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SIGNS OF A NEW CIVILIZATION

THERE is nothing ortholinear about human affairs. No straight line is to be found in the Parthenon, and even space, Albert Einstein informed us, is curved. Nor is there any straight-line progress in culture or civilization. In the East deserts hide the fragmentary remains of great cities, while in the West the monuments of the Mayas were overtaken by jungle growth. Epochs of history are plainly cyclical, and there are psychologies and philosophies which attend the formative period of a civilization, while others are keyed to decline. In addition, the idea of progress is ambiguous in meaning. The owl of wisdom, as Hegel put it, does not rise until the sun of empire has set. This means, substantially, that people do their best thinking when they are in trouble. It is certainly the case that the Platonic philosophy came into being as a response to political corruption and social disorder. And Socrates stands today as a symbol of integrity and loyalty to principle, giving heart to those few who are struggling to understand and deal with the catastrophic changes affecting modern society.

An interesting contrast may be drawn between the Stoics and Plato. The Stoics learned and taught how to endure in the face of moral and cultural disintegration. You wouldn't speak of them as "builders," but rather as philosophers who saw no point in trying to inaugurate a new social order at a time when all human institutions were going downhill. They made themselves into rocks of human integrity, standing immovable as personal barriers to the tide of decline. Plato also stood firm against this tide, but at the same time gave counsel to those who longed to be builders. He sought and expounded the principles of constructive self-development for both the individual and society, writing as the ancestor of all subsequent utopian literature. As author or elaborator of the Socratic method, he showed that the beginning of all desirable undertakings must involve the search for first principles. This is the Socratic method—the investigation of first principles. The capacity for critical thinking is developed in this way.

In the present there is need for both critical thinking and builder capacities. The present seems different from the time of the breakdown and death of the classical age. Today there are scores and hundreds of thinkers and writers who are wondering how to begin rebuilding in the midst of ruin and decline. Criticism is rampant, iconoclasm the order of the day, yet there are those who attempt to bring balance to analysis by exploring the religions, philosophies, and social systems of the past, looking for first principles. A pioneer in this work, one who combined intimate knowledge of the civilizations of both East and West, was Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), known mainly for his works on Oriental art, yet whose chief interest was in saving the cultures of the East from the inroads of Western industrialism. In *The Bugbear of Literacy* (1947), he made this uncompromising indictment:

> A more loveless, and at the same time more sentimentally cynical, culture than that of modern Europe and America it would be impossible to imagine. "Seeing through," as it supposes, everything, it cares for nothing but itself. The passionless reason of its "objective" scholarship, applied to the study of "what men have believed," is only a sort of frivolity, in which the real problem, that of knowing what should be believed, is evaded. Values are to such an extent inverted that action, properly means to an end, has been made an end in itself, and contemplation, prerequisite to action, has come to be disparaged as an "escape" from the responsibilities of activity. . . .
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> There is more than political and economic interest behind the proselytizing fury; behind all this there is a fanaticism that cannot [abide] any sort of wisdom that is not of its own date and kind and the

product of its own pragmatic calculations: "there is a rancour," as Hermes Trismegistus said, "that is contemptuous of immortality, and will not let us recognize what is divine in us."

Speaking as an Easterner, Coomaraswamy said to the West: "What you call your 'civilizing mission' is in our eyes nothing but a form of megalomania. Whatever we need to learn from you, we shall come to ask you for as the need is felt." Then, more generally, he asked:

> How can this world be given back its meaning? Not, of course, by a return to the outward forms of the Middle Ages nor, on the other hand, by assimilation to any surviving Oriental or other, pattern of life. But why not by a recognition of the principles on which the "unspoiled" life of the East is still supported, must at least be grasped, respected, and understood if ever the Western provincial is to become a citizen of the world. Even the goodness of the modern world is unprincipled; its "altruism" is no longer founded on a knowledge of the Self of all beings and therefore in the love of Self, but only on selfish inclination. And what of those who are not inclined to be unselfish; is there any intellectual standard by which they can be blamed?
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> If ever the gulf between East and West, of which we are made continually more aware as physical intimacies are forced on us, is to be bridged, it will be only by an agreement on principles, and not by any participation in common forms of government or methods of manufacture and distribution. It is not, as Kierkegaard said, new forms of government, but another Socrates that the world needs. . . . They cannot help us who, in the words of Plato, "think that nothing is, except what they can grasp firmly with their hands." I repeat what I have said elsewhere, that "the European, for his own sake and all men's sake in a future world, must not only cease to harm and exploit the other peoples of the world, but must also give up the cherished and flattering belief that he can do them any good otherwise than by being good himself." I am far from believing that the European is incapable of goodness.

In defense of oral literature and non-literate culture, Coomaraswamy asks:

> How dare you forget that you are dealing with peoples "whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," and for whom your unfortunate distinctions of religious from secular learning, fine from applied art, and significance from use have not yet been made?
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> When you have introduced these distinctions and have divided an "educated" from a still "illiterate" class, it is to the latter that we must turn if we want to study the language, the poetry, and the whole culture of these peoples, "before it is too late."

On the subject of art, Coomaraswamy is both critical and restorative:

> Let us make it clear that if we approach the problem of inter-cultural relationships largely on the ground of *art*, it is not with the special modern and aesthetic or sentimental concept of art in mind, but from that Platonic and once universally human point of view in which "art" is the principle of manufacture and nothing but the science of the making of any things whatever for man's good use, physical and metaphysical; and in which, accordingly, agriculture and cookery, weaving and fishing are just as much arts as painting and music. However strange this may appear to us, let us remember that we cannot pretend to think *for* others unless we can think *with* them. In these contexts, then, "art" involves the whole of the active life, and presupposes the contemplative. The disintegration of a people's art is the destruction of their life, by which they are reduced to the proletarian status of hewers of wood and drawers of water in the interests of a foreign trader, whose is the *profit*. The employment of Malays on rubber estates, for example, in no way contributes to their culture and certainly cannot have made them our friends: they owe us nothing. We are irresponsible, in a way that Orientals are not yet, for the most part, irresponsible.
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> Let me illustrate what I mean by responsibility. I have known Indians who indignantly refused to buy shares in a profitable hotel company, because they would not make money out of hospitality, and an Indian woman who refused to buy a washing machine, because then, "What would become of the washerwoman's livelihood?"

This is an attitude which soon dies out when payments of money are allowed to take the place of feelings of human obligation. Coomaraswamy is contending for attitudes and ways which once prevailed in both ancient and Eastern societies. It is not that we can or should try to imitate those societies, but rather come to recognition of what has been lost by ourselves, and to ask: How can those feelings and attitudes be restored?

Since the title of his book is *The Bugbear of Literacy*, one might suppose that he attacks the ability to read and write. He does not. He shows what happens when these useful skills are mistaken for genuine development. Modern education, he maintains, is a misuse and a misrepresentation of learning, and he offers the testimony of distinguished scholars:

> A "literary" man, if ever there was one, the late Professor G. L. Kittredge writes: "It requires a combined effort of the reason and the Imagination to conceive a poet as a person who cannot write, singing or reciting his verses to an audience that cannot read. . . . The ability of oral tradition to transmit great masses of verse for hundreds of years is proved and admitted. . . . To this oral literature, as the French call it, education is no friend. Culture destroys it, sometimes with amazing rapidity. *When a nation begins to read . . . what was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether."* Mark, too, that this oral literature once belonged "to the whole people . . . the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," while in the reading society it is accessible only to antiquaries, and is no longer bound up with everyday life. A point of further importance is this: that the traditional oral literatures interested not only all *classes*, but also all *ages* of the population while the books that are nowadays written expressly "for children" are such as no mature mind could tolerate, it is now only the comic strips that appeal alike to children who have been given nothing better and at the same time to "adults" who have never grown up. . . .
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> In other words, "Universal compulsory education, of the type introduced at the end of the last century, has not fulfilled expectations by producing happier and more effective citizens; on the contrary, it has created readers of the yellow press and cinema-goers" (Karl Otten). A master who can himself not only read, but also *write* good classical Latin and Greek, remarks that "there is no doubt of the quantitative increase in literacy of a kind, and amid the general satisfaction it escapes enquiry whether the something is profit or deficit." He is discussing only the "worst effects" of enforced literacy, and concludes: "Learning and wisdom have often been divided; perhaps the clearest result of modern literacy has been to maintain and enlarge the gulf."

It may be difficult to see and accept the point of such discussions without romanticizing the past, yet that is not Coomaraswamy's intention, and certainly not ours. As he says:

> My real concern is with the fallacy involved in the attachment of an absolute value to literacy, and the very dangerous consequences that are involved in the setting up of "literacy" as a standard by which to measure the cultures of unlettered peoples. Your blind faith in literacy not only obscures for us the significance of other skills, so that you care not under what subhuman conditions a man has to earn his living, if only he can read, no matter what, in his hours of leisure; it is also one of the fundamental grounds of interracial prejudice and becomes a prime factor in the spiritual impoverishment of all the "backward" people whom you propose to civilize. . . .
>
> Modern "education" imposed on traditional cultures (e.g., Gaelic, Indian, Polynesian, American Indian) is only less deliberately, not less actually, destructive than the Nazi destruction of Polish libraries, which was intended to wipe out their racial memories, the Germans acted consciously, but those who Anglicize or Americanize or Frenchify are driven by a rancour they do not recognize and could not confess. This rancour is, in fact, their reaction to a superiority that they resent and therefore would like to destroy.

This was written in the early 1940s, and in the nearly forty years since a great change has come over the cultures of the industrialized nations, especially in the United States. A primitive alienation from the prevailing standards and modes of life began showing itself among the young during the 1960s. There were two kinds of dropouts from the high schools and colleges the younger teenagers who could see no reason for going to school and working hard at their studies, and older ones who in early maturity recognized the fraud and pretense in the devitalized courses of the higher learning. They saw that the "culture" of the mass society was not worth acquiring, that the distortions and false goals of academic life deserved little more than contempt. Lewis Mumford, one of the few truly civilized men of our time, gave this account of the "successful" college graduate:

> Measured by the standards of the society he lives in, he has been excellently brought up . . . "He has been given every advantage." This means that ever since he learned his ABC's he has been exposed to the most vicious institution of present-day civilization: our so-called educational system. The barrenly intellectualized training he has been given in that system has ingrained in him the habit of living at second hand; with the result that though he has apparently a vast knowledge about art, industry, science, love, friendship, and so forth, he has never had the least direct acquaintance with any of these things. He is emotionally starved, and volitionally frustrate, while intellectually he is prodigious. A modern college president would think him a very promising young man: but according to the ideals of an Athenian in the age of Pericles, he is a hopeless idiot, a nuisance to himself; a burden to his family; and a total loss of manhood to the state.

It is this total inadequacy that the young sense, while others, of greater maturity, define it explicitly; and it is not of course an ill peculiar to universities but pervades the entire culture, being enforced by the complex requirements of the technological society, whose plans and projects depend very largely on uniformity of response on the part of the people. Even so, the disillusionment is spreading, with countless small-scale experiments in education already going on, although not without difficulty and failure.

The problem is this: In a period of decline, the positive, constructive, and ongoing qualities of human beings are not embodied in institutions; they cannot be, for the reason that institutions are geared to the old ways in order to survive; institutions are the last things to change, and for them change almost always takes the form of functional collapse. Meanwhile the ideal must be sought in the ideas and behavior of rare individuals—Mumford is a good example. Such men and women are autodidacts—self-taught. Ortega wrote at some length about these individuals, and it was he who called attention to the decline and breakup of Western civilization long before the symptoms were recognized by others. Ortega called the turn for Europe just fifty years ago in *The Revolt of the Masses*, while America had to wait until the fourth quarter of the century for a work of similar importance about the New World—Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America* (1977). Such writers are all autodidacts, self-taught, and one of a kind. Their work *cannot* be systematized or organized into a curriculum; it is too close to the source of new beginnings. Organization and system thrive during the last half of a finite epoch of "progress," and become all-important during the final descending cycle.

How is a new beginning made? It is made by the means suggested by Ananda Coomaraswamy, who looked to Plato and to the *Bhagavad-Gita* for the clues to self-discovery and direction in life. Lewis Mumford puts his prescription in the form of recommendations for education:

> The materials for education are much like those by means of which a plant grows: the arts and sciences may be compared to earth, air and water. But whereas it is now commonly held that the materials themselves are the education, so that a person who has stored up certain facts and ideas is thereby educated, the truth is that they are no more the education than the air and earth and water are the growth of the plant. The analogy between plant nourishment and what we call education would hold if plants could store up large chemical supplies while remaining shriveled, wizened, small, undeveloped: a thing unknown in botany. We must realize that education is a process of growth, lasting throughout life and coeval with life. If we are wise we shall not try to force it or hasten it. We will give up the whole medal-awarding, diploma-bestowing, scholarship-granting, pupil-pushing rigmarole: and we will direct our efforts toward seeing that the environment is so ordered that the natural processes may be carried on in the most favorable way.

Such generalizations are probably about the best or only advice we can have, for the reason that anything very specific would begin the shriveling process all over again. The change now going on was once described by J. Bronowski as an act of self-reference. This is the only thing to do when a system starts breaking down. You go into yourself to find new axioms—new first principles—and construct a life in terms of what they imply. So with individuals, and so,

eventually, with community and people. The process, as Mumford points out, should not be hastened, because it can't be. But what everyone interested in helping can do is what the time calls for—the practice of self-reliance and self-education, beginning with the search for first principles.

What, actually, is happening today? One theory would be that the cycles of history represent great self-educational experiments in the progress of man. Both opportunities and risks are involved. In a new period of development, we make some progress and then get bogged down in the system by which it seems to have been accomplished. We mistake ingredients and techniques for the growth. This is materialism. Then, having put our faith in mistaken ideas—impressive to begin with, although mistaken after we finally understand them—we are made their captives, and only the few who can see beyond these blinders are able to point the way out. At first the warnings are not heard. Then, as the signs of our captivity multiply, there comes a general feeling that a new beginning must be made. Eventually, numerous awakened spirits begin to ask the right questions and struggle to improvise answers, which they then put to work. And out of the struggle and the learning, which spreads as new and sometimes old ideas are put to work, arise new forms of thinking and collaboration in action. These are some of the signs that a new civilization is being born.

REVIEW
PAST COMMUNITIES—HERE AND ABROAD

THE "community movement" is a deliberate attempt to design and pursue another way of life. Some communities are formed by people who want to free themselves from the constraints of conventional society, and are content to live in blessed isolation, while others are conceived as "models" which, it is hoped, will in time convert the rest of the world to the motives and attitudes and behavior typified by community living.

Many or most of the communities of the past have been animated by a religious impulse, and John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the famous nineteenth-century Oneida Community, said that he did not believe communities could survive without the integration of a common religious faith. But there have also been communities inspired by various social ideals, including Tolstoyan and anarchist communities. Books on past communities are numerous, but the classic study of American communities is *The Communistic Societies of the United States* by Charles Nordhoff, published in 1875. This writer visited and lived in the communities he wrote about, becoming well acquainted with their dreams, visions, and problems. His book describes eight societies having a total of seventy-two communities, some as old as eighty years, the youngest being then twenty-two. Nordhoff said:

> These seventy-two communes make but little noise in the world; they live quiet and peaceful lives, and do not like to admit strangers to their privacy. They numbered in 1874 about five thousand persons, including children, and were then scattered through thirteen states, in which they own over one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land—probably nearer one hundred and eighty thousand, for the most prosperous frequently own farms at a distance, and the exact amount of their holdings is not easily ascertained.

Remarking that the successful communes are composed of what are called "common people," he continued:

> You look in vain for highly educated, refined, cultivated, or elegant men and women. They profess no exalted views of humanity or destiny; they are not enthusiasts, they do not speak much of the Beautiful with a big B. They are utilitarians. . . . I believe that success depends—together with a general agreement in religious faith, and a real and spiritual religion leavening the mass—upon another sentiment—upon a feeling of the unbearableness of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The general feeling of modern society is blindly right at bottom: communism is a mutiny against society.

While a "New World" atmosphere pervaded these American communities, nearly all of them had European roots. This becomes evident from a book which has just come out—*Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England*, by Dennis Hardy, published in England by Longman ($25.00). This writer—whose survey of the English communities is thorough and detailed—speaks of the relationships between the English and American efforts:

> The intensity of community formation in the new lands—where, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, there was a time when "not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket"—far exceeded that in any of the European countries. Numbers involved have been put as high as 100,000 participants, with as many as 300 communities. European influence in these developments was not insignificant, and the view is generally taken that although "the communitarian idea came to fullest flower in the New World . . . its seeds were brought from the Old." What is more, the seeds had been carried across the Atlantic for many years before the nineteenth century—initially by religious groups from Central and Western Europe, in search of a more tolerant environment. Successive groups were attracted, not simply by this greater degree of tolerance, but also by the tangible advantage of cheap and plentiful land. In one of the main waves of American communitarianism—between 1820 and 1850—sectarians (many of whom continued to come from Germany) were joined by political groups, notably, the utopian socialists originating in England and France. Later in the century, there is evidence of a reverse flow, with ideas gleaned from experience of American communities stimulating fresh experiments in the Old World.

The twenty-eight English communities described by Dennis Hardy—dotted all over the country—were of various sorts. While a number of them were sectarian religious, as in the United States, others had a socialist inspiration, and still others were anarchist. They were often deliberate rejections of the capitalist system. The attractions of community life grew with the utopian longings of the time, aroused by the ugly qualities of the industrial system. As Dennis Hardy says:

> For the realization was not simply that society was changing in itself, but that this change was at the expense of something that had already largely disappeared. And in the lost order could be seen the fading image of community. In place of a society composed of small integrated groups where people were assumed to have experienced a sense of belonging, the character of the new society was one of an increasing scale of organization and growing detachment for the individual. The focus of the old order—family life, the village and the small town—gave way to large cities and State bureaucracies.

From this book one learns much of the intellectual and moral influences which shaped the community movements of the past. The part played in the back-to-the-land movements by the thinking of such men as Peter Kropotkin, John Ruskin, and Leo Tolstoy becomes evident. The leadership of Robert Owen gives something of the quality of the dream. Owen said in his autobiography that "the mission of my life appears to be to prepare the population of the world to understand the vast importance of the second creation of humanity, from the birth of each individual, through the agency of man, by creating entirely new surroundings in which to place all through life, and by which a new human nature would appear to arise from the new surroundings."

On the thinking behind the anarchist communities, Dennis Hardy writes:

> Peter Kropotkin's anarchist theory of the "free commune" offered one of the strongest theoretical foundations for the English communities in the late nineteenth century. In essence, Kropotkin sought to demonstrate that "mutual aid" is a natural basis for social relationships, and that a natural outcome of its application would be to replace the oppressive authority of the State with a system of decentralized, cooperative communities—the free commune. As a figure of international standing, Kropotkin was able to argue for communities, not simply on their own merits, but also as a part of a theoretical perspective which explicitly rejected both the alternative revolutionary theory of scientific socialism, and the counter-revolutionary liberal support for Darwin's "jungle law" of evolution.

Throughout his life Kropotkin had studied agricultural methods, enabling him to offer specific plans for communities. In *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow* (Allen and Unwin, 1974) he suggested how a thousand acres might be used by two hundred families: the land divided into areas for cereal production, animal fodder, and intensive fruit and vegetable production. There would be space for workshops, gardens, and public squares. Kropotkin said:

> The labour that would be required for such an intensive culture would not be the hard labour of the serf or slave. It would be accessible to everyone, strong or weak, town bred or country born; it would also have many charms besides. And its total amount would be far smaller than the amount of labour which every thousand persons, taken from this or any other nation, have now to spend in getting their present food, much smaller in quantity and of worse quality. I mean, of course, the technically necessary labour without even considering the labour which we now have to give in order to maintain all our middlemen, armies and the like. The amount of labour required to grow food under a rational culture is so small, indeed, that our hypothetical inhabitants would be led unnecessarily to employ their leisure in manufacturing, artistic, scientific, and other pursuits.

Communities are deliberate attempts on the part of human beings to bring into being the good society. The same basic ideas are expressed again and again by their founders and participants. Such attempts will doubtless go on and on, as the hundreds of communes formed in the United States during the past twenty-five or thirty years make plain. Dennis Hardy's book is a valuable addition to the literature of this movement.

COMMENTARY
AN EXAMINATION OF LIFE

IN a recent discussion of the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset (in *Cross Currents* for the Fall of 1979), John W. Dixon, Jr., proposes that the Spanish thinker might have taken issue with Socrates on the claim, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Are there not people who live excellent lives without thinking much about them? And it is necessary to *live* a life, not just think about it.

> Ortega might raise a different question: What constitutes a true examination? The "unexamined" life that is clearly worth living is a life that manifestly has coherence of style; a moral purpose, a wholeness that is a fulfillment of the human. Coherence and wholeness are not gifts. They are achievements. The person who achieves them, whether peasant or prince, does so by decision, by choice, by endurance. He, or she, may not be able to put it into words but such decisions are a part of an act of examination often surpassing the verbal critique of the professional philosopher.

Ortega certainly examined his own life, and with unparalleled clarity. Mr. Dixon writes:

> It was Ortega's great gift as a poet that his first book should contain a formula as striking, as memorable, as revolutionary as the Cartesian cogito. In *Meditations* on *Quixote* we read: "I am I and my circumstances." . . . There is a core which can be termed the self; "I" am not to be identified with the actuality of things outside myself. "I" am not simply a part of the flow of universal energy. Part of my "I," my self, is distinguishable from what is out there—or, perhaps more exactly put, my self is partly distinguishable from that which is not myself. But part of my self is the circumstances of my history. I am not a self imprisoned in my circumstances, trapped in a world that is either indifferent or alien to me. My circumstances (which Ortega sometimes put in the singular, sometimes in the plural) is part of me. Understanding myself, then, becomes grasping the interaction between my self and the circumstances. And grasping does not mean, primarily, explanation. "Reality" is not separate from me but inseparable from me.

Metaphysics, according to Ortega, "is a construction of the world, and this making a world out of what surrounds you is human life." Included in self-knowledge, therefore, is knowledge of the world. "Man reaches his full capacity when he acquires complete consciousness of his circumstances. Through them he communicates with the universe." And through love there is "an extension of the individuality which absorbs other things into it, which unites them to us."

> This union and interpenetration enables us to acquire a deep understanding of the properties of the beloved object. We see it whole and it is revealed to us in all its worth. Then we observe that the beloved object is, in its turn, part of something else that it requires and to which it is bound, and as this is indispensable for the beloved object, it also becomes indispensable to us. In this firm way, love binds one thing to another and everything to us in a firm essential structure. (*Meditations on Quixote.*)

"Reality" is living our lives to this end.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD

MOST of the time, we avoid using "statistical material" about children. The impersonality of statistics pales the content. Yet there is at least some value—in terms of the conditions the industrial age has created—in knowing what statistics suggest. For example, in *Children in the World,* by Magda and John McHale, published by the Population Reference Bureau (1979), Washington, D.C., there is the following on education:

> Millions of children have no opportunity to attend school. In some less developed countries, as many as nine out of every ten children in the rural areas grow up unable to read or write. Although the proportion of children enrolled in school has been increasing in the less developed countries, less than two thirds (62 per cent) of those in the primary school ages of 6-11 were enrolled in 1975 in the more developed regions as a whole. And about half of those who do enter school drop out before completing the minimum four or five years necessary to achieve and retain basic literacy.
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> Girls in the less developed countries are far less likely to be in school than boys. In 1975, just over half (53 per cent) of girls aged 6-11 were in school in the less developed countries as a whole, compared to 70 per cent of boys of this age. At the secondary school level, relatively more girls were enrolled than boys—85 versus 84 per cent.
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> The low school enrollment of girls in the less developed countries reinforces the circle of educational deprivation, for when these girls become mothers they are less able to help their children become literate. It is estimated that two thirds of the world's 800 million illiterate adults in 1975 were women.
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> As yet, there are not enough teachers in the less developed regions. The number of teachers is growing rapidly, but the school-age population is growing even more rapidly. Despite an increase of four million primary-school teachers in the less developed countries between 1960 and 1975, the ratio of children to teacher is high. For example, in 1975 in Afghanistan, there were 258 school-age children per teacher in India, there were 80 school-age children per teacher. By comparison, in New Zealand, there were 28 children per teacher; and in The Netherlands, 35.

We should perhaps remind ourselves that in poor countries the opportunity to go to school is a symbol of hope. The problems which beset elementary education in the affluent societies hardly exist. One imagines that John Holt, if he lived, say, in Bangladesh, would go about starting schools, and that he could do this without changing any of his basic opinions.

A brief essay on attitudes toward children around the world has come into our hands. The author is S. P. R. Charter, of Olema, Calif., who says:

* * *

The loss of the children in Cambodia and Vietnam and Central Africa represents a profound human trauma of a scope which we in America can scarcely imagine. There are many reasons why we cannot imagine the tragedy and recognize its effects upon us. One reason is that those children expose a facet of ourselves which we would rather not see.

In America the children, generally speaking, have power because they have affluence. The children's "market," for instance, represents a large economic factor in toys, clothes, special foods, medical attention, pre-schooling, television entertainment, and so on. Even poor children in America have some power because they have advocates and laws protecting some of their rights as human beings. But what rights do poor children of poor parents in poor countries have? All they have is their parents' love and devotion—which is no small thing—and whatever protection their parents can provide. This protection is of a very low level, very nearly incomprehensible to the parents of an American child even in the unconscionable slums in this country.

It is difficult and perhaps nearly impossible for us to comprehend what life is like in political systems which do not recognize or care about human values and needs, even if only as a matter of public policy. Under such systems the vulnerable members are the children. They suffer the most and die the most simply because they are more tender.

One of the ironies, one of many, is that in most of these countries in Asia and also Africa the children are highly cherished by parents and families. Americans don't cherish their children in the way

those other people do. Perhaps children are more precious in those other countries because they are the most precious possessions the families have, and the children represent the best hope for the future.

We give lip-service to the statement, if not the belief, that the children represent the best hope for the future. We have some special schools and programs for those considered by some parents and child-psychologists to be "gifted"; (parenthetically, I wonder how many child-psychologists or even medical pediatricians there are in those other countries?). We also have some special programs and places for children considered to be retarded. Yes, we do give lip-service to the statement that the children represent the best hope for the future. And yet in America we have so many other things for the assurance in some degree of the future, and many of these things do take the place, in our minds, of the interrelationship of children and future. We really don't need children here in terms of our individual futures because we have many "retirement plans," social security programs, and plenty of recreational diversions. Regardless of the lip-service we give, children do not play a large role in our future, especially in our thoughts of the future. Indeed, to increasingly more people in the affluent West having children is now an interference—a social and economic interference—in the good life those people want to pursue. Some of them, and others too, say in effect that the world is now too uncertain to bring children into it.

So, on the one hand children in affluent countries are a measurable economic factor; on the other hand to many people they are a distinct economic burden and liability. A dilemma? Of course. But within affluence are many dilemmas.

And so our concerns over the loss of the children in Asia and Africa call upon our senses of goodness and unselfishness and, indeed, our humaneness. These three essential ingredients are not in very large availability in our country at this time. We have lived in affluence, generally speaking, for decades. And this economic affluence is receding from us, and we are puzzled and agitated. We are also becoming more self-centered, self-concerned.

In difficult times how much humaneness, unselfishness, goodness do we retain through which to understand and to respond to the profound human trauma of the loss of the children in those distant and different lands?

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No. 19 of Asian *Action* (publication of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development, Room 201, 399/1 Soi Siri, off Silom Road, Bangkok-5, Thailand—6 airmail issues a year, $15), tells the story of Alauddin, a thirteen-year-old in Bangladesh, who gets up at dawn to do chores on the acre of land owned by his family, then goes to a school established by a voluntary agency, where he does agricultural work as well as book learning. There are free public schools in Bangladesh but the poor cannot afford pencils, paper, books, and proper clothes. Only 33 per cent of school-age children attend these schools.

After morning at his school Alauddin tends the family cattle in the afternoon, finding time to teach his little brothers and sisters how to read and write. He and his friends also study nutrition and agriculture, and at the People's Workshop of his school he is learning metal work. Already he has enough skills to make a little money, and with his earnings has bought a goat. He would like to have a larger garden, but seedlings are not available and the local well has been out of order for two years, making irrigation impossible. Yet in Bangladesh this is an onward and upward story, filled with promise for the people. There is a school which adapts itself to the needs of the poorest people. Alauddin is able to read the newspaper!

Asian Action is the best reading we know for getting into the grain of the lives of the peasants—80 to 90 per cent of all the people—of Asia. It is well-written, ably and imaginatively edited, and clearly printed—this issue by a shop in Bangladesh. The entire issue is on Bangladesh. *Asian Action* coverage moves around. A while back there was a splendid issue all on Sri Lanka (Ceylon), from which MANAS quoted.

FRONTIERS

Indicators of Change

IN a scant twenty-five years, the initiative for social change has altered and strengthened so rapidly that it is impossible to say with particularity what is taking place. All you can do is collect samples and perform a few litmus tests. No longer is "ideology" an important word. No longer is power the goal. The issue, now, is the direction in which societies and communities of human beings should move, and the elimination of obstacles which stand in the way of the direction a growing number of people want to go.

We quote first from a pamphlet, *Common Sense Radicalism,* by Neil N. Seldman, a co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Washington, D.C. This pamphlet (published by Mutualist Books, Box 1983, Rochester, N.Y. 14603) is useful in showing the general aim of present-day radical thinking. The writer says in his Introduction:

> It is ironic that precisely 200 years after our Declaration of Independence, Americans are in need of another affirmation of their desire to live free, self-determined lives. Americans are also in need of another sustained and laborious effort to make that affirmation a reality. Unlike Americans of 200 years ago, however, we already know that progressive fundamental change is possible. . . . Solutions to our current problems are at hand and they can be realized with far less struggle than revolutionary warfare. . . . The knowledge of viable alternatives to our present inadequate ways of providing a secure life for our citizens is a mobilizing force among a population which is equipped with sufficient mechanisms for asserting its collective will. For many Americans, who are now far removed from any direct knowledge of how things work or grow, the approach of common sense radicalism will not only be an argument for political thought and action, but also an argument for the development of a new psychic awareness of the fact that people, in cooperation with neighbors and co-workers, can provide infinitely better care for themselves than others can provide for them.
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> Common sense radicalism attempts to reacquaint us with our past history and political culture, to understand the purposefully hidden biases of our current economic accounting system, to demystify technology, to demystify the alleged efficiency of large corporations, and to identify the technological and social tools already at hand which can create a more ample life for Americans.

The determined spirit of the old radicalism now has a fresh embodiment in activists who recognize that freedom of mind comes first, and that a low estimate of human beings, resulting from mechanist thinking in science and consumerism in politics, must be replaced by conceptions of man that have both rational and intuitive sanctions. A year ago, in the *North Country Anvil,* Jack Miller drew on Schumacher and Simone Weil for criticism of materialistic assumptions in science, then said:

> What I am suggesting is not the suppression of science but the release of the true scientific spirit from forces that are carrying toward destruction. I am suggesting the rejection of a view of life that is false, for it denies the existence of the most important realities. . . . To reject the mechanical view of life does not mean that we must fall into the arms of the purveyors of Born Again salvation and their obsession with the after-life to the exclusion of the here and now, the separation of religion from the whole of life (the sacred from the secular or profane) or the separation of religious contemplation from the living of a life inspired and informed by the Good. It *does* mean, however, the assertion in unequivocal terms of the absolute primacy of that in people, of that within us, which is part of the All, the good. It *does mean* that we must recognize and celebrate that in ourselves and others which is *not* subject to the laws of gravity or to any other laws, but which is sovereign, sacred, and ultimately mysterious. It *does* mean that we must not yield this reality, this faith in what we are a part of, to mere mechanical laws of the universe. It *does* mean that we must give no ground to people, organizations, corporations, nations or other institutions that seek to treat us as things, and nothing more.

Meanwhile, at the practical level, various alliances of people who oppose war-making have turned their energies against nuclear power for both war and peacetime energy. Practically all the women's groups are strongly against nuclear weapons and reactors. Helen Caldicott, an Australian-born pediatrician eminent for her

outspoken condemnation of nuclear power, easily obtains space in the newspapers for what she says. Editors, it seems clear, are aware of this turn in public opinion. Last year she told an audience of women how radiation affects the human body:

> She came armed with a frightening array of statistics: $1 billion a day is spent on the arms race in the world while two-thirds of the world's children are malnourished and starving; America and the Soviet Union have enough nuclear weapons to blow everyone off the earth 12 times; the inside of a nuclear reactor has as much radiation as 1,000 Hiroshima bombs; three new atomic bombs are made every day in this country.
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> "Men still want to kill each other," she said, "but women are the civilizers because we have the children. We have the majority. We won the right to vote 50 years ago, and what have we done with it? We've done nothing. And now, we're about to exterminate ourselves. . . . But now we have to use the power we've found through the Women's Liberation Movement. We have to use that power together with our confidence, our nurturing and our intuition to save the world.
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> "So women are vital. For the first time we have to spend every waking moment to save our children. This is the United Nations Year of the Child. This is about children because nuclear waste is going to produce epidemics of cancer, leukemia and genetic diseases in children for the next million years. (*Los Angeles Times,* April 23, 1979.)

Even *Business Week,* not exactly a radical magazine, began a "special report" by saying: "One by one, the lights are going out for the U.S. nuclear power industry," and the *Progressive* described the five-year struggle on the part of Californians to prevent operation of P G & E's nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon (which has cost a billion dollars more than originally estimated). More than 500 demonstrators were jailed for trespassing on the site in campaigns organized by the Abalone Alliance, in a demonstration joined by Mothers for Peace, an informal association of women which has no membership list, no dues, and no elected officers, yet has become noticeably effective in pursuing one basic purpose: to find and act on the answer to the question: What can we do to prevent needless loss of life?

People in the United States still have access to the means of change—more, that is, than many of those in other parts of the world. It is a big continent and there is still unused land. Inflation is a vicious barrier to access, but there is also more money per capita in America and both individuals and communities are finding ways to act in locally self-reliant ways. Meanwhile mounting evidence of the bad management of the country is contributing to what Neil Seldman calls "a new psychic awareness of the fact that people, in cooperation with neighbors and co-workers, can provide infinitely better care for themselves than others can provide for them."