least partial answers. Merchants with goods to sell and advertising men with over-stocked clients devote much attention to the art of shaping people's desires or likings. Politicians practice a similar art with more or less success. The more money a candidate has, the better his chance to win an election. This means simply that, up to a point, opinions are purchasable. But these opinions are, by definition, low grade. A brief comment would be: "Is that any way to build a good society?" And the inevitable answer: "Well, no, but we do it because we have to."

The argument shouldn't stop right there, but it usually does.

A more basic approach might begin with asking: How are opinions formed in the first place? They are formed in response to experience. Take the angers and vengeful intentions which lie behind war and revolution. These feelings have causes which are either direct or indirect (often fabricated). People suffer hurt or injustice and are aroused to militant action. In the case of the colonization of Africa, as Norman Angell pointed out in one of his books, the "natives" at first decided that white men were abusing them, so they set out to kill the whites. But then they began to realize that there are different kinds of whites—French and German and English. So their anger was better focused, but still terrible mistakes occurred. They sometimes killed their best friends, not knowing that some Englishmen, say, were trying their best to repair the wrongs of colonization. People learn from experience, and then, after more experience, they learn to change their ideas. But when they are enraged, mistakes don't matter to them. It takes a lot of experience to alter the thinking of outraged human beings. The pressures have to be somewhat relieved to give time and opportunity for reflective judgment. Education is needed, but the only education that works involves more than the manipulation of symbols. Symbols are capsules which abstract from experience; they don't have the impact of what happens to us in everyday life.

Symbols are also the tools of propagandists, and can be made to distort or replace experience. This partisan education through symbols is worse than natural ignorance, since it produces what Plato called "double ignorance"—thinking you know when you don't.

An aspect of this problem is considered by Philip Morrison, a theoretical astrophysicist at M.I.T., in an interview with Susan Fairclough, printed in *Technology Review* for last November. Morrison is a member of the Boston Study Group, whose *The Price of Defense* was published in 1979. Questioned by the interviewer about post-war public opinion, he said:

> I think that the American experience in World War II was very unfortunate from the standpoint of the post-war world. Americans didn't encounter war at all in America. That gave them a very unsatisfactory view of what warfare is like.
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> *Fairclough: Do you* think it's part of human nature to have wars?
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> *Morrison:* Well, it's certainly in the nature of our societies to have war. I don't know that it's in people's nature. War was not a concept among the Eskimos—they were rather surprised by it. They knew about murder, they didn't know about war. They couldn't, because war would mean losing the game animals, thus making Eskimo society very difficult to maintain. Human nature is a plastic and malleable thing. I impute human nature to society. Murders are going to happen among people, as well as bad temper and so on. But war is none of those things. . . .
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> The trouble is that there isn't enough direct experience, especially in these rather subtle matters like international relations. That's the hardest problem—that societies have means of interacting

now which are just not within the experience of the average person. So he or she can only form a very vague understanding of what these interactions mean.

Fairclough: Could the educational system help by integrating experience more with quantitative study?

Morrison: Sure, it has to be done. It means that words and calculations and diagrams and memorizing the principles of physics have too great an emphasis compared to the actual experience of what all these things mean. The schools should depend more heavily on real experience and less upon symbolic experience.

It's a very clear historical development. When the average family was a farm family, people had plenty of material experience. They knew about life and death, the growing of seeds, and the weather, the environment was very rich. But what they didn't have was a big flow of symbols. So schools set out to rectify that. Let everyone learn to read and deal with symbols and see pictures of faraway places. Very sensible thing to do. But now it's caught up. Now the people in the city have no such experiences. They work in their houses or they go to an office. The environment is air-conditioned; the windows do not open. They rarely see the moon or the stars or a horse or a cow. Some think milk comes from bottles in the supermarket. And they have a flood of images: thick newspapers every day, television, and a computer that tells them what to do at work.

Asked what might be done to improve our understanding of national defense, Prof. Morrison said:

I have no special prescription for that—it's obvious there has to be a change in public opinion. That means newspaper editorials, letters to congressmen, organizations, city councils, and a hundred different media saying, "Our resources are limited and we have too much in defense. We need to worry about the broad social health of the country more than a military threat; and indeed our own military is becoming as serious a threat as anybody else's."

This is what *The Price of Defense* contends. Explaining, Morrison said:

In short, you can say the arms race is itself a danger, entirely apart from "the enemy." Up until now, people have only considered the enemy to be a problem; but eventually it's clear that the arms race will be the main problem. There's some transition point; we argue that we're past that point.

The weapons we invent are more likely to destroy us all than vanquish the enemy for several different reasons: first, just by the unprecedented physical damage in nuclear war; second, by the fact that they push an enemy to develop still more; third, by the fact that they induce a lack of reason in the apprehensive opposition, who may become frightened and lose control. The history of previous wars, which were not as cataclysmic as this one would be, shows very clearly: to induce fear is the worst possible way of averting a conflict.

In addition, there is the temptation to intervene, which we had in Vietnam. We can't end that possibility because Americans have such power that even a small fraction of our force is large compared to that of a quite respectable military power. But by reducing our force to something commensurate with our problems, at least you inhibit intervention.

Philip Morrison knows something about nuclear physics and weapons. During the war he was a member of the Manhattan Project, which developed the atom bomb, and ever since he has been campaigning for moderation in U.S. military commitment. His logic seems sound enough, as far as it goes, and his influence may persuade a number of people to change or modify their opinions. But it is hardly necessary to point out that his argument, as developed above, based on some thirty years of thinking—for him an intense sort of experience—is self-evidently valid only for people of similar intelligence. Some ideas,. if inherently reasonable, are widely transferable; others are not, because they are too abstract, not enough related to experience people are familiar with.

What can we do about that? Not much. Needed is the kind of maturity of mind that Prof. Morrison and a few others have developed, but maturity is not something we know how to teach. Yet we have to try. As he says, "Sure, it has to be done." But he knows and we know that it won't get done in a hurry.

There is another thing we can attempt. Grasping Prof. Morrison's reasoning to show that the arms race itself is more dangerous than "the enemy" requires fairly sophisticated thinking: call it, then, the educational "growth" solution for the threat of

military giantism. But there is also a "design" solution, actually a page out of Schumacher's book. If we're small—or comparatively small—we won't, as Morrison says, be tempted into casual wars of intervention. If we could be very small, we'd be like the Eskimos and not even know about war. But then, of course, someone will remind us that the Eskimos, being innocent of war, had no defense against the white men who came their way, looking for furs and other items that might be saleable in New York and London.

So how does one really change people's opinions? And, at the same time, how do you get people not to try to change the opinions of other people like the Eskimos?

At this point it becomes necessary to divide the problem up. Considering populations as totals, the matter is really hopeless—that is, hopeless unless you have in mind the persuasions of a Genghis Khan, the Conquistadores, a Hitler, a Stalin, or a nuclear warhead. You work up your case for a changed opinion—about, say, war and national defense—and then, as they said on Madison Avenue twenty-five years ago, you run it up on the flagpole to see who salutes. Which flagpole? The *Reader's Digest?* The *Atlantic* or *Harper's?* The *New York Times?* The *Saturday Review?* The *Nation?* The *Progressive?*

The more carefully you think about the paper in which your finely-drawn argument has a chance of appearing, the more the possibility of wide circulation goes down. A mass audience is not an audience that responds well to abstractly reasoned appeal, however articulate. You could say that the more real sense in your argument, the fewer the people you will be able to talk to with persuasive effect. Really good thinkers need the collaboration of pressures from history to get their points across. Tom Paine had the redcoats on our shores, and he won a big audience, but see what happened to him after freedom was won. Paine was one more victim of business as usual. The help from history was gone. And see what happened to Gandhi, who made a big dent in Indian history when one of its accidents split open a vista to his vision. But then, after Indian independence, the avenue to vision was closed.

It all seems quite discouraging. Do we expect too much of human beings? But what do we know, really, about the achievement and consolidation of human progress? Is there any sort of "rate"? If we have the idea that we ought to work to spread around good ideas, and in this way alter public opinion, wouldn't it be best to know more about what we are up against by having a better understanding of human nature? For example, would we obtain more patience for both others and ourselves if we shared with Ortega the idea that "at times what happens to man is nothing less than *ceasing to be man."* The Spanish philosopher continued:

> And this is true not only abstractly and generically but it holds of our own individuality. Each one of us is always in danger of not being the unique and untransferable *self* which he is. The majority of men perpetually betray this self which is waiting to be; and to tell the whole truth, our personal individuality is a personage which is never completely realized, a stimulating Utopia, a secret legend, which each of us guards in the depths of his heart. It is thoroughly comprehensible that Pindar summarized his heroic ethics in the well-known imperative: "Become what you are."

People reach good opinions by a process that may not show at all. First, they change through some mysterious inner development by self-energized effort to gain maturity. What is maturity? It is funding the height at which good decisions are made. It is not this or that correct opinion, but a way of seeing. Mature people are people you can count on, and who, for the most part, don't need to change their ideas and opinions, because they know what they know, and when it comes to what they don't know, they know that they don't. This is far more important than having the right ideas!

Maslow said of his healthy (mature) subjects:

> In practically all of them, I found a rather good-humored rejection of the stupidities and imperfections of the culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it. They definitely showed an ability to fight it vigorously when they thought it necessary. . . . The mixture of varying proportions of affection or approval, and hostility and criticism indicated that they select from American culture what is good in it by their lights and reject what they think is bad in it.

In a word, they weigh it, and judge it (by their own inner criteria) and then make their own decisions. . . .

For these and other reasons they may be called autonomous, i.e., ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society (insofar as these are different). It is in this sense that they are not only or merely Americans but also members at large of the human species.

Of them, then, it could perhaps be said that they have become what they are, in Pindar's sense. They are few, and have been called the Saving Remnant. From among them emerge the Lincolns, the Tolstoys, the Gandhis, the Simone Weils and the Jane Addamses. It is always this company which shapes the best thinking of the age—of any age—and which generates the conception of the Utopia in which others, in their best moments, participate, and hold and guard in the depths of their hearts.

But other lines of influence have had a larger part in producing the feelings and attitudes of Americans. In *The Quiet Crisis* (1963), a book written by Stewart Udall in the hope of generating better understanding of the care of the land, the landscape, and the whole natural environment, there is a passage about the Mountain Men of more than a hundred years ago. They became our folk heroes, the creators of Western tradition—starting with Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and Jed Smith—men whose daring, bravery, and toughness made a legend of the American frontier. Udall says:

None of the mountain men got rich trapping, and most died poor. Beaver plews sold for six dollars apiece in peak years, and a good trapper could make one thousand dollars a season. But at the summer rendezvous the fur companies charged outrageous prices for supplies hauled in from St. Louis, and most of the time the trappers decided to stay on another year in the high country and hope for a bumper harvest. A few cleaned up, and John Jacob Astor, running part of the show from back East, became the richest man in America because he knew how to organize the extermination of the beaver. . . .

The trappers' raid on the beaver was a harbinger of things to come. The undisciplined creed of reckless individualism became the code of those who later used a higher technology to raid our resources systematically. The spiritual sons of the mountain men were the men of the next wave—the skin-and-scoot market hunters, the cut-and-get-out lumbermen, the cattle barons whose herds grazed the plains bare.

It is neither fair nor quite true to say that the tradition of thoughtless land exploitation started with the mountain men, but certainly part of it can be traced to them. Leatherstocking, James Fenimore Cooper's idealized frontiersman, found God in the trees and water and the breath of summer air but the true-life mountain man made his demands on America's abundance without thought, without thanks, and without veneration for living things. These men embodied, as few others have, one facet of the self-reliance of which Emerson later wrote, but they wholly lacked the self-discipline which alone gave it grace and meaning.

In all this the circular process of history was at work. The land was determining the character of the men who, in turn, were determining the future of the land itself. The result of this interaction was the clearest possible example of the American ambivalence toward the land that continues to dominate our relationship to the continent and its resources. It is a combination of a love for the land and the practical urge to exploit it shortsightedly for profit.

These are some of our roots, better, most likely, than various others.

Today we are being pushed, almost against our will, in the direction of maturity. Nature herself is imposing a "design solution" of belt-tightening devices. The land is continuing the circular process of history, determining the future of the men and women who live in America by presenting circumstances under which discipline must be practiced, whether we like it or not. Some discoveries may be made. Quite a few may find that discipline is a good thing, better than rioting self-indulgence, and opinions may change as a result. Some maturity may emerge as a byproduct, and be finally welcomed with thanks.

REVIEW
TWO SIEGES

AUTISM is a psychological or psychiatric mystery. One comes across the term in books by Bruno Bettelheim, who has done so much for the understanding of disturbed children. Yet if you try to find the meaning of the word, all firmness departs. Some psychiatrists won't use it at all. The same sort of problem besets those who try to pin down *schizophrenia.* Again, some psychiatrists hold that the word cloaks only learned ignorance. Uncertainty, in other words, should apply to such designations. Yet the reality of these psychological ills is there, and people encounter it in their lives. The experience of having an autistic child lays siege to the understanding of the parents. It comes to them out of the blue and they must try to find out what it means. *Why* is no doubt the first question asked. Some vague feeling may be obtained, but putting it into words is likely to be a great mistake. The *what* question proves more useful. Something can be said in answer to that.

We have been reading in Clara Claiborne Park's *The Siege—The First Eight Years of an Autistic Child* (Little, Brown, 1967), a book about her fourth child, so tragically different from the other three. This is not a story of triumph in healing, yet it is not about failure, either. It is, you could say, about love, but a kind of love which seeks detachment in order to see how love is best expressed. In the book it is disclosed as the quiet glow of intelligence at work in a field where difficulties, puzzles, obstacles are normal, continuous, and relieved only by tiny increments of gain.

The author is a literary person and a teacher. This background for telling about her autistic daughter, Elly, makes the book a contribution to the humanities. Pathology is there, but in a back seat. We take particular note of this quality since it lifts the experience out of the medical or psychiatric category, exploring its human dimensions and using everything else to illuminate the meanings which are revealed.

There is the factual foundation—the story of Elly's eight years—and then the reflective asides. (They aren't really "asides.") The latter will have attention here, since they change the book into a work of literature. There is this for example:

> Elly has lived with us and the experience has been kept manageable. It's well to claim no more. One day, perhaps, my children will tell someone else of suffering I did not guess. But we have managed. As the children have grown older—the eldest is ready for college now—they have not tried to hide Elly or dissociate themselves from her. At home and at school they seem comfortable about themselves and her. They take her about with them without embarrassment. Their friends come to the house, and they show off her weird abilities with some pride. And I am not really surprised. If I had any faith in all this business it was that we had good children, that they could help Elly, and help us, and help themselves through helping. We were uneasy over many things as Elly grew, but over this one thing we were profoundly at ease. We never thought that it could injure our children to discover that there was a real world in which all were not fortunate, and where those who were had obligations to those who were not. I have written already that they had grown up in an ideal place, if an ideal place is one which is free from insecurity and danger. It should be clear by now that I am by no means sure that it is. James wrote years ago of the need to find a moral equivalent of war; I think we may also have, today, a need to find a moral equivalent of poverty, of illness, of sorrow in the privileged enclaves from which we have almost excluded them. At any rate, I have never been sorry that our children had this trouble in the midst of all their good fortune. Our ancestors would have said that we all have our cross to bear. Our vocabulary is different, but the meaning is precious and should not be lost. The children have not grown up poorer for having Elly in their family. I think they feel this to some degree even now. Later they will know it.

Elly, one thinks to oneself, was indeed fortunate to be born into such a family. But who or what is Elly? Was she, is she, just another human trying to get "in"? Why was it so hard for her? Was she not trying? She was healthy enough, physically. Her coming laid siege to her

mother, her father, her brother and sisters—to them all as a family—and by accepting her they withstood the attack. Elly is Elly and remains an unsolved mystery, and a virtue of this book is that she is never left out as a human presence, she never becomes merely a difficult and prolonged event. So who was Elly? Telling of another siege, Mrs. Park says at the beginning:

> I knew only that my fourth child was not like the others, who needed me and loved me, as I loved them. The fairies had stolen away the human baby and left one of their own. There she moved, every day, among us but not of us, acquiescent when we approached, untouched when we retreated, serene, detached, in perfect equilibrium. Existing among us, she had her being elsewhere. As long as no demands were made upon her, she was content. If smiles and laughter mean happiness, she was happy inside the invisible walls that surrounded her. She dwelt in a solitary citadel, compelling and self-made, complete and valid. Yet we could not leave her there. We must intrude, attack, invade, not because she was unhappy inside it, for she was not, but because the equilibrium she had found, perfect as it was, denied the possibility of growth. We had not demanded; now we must. We had accepted; now we must try to change. A terrible arrogance, for what had we to offer her? Which of us could call our selves content as Elly was? The world we would tempt her into was the world of risk, failure, and frustration, of unfulfilled desire, of pain as well as activity and love. There in Nirvana, why should she ever come out? Yet she was ours as well as her own, and we wanted her with us. If what we had to offer was not enough, we had nothing beside it. Confronted with a tiny child's refusal of life, all existential hesitations evaporate. We had no choice. We would use every strategem we could invent to assail her fortress, to beguile, entice, seduce her into the human condition.

This is the beginning of the Odyssey, a drama that could not be a great success. Mrs. Park writes about their wanderings with Elly, trying to show her the way home. The encounters are as exciting as the Greek hero's.

What, then, was Elly? In her second year—

> I remember one sunny spring day, the yards filled with playing children, my neighbor and I standing and watching Elly as she crawled serenely away from us all. Something about her isolation—she was so tiny, and already so far away—made me say, only half joking, "There's nothing the matter with Elly. She just has a distorted sense of what's important. My neighbor laughed at the application of such inflated language to a baby. But it is I who have had the last laugh, if you could call it that.

The pilgrimages to psychiatrists and mental hospitals for children began. Elly's mature parents were ready to learn from the experts, yet able, too, to recognize that the specialists were pretty much in the dark concerning such ills. They found that "there was no agreement on the right label for Elly." She just shut people and the world out. "Totally self-absorbed" seemed the right account of what she was doing. They went through the ordeal of studying the psychiatric analyses which stressed parental responsibility for autism in a child, but emerged unscathed. They simply couldn't feel guilty, and indeed, they don't seem to have been. They were helping, not hurting, their daughter.

One encounter with an institution became a revelation:

> We expected to talk with wise and sympathetic people—wise because of a wide experience with sick children, sympathetic because it was their vocation to help those in trouble. . . . It should have been easy, after all, to say it: "Look, you're a professional. I need references, I need to find out about play therapy, I need to know all I can about children like Elly, because whoever else may or may not work with her, her main psychotherapist is me."
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> But of course it was not easy but impossible. Their system made it so. Autistic was not a word they used. They were wise to avoid it, it fitted them so closely. We knew that imperviousness, that terrible silence, those eyes that turn away. And this was the most frightening discovery of all: that we could make better progress against the walls around Elly than we could in reaching these people. . . .
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> We know now, I think, how the slum mother feels as the welfare worker comes round the corner. It takes, one would think, so little knowledge of psychology to put oneself in someone else's place.
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> The failure of the Institute was not a failure of knowledge. Ultimately they produced, though not for our eyes a reasonably detailed report, far fuller than

> the three oracular utterances they had trusted us to hear. Their failure was one of imagination. For all their silent attention they were not able to imagine the thoughts and feelings of my husband and me.

Mrs. Park adds: "the reader, I hope, is ready to burst out in exclamation . . . 'But all psychiatrists aren't like this!' I know it." In England, where their work took them, the Parks found a very different reception—a human reception—at the Hampstead Clinic of Anna Freud.

What was really the trouble with Elly? Her father's guess, after watching the child's laborious preparations for going to school, seems close to the truth: "It's the sense of purpose that's missing!" This drew many threads of understanding together. The child never had hallucinations or made fantasies and her memory worked only in limited ways: "she is as yet incapable of understanding why Peter Rabbit was afraid of Mr. McGregor, because for her out of sight is out of mind." So the mystery continues. Mrs. Park says at the end: "Of all the things that Elly has given, the most precious is . . . a faith experience has almost transformed into certain knowledge: that inside the strongest citadel he can construct, the human being awaits his besieger."

COMMENTARY
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

AN article by James Fallows in the February *Atlantic* makes an interesting contrast with the material in this week's "Children." Mr. Fallows compares the pretensions of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) on which college admissions are based—that they are "fair," or as fair as can be—with the devastating fact that past experience reveals a close correlation between scores of students and the incomes of their families. The compilers of the tests, he shows, try very hard to eliminate any sort of cultural or economic bias from their questions; his point is that they don't succeed; and it might be added that perhaps they can't.

A brief summary of this complicated analysis—the article is well worth reading—doesn't seem possible, but the sense of the writer's conclusion seems clear:

> In a way, the universities have been unfairly trapped by a myth—the myth of themselves as the forces for social change. The ultimate meritocratic justification for selective education is that this privilege will go to the most deserving, who will be better trained for their future responsibilities and who will provide surer, wiser leadership for all mankind. But most sociological studies show that education does not work that way at all. The amount of education you get makes a difference in success in later life, but performance in school doesn't (except by entitling you to spend more years in school). Instead of selecting and training leaders, education *certifies* them to hold positions of privilege. This confusion between the academic role of education and its role as a granter of credentials may be the biggest threat to academic standards of all. It leads to grade-grubbing, demands for "fair admissions," and a view of liberal education as nothing more than a ticket to business school.

Mr. Fallows would like to see an end put to the pretense that the SAT tests disclose which candidates are likely to "make the greatest contribution to society in their occupations and professions." Whatever the tests are used for, they should not again delude us "into thinking we have found a scientific basis for the order of lords, vassals, and serfs."

The tests, in short, select our society's idea of appropriate candidates for affluence, whatever the cultural decorations which go along with this. Let us admit it, Fallows says, and try to give all the students an even break, if affluence is what they are after.

There are indeed teachers who are concerned with something more important. But what they can accomplish is limited by the deadly averages of motivation to which large institutions submit in order to survive. The only remedy, so far as we can see, is to foster the ideal of an aristocracy of character—after, say, the example of Gandhi—to take the place of the aristocracy of affluence, and hope that some day small institutions which cherish this ideal will be able to survive.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE TEACHING PROFESSION

THE second 1979 issue of *New Directions in Teaching* (which comes out twice a year) is devoted to musings on the past twenty years by nine teachers of undergraduates in college. They are, we suppose, professionals talking to professionals, and what they say is interesting as "slices of life," but also as evidence of the sort of human beings who decide to spend their lives teaching the young. A teacher feels basic concern for the welfare of others. The really good teachers, that is, choose to teach because nothing else will give their lives meaning. Often, as a result, they feel that they are experiencing defeat. The stamp of the times is on their students, and also on the institutions where they work. Yet most of them keep on teaching.

The first contributor, called the keynoter by the *New Directions* editor, is Jerry Richard, who identifies himself—

> Mostly, I attend meetings, an activity that for some reason does not seem to improve with practice. I share with students my love of literature and together we sometimes use literature to try to understand ourselves or the world. I also teach writing and I try to practice what I teach. Most of this I do at the Center for Urban studies which is essentially a degree-granting, adult education program of Western Washington University.

Jerry Richard prefaces his recollections of teaching in the turbulent sixties with de Tocqueville's account of "democracy" in its least attractive guise—"a depraved taste for equality which impels the weak to attempt to lower the powerful to their own level, and reduces men to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom." Anger over injustice to blacks in the South (and the North) and the threat of the draft led to student rebellion:

> Anti-authoritarianism was the hallmark of the period, and in the drive for equality it was applied indiscriminately, against parents, police, politicians, teachers, works of art, and even against peers who showed any sign of leadership ability. Of course there was good reason to be suspicious of authority: President Johnson had clearly abused his, and if his mendacity was not typical there was still little reason to believe it was any great exception. The road to equality, it seemed, lay through the forest of authority, and so we set about to cut it down. . . .
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> It wasn't long before there were students demanding office space, and others who wondered out loud why they had to pay while the faculty received pay since not only were we all there together but many of us insisted that for us it was a learning experience too (and it was all too true in some cases). I knew several teachers who shared those thoughts and began to feel guilty about their paychecks.
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> What had been happening?
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> The symbols that were meant to express the ideas of equalitarianism and living-learning were having another effect. They were degrading education itself. Not just the teacher but what the teacher represented had been leveled; the children and the dogs [brought to class] suggested that education was not to be taken seriously. Casualness became sloppiness.

In a way, it's better now, Jerry Richard thinks, but there are other reductive trends. With the onset of recession a degree no longer meant easy access to a job and students began showing interest in courses that might help their careers.

> Concerned now about their own futures they had no time for the past and courses in literature, philosophy, history began to beg for students. Students who were about to challenge the economic system suddenly were hoping that it would survive long enough to provide them with a good living. The grand experiment was whining down.
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> Human beings are afflicted with a condition I call pendulumitis. It is the tendency to move from one extreme to the other. Already, reaction to the mistakes and excesses of the recent past are setting in and the successes are being thrown out along with the children and the dogs. Experimental programs and colleges are either closing or reverting to traditional ways.

An understandable gloom is communicated by John Bauer, recipient of a CUNY award for excellence in teaching as he reviews his thirty years of experience:

> Though the Vietnam War is over, its emotional lethal mushroom has not passed away. And so it is

> not over. Though flower children are seldom seen, we now are confronted by their mummified remains. They are a different breed, mentally competent perhaps, but not particularly interested in the world around them, in the shaping forces of their past, or the mysteries of today's colliding conflicts so significantly involving their future. . . .
>
> Many of our present high school and college teachers *we* fashioned in the sixties and seventies. Yet they too are a new breed. The hopes and liberalism of their short yesteryear squashed by their own disappointments and frustrations, many have become "civil service mentalities," themselves short-cutters professionally defeated in their own ideology either by the dead weight of our educational bureaucracy or as a result of their own ego debility. . . . Our students have had few limits of control set upon them—and they in turn feel too threatened to make the demands an authentic education inescapably requires. Their demands, therefore, over the last ten years have been minimal, and their own adolescent hedonism often touts itself as the primary force of life. In addition, the linear, hard-nosed school cannot compete with multi-media titillation, that very Hydra which has stopped forever so many from first learning to read and then to think and analyze. The one massive consequence: even the striving, as yet undefeated teacher cannot penetrate their often narcissistic passivity to contact "them" within. . . .
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> Though eligible for retirement, I keep on plodding. Something in me persists—for they are young and virginal, our only hope for the future, if a future is ever to be theirs, for we will be gone.

Norman Leer, who teaches at Roosevelt University in Chicago, after an engaging bit of autobiography, says toward the end:

> The declining enrollments in the liberal arts, the lack of interest in and funding for new programs, all these leave me with a feeling of a very cold place, one where I can't really develop further and bring out what is best in me. Like many of us, I have searched the job market and even thought of leaving teaching, but there seems nowhere to go.
>
> The depression and anger are sometimes too much to bear, on top of the frozen salaries, cut budgets, and students asking all the old questions like how many pages do I want in a particular paper. . . . All I require is that the work be mutually satisfactory before the designated grade is assigned; if it isn't, I ask the student for revision. Seven years ago, students would choose all sorts of options. I remember one person who made a beautiful ten-minute film based on Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Now most of the students will choose the conventional papers, and I find myself sick of reading work that I don't really enjoy assigning, and where I can tell from the quality of the writing (even the handwriting) that the students don't really enjoy writing it. (Is anyone else tired of papers, torn out of notebooks, in half-legible handwriting, with rough back edges still dangling?) It seems as if we're all trapped in a system of currency exchanged for credits and finally degrees. Is this learning, in any humane or significant sense? I seriously doubt it.

From reading these articles by teachers—experienced teachers, committed teachers—the impression grows that we the people are wasting the energies of some very useful citizens. Teachers like these are rare. They come out of their youth ready to work in behalf of the next generation and we put them in situations calculated to all but drive them up the wall. Is it time to start afresh, right from the beginning, a la John Holt? If so, parents will have to make the beginning. No one else cares enough about it; but they'll probably put off trying too long. Meanwhile, as encouragement of a sort, we have this common sense from Mr. Leer:

> I love my field, which is literature, because it and the other arts are among the few academic disciplines that encourage the learner to engage his or her full self, emotional as well as intellectual. Too often, the kinds of studies that are done in literature come nowhere near to such integration. This is true even of the master's degree exams which we give in our department, and which I must grade and ostensibly support. They are simply more vocational, training in a field where there is barely any vocation' in the narrow sense, left. I keep hoping that colleges and universities will go back to teaching vocation in the broader sense—a mission to which one is called, or to learn for its own sake, because it is something meaningful to give oneself to other people.

This is a current report from the educational "front," revealing what is actually going on.

FRONTIERS

Goodbye to All That

IN *Rain* for last December, Lloyd Kahn asks some hard questions about the whole "alternative" movement, in which he has been a prime mover. His article, which grew out of discussions with the *Rain* editors, is something like the long letter to *Resurgence* (June, 1979) by an Englishman who voiced similar sentiments. (See MANAS for Nov. 21.) Enthusiasts oversimplify, he maintained, expanding on twenty-two fallacies or "myths" which mislead uninformed people into ill-advised adventures ending with failure and considerable pain.

Kahn, the editor of *Shelter I* and *Shelter II,* includes criticism of himself:

> Bad information abounds in the owner-built housing field these days. This is the area I've investigated the most thoroughly, and where I've made some embarrassing mistakes myself.
>
> *Domes:* After helping to build 17 domes at Pacific High School in the '60s, publishing two dome books (both out of print), and corresponding with dome-builders all over the country, I finally concluded that domes were totally unsatisfactory shelters. Without going into detail here, domes have unique and specific drawbacks which make them, in my opinion, less efficient and practical than conventional stud construction. I ended up writing quite extensively about why they don't work (in the *Shelter* books), and have tried to show what went wrong, even though a lot of people apparently don't want to hear about it. Shelter Publications still gets letters and phone calls every day, asking for *Domebook 2,* which has been out of print for five years.

His general point is well made:

> It's a shame no one sees fit to write about the pitfalls of rural living. Instead, we have a host of books praising life on the homestead, often written prematurely, before the authors have been through enough seasons to know their stuff. Many homesteader-writers make a good part of their living writing about this kind of a life, and are not as dependent upon food and craft income as will be those inspired by their published work.

There is this about small-scale farming:

> It's very difficult. Simply put, you need enough *land* to justify the proper *equipment* to farm efficiently. Work horses are great for a very few farmers, but the others need tractors. And discs. And cultivators and seed broadcasters and weeders and harvesting equipment and so on.
>
> In farming, as in building and the other *practical* crafts, I've found that if something isn't being done, there's probably a pretty good reason. A few years ago several of us didn't see any reason why we couldn't grow grains here in our coastal climate just north of San Francisco, even though no one was doing it. So we tried it. Wheat, oats, rye, triticale, millet, even rice. Sure, it worked okay on a garden scale, with a lot of labor and watchfulness. But when we planted the larger areas, we found that along with the initial problems of birds and drought years, it takes an immense amount of time to get the grain harvested, dried, threshed, winnowed and ready to grind without an expensive harvesting combine. And that was if we were lucky enough to have it dry properly in the fields without going moldy in the summer fog. Experience taught us why they grow potatoes and artichokes, not wheat and millet, here.

Musing, Lloyd Kahn says:

> It's a wonderful idea to produce food with no salt fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides. But it's not easy, especially for those who haven't tried it before. I'm no fan of Earl Butz, but there's more than a grain of truth in his question: "Which 50 million Americans are you going to pick to starve?" if we abandon agri-biz farming overnight. This isn't to say we can't work our way toward a system of food production that is healthier for humans and topsoil—perhaps America's most crucial resource in coming years. But kicking the agri-biz habit won't be simple and will probably come about only by economic necessity, such as the cost of fertilizer or oil, anyway. . . .
>
> Do I conclude that all of the how-to literature on alternative food/shelter/energy is untrustworthy? Or that organic farming won't work, compost privies lead to disease, and solar heating is a sham? Not at all. . . . But I do think inexperienced people need to know what they're up against. . . . As we enter an era of diminishing resources and escalating prices we need the best possible information if we are to make any real progress in providing for ourselves. . . . We are going to need sharper reporting, better editing, and

> more responsible publishing to produce the good information we need now more than ever.

This sort of realism and good sense, fortunately, is spreading around, and is itself good evidence that an alternative society is actually on the way. But when we take stock of ourselves and what others are doing, or attempting to do, there is value in giving a long look at what we are trying to say *good-bye* to. The *Progressive* for December has two articles which make this quite clear. The alternative movement, blunders and all, is the only long-term choice for decent human beings who realize what is going on.

One of these *Progressive* articles is "The Politics of Hunger" by Ron Freund, a factual account of how American large-scale food production has been converted into a political weapon which our "statesmen" call "Food for Peace." Senator Proxmire recently renamed it "a gigantic military assistance slush fund," used to win the collaboration of governments which are sometimes "notorious violators of human rights." Freund says:

> Food for Peace has also benefited American agribusiness and corporate interests by dumping large amounts of American food products on the local markets of Third World nations, with the support of corrupt government officials. Indigenous farmers are not able to compete with American food producers. As a result, many are forced to give up their land to search for work in the cities. This allows the local government to turn the land into "cash crop" development while simultaneously providing a cheap labor pool in the urban areas for foreign-based corporations.

The other *Progressive* article, by Michael Bader, describes the promotion and sale to the Third World of drugs and pharmaceutical preparations which may prove hazardous to the user:

> An example is chloramphenical, a powerful antibiotic rarely prescribed in the United States because of its potential for causing a fatal blood disease (aplastic anemia), yet widely promoted by multinational firms. Warnings about the blood disease are either omitted or understated in chloramphenical labels in Latin America, with the result that physicians there have seen an alarming rise in aplastic anemias directly related to drug use.

Bader's report gives many more examples of the thriving "hazard export business" in drugs and other items. "Out of the total of 15,000 or more drugs marketed in Third World countries, the World Health Organization has found that only 200 'essential drugs' are necessary for adequate health care."