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THE OTHER AMERICA

AMERICANS are not thought highly of in Iran, these days. Historians sometimes give reasons for this growing unpopularity, but it remains difficult to understand because *we* don't recall being participants in the bad things we are said to have done. At present the country seems to be openly getting ready to do some more bad things—registering the young for military service will be regarded abroad as an ominous sign and while the idea that a show of strength to keep imported oil flowing to our shores may seem reasonable to a lot of people with cars, it doesn't appeal at all to the inhabitants of regions which, directly or indirectly, have already felt the impact of American power.

American interventions during this century have been experienced in many far-off places. Henry Steele Commager listed them recently, starting with the Korean and Vietnam wars. "These interventions," he said, "set a pattern that was shortly reproduced in every quarter of the globe."

> The United States, assuming that God and History had imposed upon it an obligation to preserve peace and freedom everywhere, intervened in Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Greece, Iran, and perhaps a dozen other nations in Africa and Asia. Sometimes it was done overtly; for the most part covertly. . . .
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> U.S. intervention led to a vast growth of the military; to the burgeoning of the Central Intelligence Agency in 60 countries; to the emergence, for the first time, of the principle that it cost more to be at peace than to be at war; to the militarization of the economy, of society, and of politics, of science and learning; to the creation of what was most feared by the Founding Fathers—the "security state."

Military adventures and CIA plotting are bad enough, and we have a chance to know something about them because of the headlines created by investigative reporting, but there are other doings, now being exposed by ecological criticism of multinational agribusiness and the Green Revolution, which seldom get much attention in the daily press. Prof. Commager notes that in Iran we ousted Mossadeq and put the Shah in power—a man quite willing to cooperate and learn from our experts—and the historian adds that for our pains "now we have an Ayatollah Khomeini to deal with." But for what our experts told the Shah to do one must go to books like *Food First* by Frances Lappe and Joseph Collins. These writers point out that after the Shah instituted land reforms in Iran in 1962, and the peasants began to grow food in areas once owned by the rich, he decided to hire American engineers to build some big dams to produce irrigation.

That doesn't sound at all bad, but then, when the irrigation was ready, only Iranian farmers big enough to have the equipment to do large-scale farming were able to qualify for the broken-up estates. And foreign agribusiness entered the picture. The result was that "17,000 Iranians have been pushed off their lands."

> The fact that peasants produced food there before the coming of agribusiness is ignored. Even more significantly, it was the massive irrigation system installed at public expense *before* agribusiness moved in that really made the parched lands productive.
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> And how are the people of rural Khuzestan doing? Most are landless and jobless. Some see no alternative but to flee to the already crowded urban slums. Many of these refugees are in their teens and twenties. They would gladly farm if they had their own plots; their real skills are those of small rice farmers.

Well, if the Shah was our man in Iran, you can understand why we get the blame for what he did. There were lots of other things—much uglier things that happened under the Shah's rule, for which we are held more or less responsible.

Writing in the *Nation* for Feb. 23, an Iranian poet and novelist, Reza Baraheni, describes the tortures of political offenders which went on for thirty years under the Shah—crimes known to Amnesty International and other humanitarian organizations but ignored and denied by the U.S. Government. This writer ends his article:

> In the eyes of many Iranians, particularly Ayatollah Khomeini, Carter's human-rights policy was a hypocritical ploy aimed at defending American stooges at the expense of a tormented and impoverished people. America's equipment killed—both directly and indirectly. How then could the people of Iran forget what they see as the complicity of the U.S. Government in their thirty-six years of suffering under the Shah?

Supposing this and other reports to be reasonably accurate, we can't as individuals do much of anything by conventional means of action. If there is one thing the American people are generally agreed upon, it is that Mr. Carter is a well-meaning and rather nice man, whether or not he makes a good president. It certainly can't be to his liking to have to ignore the crimes of the Shah, but it is even less to his liking—beyond, that is, his political power—to alter the behavior of the major and at least semi-autonomous devisers of government policy. The law in operation here is the one stated by John Schaar in his essay on power and authority (*New American Review,* No. 8, January, 1970), Speaking of the autonomy of process, he said:

> The system works not because recognizable human authority is in charge, but because its basic ends and its procedural assumptions are taken for granted and programmed into men and machines. Given the basic assumption of growth as the main goal and efficiency as the criterion of performance, human intervention is largely limited to making incremental adjustments, fundamentally of an equilibrating kind. The system is glacially resistant to genuine innovation, for it proceeds by its own momentum, imposes its own demands, and systematically screens out information of all kinds but one.

In other words, governments and presidents in our time are practically unable to resist the constraints of history as we understand it and try to make it. The fact is that the practical men in the employ of the state are all the time doing things the rest of us would be enormously ashamed of—if we knew about them—and when we find out about them our outcries and demands for reform accomplish only a little window-dressing. The policies go on as usual. The changes always come to rest at the bureaucratic level where the methods, as John Schaar says, "profoundly shape the ends."

What can we do about the "inevitable evils" of bureaucracy? We can't do anything about them, per se, save by a miraculous alteration in human nature. This is ultimately a moral problem, of course, but more immediately it is a problem of *size.* There is a kind of technological fix. When a big tool can't do the job, you use a small one. So, if we want a political establishment that is responsive to the outlook we want to make operative, it will have to be much smaller.

The basic considerations were stated by E. F. Schumacher in his now classic article, "The Critical Question of Size," which appeared in *Resurgence* for May-June 1975. He said:

> One of our fundamental needs is to be able to act in accordance with our moral impulses. In a big organization our freedom to do so is inevitably severely restricted. Our primary duty is to stay within the rules and regulations, which although contrived by human beings, are not themselves human beings. No matter how carefully drawn up, they lack the flexibility of the "human touch."
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> The bigger the organization, the less it is possible for any member of it to act freely as a moral being; the more frequent are the occasions when someone will say: "I am sorry, I know what I am doing is not quite right, but these are my instructions.". . .
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> As a result, big organizations often behave very badly, very immorally, very stupidly and inhumanely, not because the people inside them are any of these things but simply because the organization carries the load of bigness. The people inside them are then criticized by people outside, and such criticism is of course justified and necessary, but it bears the wrong address. It is not the people of the organization but

its size that is at fault. It is like blaming a car's exhaust gases on the driver; even an angel could not drive a car without fouling the air.

> This is a situation of universal frustration: the people inside the organization are morally frustrated because they lack freedom of action, and the people outside are frustrated because, rare exceptions apart, their legitimate moral complaints find no positive response and all too often merely produce evasive, meaningless, blandly arrogant, or downright offensive replies.

He draws a broadly significant conclusion:

> Many books have been written about moral individuals in immoral society. As a society is composed of individuals, how could a society be more immoral than its members? It becomes immoral if its structure is such that moral individuals cannot act in accordance with their moral impulses. And one method of achieving this dreadful result is by letting organizations become too large. (I am not asserting that there are no evil individuals capable of doing evil things no matter what may be the size of organizations or generally, the structure of society. It is when ordinary, decent, harmless people do evil things that society gets into the deepest troubles.)

People who are able to act on their moral impulses, Schumacher points out, prevent problems rather than "solve" them. A lot of problems don't come into being when the participating groups are the right size.

In Schumacher's language, "People's Power" means the capacity and freedom to do what you believe is right. Explaining, he says:

> Whether in governmental or voluntary, non-governmental organization, the human touch and the mobilization of people's power remain wishful thinking unless the organization is of the right size, both geographically and numerically. "Right size" is a difficult concept: the touchstone is the reaction of people—can they still give or receive individual attention? My own guess is that we should accustom ourselves to thinking in terms of very much smaller units than we may be inclined to, conditioned as we are by a society addicted to "rationalization by giantism." On a small scale people's power can be mobilized but when the scale becomes too large, people's power becomes frustrated and ineffective. What, precisely, is the right scale, I cannot say. We should experiment to find out.

The validity of what Schumacher says here is obvious enough. Also the common sense of his proposal: Cut down the size of human enterprise wherever you can. Adapting to bigness in order to oppose it is not opposition but collaboration. Right from the beginning the remedy is infected with the ill.

Why did we need to wait until the 1970s for someone to tell us this? We didn't have to wait, but we couldn't hear the voices of those who told us earlier—people like Arthur Morgan, Lewis Mumford, and Ralph Borsodi. There was still another writer, Lyman Bryson, who said quite clearly what Schumacher says above, although his language is more abstract. In *The Next America* (Harper, 1952) Bryson began a chapter headed "The Groups Take Over" by answering the question: "What has industrialism done, besides making goods?"

> The essential trait of a developed technology is explicitness. The process of change in the culture that makes great machine production possible takes skill out of the personality of the worker and embodies it objectively and explicitly in the machine, where the worker can modify it but little; it takes the making of decisions away from the worker and puts it in groups where the worker, although a member, can influence it little if at all. What the explicitness of advanced technology does to the personality of a man as wage earner, especially on the assembly line in mass production, happens also in varying degrees to the same man as citizen, as owner, or as a member of any other giant group. The collective swallows the personal choice as the machine swallows the personal skill. We disguise these facts from ourselves although we feel the effects in our lives and are disturbed. Collectives are not new; but they are now much bigger and more damaging to our way of life.

After noting that the technology of our machine civilization gave us our power and material affluence—an affluence more widely distributed than in some other industrialized countries—Mr. Bryson says that the real test of American society is in what we then do with our capacities:

Material success has been one of the vehicles of our democracy; individual control over one's economic affairs was an element in the content of our customary democratic institutions Our economic development, the success of enterprise, has now changed its role. It is no longer the field of democratic action for most men and its continued success has to be made subordinate and instrumental to better ends.

> The advancement of our machine culture has taken away from the individual these two basic opportunities of individuality, the power to make decisions in some of the important aspects of living and the personal skill that is built into one's fingers and eyes and nerves by learning and practice. The merely material aspects of our living, now collectively controlled, are not the most important, since they are material, but what has been taken away from us in making us machine tenders instead of workers cannot be surrendered if we are to be fully human. We cannot live democracy without making responsible choices. Can we, by taking thought, get back democracy as a process, and skill as experience? We can go deeper into the present situation by looking at what the mass groups have done to our ordinary lives, and consider first the loss of personal choice in collective action. We can find evidences of that loss in our ownership, in our work, in our national politics—in every large-scale group.

One great defect in collectivist thinking is that it feels obliged to pretend that the decision-makers represent the people:

> How could government be really ourselves? Anyone who has ever held a public office and can remember his ways of thinking while in that situation knows that he was more than a member of the public. If an official thinks for us, we have not thought for ourselves. Even when a government official is most truly our servant, he is not a mere extension of ourselves; he is the custodian of our opportunities. The difficulty in our thinking about these things appears to lie in the mistake that many philosophers make and thus give a bad example to citizens. It is the mistake of thinking that a political process is justified by its public result. This is not true. A political process is justified by its private result, that is, by its result in the lives of the members of the state, and the most important thing in the lives of the citizens at any time, even at a time of public danger, is the development of their own best selves.

What Lyman Bryson says and what Schumacher says gives us a clearer understanding of what has happened in the management of American society—why it is no longer in our hands, and why we are continually shocked by learning what "we" have been doing both at home and in various parts of the world.

But we can't help matters much by writing the Iranians a letter to explain how we got ourselves entrapped. They have problems of their own, which doubtless seem much worse to them than ours. We can see this by reading what they say about the Shah. Well, what *can* we do?

The title of Lyman Bryson's book, "The Next America," might give us an idea. There is and has always been "another America" than the one that makes so much noise, builds and feeds the machines, engineers consumer behavior, and gets all the publicity, now mostly bad—the other America of Walt Whitman, of Emerson and Thoreau, and in our time of Lewis Mumford and Wendell Berry. This other America deserves and should have a clearer voice. We are not as powerless as we think. There was a brief report at one of the Intermediate Technology Seminars, a few years ago, in London, that might illustrate the kind of voice that needs more volume. George Tyler, an IT representative, said:

> I worked in the State of Kuwait where costs are not a main problem, but nevertheless there is a need to develop appropriate technologies. We found that many of the people we worked with were convinced of the superiority of European-designed buildings with very large areas of glass on the exterior, and constructed of steel and concrete. It was very difficult to convince Kuwait clients, on the basis of sophisticated thermodynamic analysis of the performance of a building, that their old pre-oil structures were in many ways much more efficient. We had to use not advanced technology but advanced science to demonstrate that their old technology, or an advanced version of it, was in fact superior. It was a long process to persuade architects who had been thoroughly indoctrinated by Western architectural schools.

There is this *other* kind of technological intelligence which does not have the ruthless imperatives of giant enterprise, and which, when applied, does not get people into traps. More and more people in the West are thinking in these terms. As George McRobie said six years ago:

> The importance of the criterion of smallness hardly needs to be argued, and experience shows that whenever efficient small-scale equipment is made available the demand for it does not come merely from the Third World, but even more insistently from the affluent societies as well. Smallness is *a conditio sine qua non* for rural development, but it is also highly relevant from many other points of view—ecological, resource-wise, and social.

The Intermediate Technology Development Group people go where they are asked, and help in ways they are invited to help. Their achievements have been notable and appreciated. More of that sort of thing would lead to increasing recognition that there is not just one America—the America of Washington diplomacy, of Pentagon bravado, and multinational aggression—but at least one other America, or perhaps three or four worth taking into account.

REVIEW
THE "DEEPER HUMAN QUALITIES"

AN often recurring question is suggested by a pamphlet issued by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation—*Can Sweden Be Shrunk?* by Nordal Akerman (reprinted from the second 1979 issue of *Development Dialogue*). In this article the author describes the major "problems" which confront the Swedes, demonstrating their need to go in a direction exactly opposite to the one they have believed in and pursued for more than a hundred years. In all departments of life the idea of "growth" must be either abandoned or redefined; but the politicians of the country, Akerman says, stubbornly "refuse to acknowledge the new situation" and "cling to old formulas in the belief that these, somehow, will put the country back on the track of unproblematic growth." Alternatives are condemned as "silly romanticism."

Yet Sweden has for years been held up as a model country where everything has been kept in balance and ruled by common sense. Remember Marquis Child's *Sweden: The Middle Way?* They have freedom, co-ops, a balanced budget, good housing, exemplary medical care, and a homogeneous population that knows how to meet its responsibilities in both a serious and a good-humored way. Today, when everything is going wrong, Sweden makes a good country to study to find out why. It is not too big, and culturally united, so that generalizations hold and you feel able to think about them with some confidence. They certainly have had practically everything on their side. Mr. Akerman remarks:

> Now and then it is asked: How did the Swedish model come about? The answer is a complex one, containing both historical and contemporary reasons. The former include uninterrupted peace for 165 years; plenitude of resources; a peasantry that was never enslaved; communal self-direction; transportation an early matter for the State; free elementary education; a number of inventions and an indebtedness in foreign countries that did not exceed the growth of the country; unions that pressed for bearable conditions which at the same time eased modernization and thus expansion.

All this is spelled out in detail, along with the corresponding problems that have not been solved and cannot be solved by application of the old formulas. While economic conditions worsen, the crime rate is higher in Sweden than in other Scandinavian countries, and forty per cent of all known offenders are between the ages of eleven and twenty. Meanwhile social services have been expanded far beyond the ability to pay for them. Both morale, the author says, and "the very fabric of society seem on the verge of collapse." Yet he thinks a great many Swedes would agree that—

> The world is today not only faced with the anomaly of underdevelopment. We may also talk about overconsumptive types of development that violate the inner limits of man and the outer limits of nature. Seen in this perspective, we are all in need of redefinition of our goals, of new development strategies, of new life styles, including more modest patterns of consumption among the rich. Even though the first priority goes to securing the minima, we shall be looking for those development strategies that also may help the affluent countries, in their enlightened self-interest, in finding more human patterns of life, less exploitive of nature, of others, of oneself.

But when the author talked to a number of actual decision-makers about the future, their most frequent expectations concerned things like "further development of semi-conductors" and increased mechanization of the work-place ("robotization"), with more social stratification through wider use of computers. Akerman comments:

> The general air of futility and lack of will also pervades the assessment of what changes technology might bring. According to those interviewed not much can be done, other than adjusting to the new situation as well as is possible. Obviously, they also entertain a vain hope that nothing important will happen that could push or break their world. Not one of the thirty individuals showed any sign of recognizing that we are on the threshold of a series of breakthroughs in various fields which will drastically affect society as we know it.

> Generally speaking, so little has happened to man's ability to cope with serious questions of principles and morals that we hardly know how to manage the present technology, much less the astounding things we are likely to encounter in the near future, given the pace of innovations in areas such as biotechnology and communications.

What about government and government planning? The writer says what needs to be said:

> The reasons for the inhuman environment in the cities have long been identified with abridged calculations and one-sided profitability. But there are other factors as well. One of them is overplanning. Our time does not provide the kind of petty capitalism built by shop-owners and craftsmen which could create the irrational and surprising street. We may prefer old-time Moscow to thoroughly planned Leningrad, but the former could not arise in the same way today.

He quotes from a respected but far from popular researcher who says:

> It is only natural that through its size a State apparatus is an "organism" that is able to "think" in one dimension only. From this follows that we must seriously question all political ideologies that put their hopes in a totally planned society. Our country, out of simple cybernetic reasons, cannot be planned and guided centrally in a way which pays regard to our deeper human qualities.

Mr. Akerman has some good proposals, but the question remains: How shall these ideas or other conceptions of change be put into effect? He concludes:

> As the saying goes: you can take your horse to water, but you cannot make him drink. Some may think that Swedes are less interested in non-materialistic goals than people in other countries, less prepared to make the effort required for change. We cannot rule out that there is a kernel of truth in this. But on the other hand we must ask: Have people had the chance? Has the way society is organized been conducive to assuming more responsibility? The fight for equality and security was a liberating one. Now the aim must be to liberate people once more by shaping a new concept of security and by making society less formal, less "strong" or "great," and more inviting. I sincerely believe that the way to this end is through a conscious struggle to shrink the scale of a good many units in society. Man must again be the measure of everything man-made. We have only broached here a few areas of central importance and submitted a few proposals (our own and others'), big enough to promise a real change, but not too big to deny them some prospects of acceptance.
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> Of these, I would like to stress those which concern the rebuilding of cities, zero-planning, the buying of all land, the splitting up of cities into neighborhoods, and the creation of an all-cooperative organization on the local level. These are great tasks, no doubt, but their effects should be attractive enough to make the difficulties of implementation seem reasonable. The decisive factor is the will to let people be a part of changes affecting themselves and to trust that they have something to offer. Think shrink—it can be done!

Well, can it? All those people out there—here and in Sweden—may not share in managerial insight, in the way that this paper is conceived. They respond to other callings, have other foci of interest, and their "deeper human qualities" may be evoked by quite other means. Quite possibly, the very framework of this statement of the problem leaves untouched those qualities of human awareness and concern which will in time bring about the solutions sought. Thoreau thought that political and economic functions should be almost invisible—that is, either unconscious or only half-conscious. What if he is right? Getting the "two cultures" together—the technical and managerial, and the imaginative and. spontaneous—may not be possible through any one-to-one approach of the we-have-to-get-them-to-do-it sort.

Has "literature" anything to contribute or say about this? Perhaps nothing. Genius does not preach. It does what it must, not what it "should."

This is the question we began with, but did not ask. Pondering, two books came to mind. One is Dostoevsky's *The Idiot,* the other *Theophilus North* by Thornton Wilder. And *Don Quixote,* too. What is distinctive about the main figures in these stories? They all had some driving intention in their lives. It occupied and consumed them. And the conclusion of our wondering was that nothing really good is going to happen until

this strong sense of purpose is acquired—or restored—in human life.

We won't have to worry about "motivating" people if there are enough Quixotes around. When people start doing things without the prod of moralists—the way the bees make honey—then the rest of what needs to happen might come along naturally.

Another literary work suggests itself—the French play about an emperor in the last days of Rome. Having seen what had happened to his people, he decided that Rome's *decline* was over, the time for the *fall* had come, and he gathered blossoms from his well-bedecked quarters, seized a lyre, and with vineleaves in his hair went down the steps of his palace to welcome with song and garlands the rude and warlike Goths, who had come to take over. Maybe, in the long run, they would turn out better than the Romans. Curtain.

COMMENTARY
. . . IF YOU GIVE THEM TIME

NOT exactly by coincidence, both the lead article and the Review for this week have the same theme. The idea of reducing our institutions to more humanly manageable size is in the air. Wherever you turn, people are in the grip of the requirements of bigness—the threat of the draft is an example—and the logic of bigness, when turned around, becomes the logic of powerlessness for the ordinary person. A government planning on war *has* to cooperate with the corporate institutions that are big enough to arm the nation and oil the conflict.

As the problems of the national state multiply, the options of the individual become fewer and fewer. What to do about it? The letter by Murray Bookchin to *Rain* (see Frontiers) gives sharp focus to this question.

Our main difficulty is in seeing how the little (although personally important) decisions of individuals can possibly affect the massively controlling conditions under which we live. We may feel intuitive agreement with Bookchin that our moral integrity, our ideals, our principles are "the only power we really have that can change this insane society," but how, without tight political organization and astute management, can these qualities be made to have the desired effect?

If we agree with Bookchin's comment on this question, we may decide that the only hope lies in defining the situation differently. Lyman Bryson supplies a clue. Instead of looking at the statistical or public effect of our efforts, let us examine their *private result*—that is, their result in our own lives; and, as Bryson says, "the most important thing in the lives of citizens at any time, even at a time of public danger, is the development of their own best selves."

This "private result" is the only thing that really counts. Just eighty-one years ago, in a letter to a friend, William James put the secret of success for human beings in the form of a personal decision:

> As for me, my bed is made: I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular and moral forces that work from individual to individual stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet eroding the hardest monuments of man's pride, if you give them time. The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favor of the eternal forces of truth which always work in the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, underdogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on the top. . . .

How can people be persuaded to adopt this outlook? Only, it seems clear, by learning to value the private over the public result. Two books that have recently come in for review might illustrate this sort of learning—*Decentralism: Where It Came From; Where Is It Going?* (The School of Living Press, RD 7, York, Pa.) by Mildred J. Loomis, and *Three Farms* (Atlantic-Little Brown) by Mark Kramer. Involved is the quality of the human being, a mood that grows instead of a proposition grasped. The good life is a matrix not hostile to private results, however hostile the circumstances.

After a little "research" and recalling of vagrant memories, with some help from a friend, we determined that the play described at the end of Review (page 8) is *Romulus,* the Broadway adaptation by Gore Vidal of the original *Romulus the Great* by Friedrich Duerrenmatt. Both texts were issued in a single volume by Grove Press in 1966. The drama, in either version, is a Morality Play for twentieth-century industrialists, especially the multinational industrialists, who are the closest thing to emperors in our time. Romulus will show them how to give up gracefully, although they won't of course. But more such wit and irony may weaken their resolve.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

LETTING OFF STEAM

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO AMERICAN ENGLISH? (Scribner's, 1978, $8.95), by Arn and Charlene Tibbetts, could be a very depressing book to practically all its readers except those who decide, in behalf of their children, to become a personal antidote to what is wrong with American schools (and with what we immodestly refer to as American "culture"). We asked for a copy of this book for review because of certain requirements demanded of a sixth-grader we know. This boy's study of "reading" at school seemed calculated to make him *hate* anything connected with literature. He doesn't of course hate school. He seems to enjoy a lot of what goes on there, but this has little to do with the curriculum. His friends are there, and they do things together, which includes swapping copies of *Mad.* Well, some reading may be better than none.

As for "English," no ordinary adult could possibly understand the work book in reading the boy brings home. They invent all those technical terms that take you ten minutes to decipher, and even then you may not be sure of what they mean. Worst of all, the writers of these texts are determined to teach ten- and eleven-year-olds the sounds of the funny-looking letters that appear at the bottom of the pages of some dictionaries. Our Collegiate *Webster's* explains that the upside-down "e" has an *uh* sound, as in sof*uh*, adding that there is no unambiguous symbol for this sound. Uh-huh.

The way to teach the young pronunciation of their native language is by speaking it, reading it, using it, not by letting theorists spoil the experience with unnecessary labors which ought to drive the youngsters outside to play ball. One recalls that somewhere Rousseau says that no youngster—until mid-adolescence or after—should be obliged to sit at a desk for hours in school. There are other things for them to do, out in the country, or even on the street. Reading should be fun, and it *is* fun for children whose parents love the language and use it well around home. When this responsibility is turned over to the schools, and authorities with degrees tell the teachers how to teach, the result is a natural (healthy) resistance in the children to what happens to them in school.

The authors of *What's Happening to American English?* have taught it in so many places that they have a well-rounded knowledge of practically everything that is wrong with the schools—and the schools are only partly responsible. In one place they say:

> When the American high school works at all—that is, when it performs its function as a teaching institution—it does so at great and ponderous effort. For the school is a large, enfeebled creature, set upon by every sharp-toothed carnivore where it ranges, and so confused by its tormentors that at times it may barely remember what it lives for. So it blunders on toward a vaguely perceived destination amidst a disorder only part of its own making. . . .
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> What keeps the beast on its feet? We saw schools that ought to have been dead long ago still gamely going through the motions of education and sometimes doing a good deal more useful work than could have been expected of them in their condition. For keeping the schools alive, we can thank a relatively small number of teachers and administrators who struggle on in spite of the authors of their confusion. Another question: Why are some schools free of the worse sorts of confusion and bad teaching, even though their histories up to the early 1970's are not noticeably different from those of schools that are failing? At least four schools in our sample do so good a job that they might be recommended as models of secondary teaching. . . .
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> We concluded that aside from luck, which is certainly a factor, the better schools have one thing in common: a community determined to educate its children. This determination is translated into action when townspeople elect a school board that will pick an equally determined superintendent. Then, if through the administrative hierarchy—including, most importantly, a good principal and department chairman—the superintendent sees to it that this

determination is made known to teachers, educational disorder is averted or cleaned up.

The section on grammar has this sensible introduction:

> The great cynic Ambrose Bierce remarked that grammar was "a system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction." With the wit removed, this is still the public's notion of grammar. For that matter, many teachers probably have about the same attitude toward the subject—grammar as a discipline related to propriety and socioeconomic advancement.
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> While there is no question that bad grammar holds many people back from activities in which their other talents might shine, the main issue regarding the teaching of the subject is at once broader and more fundamental. Teachers have no choice but to deal with questions of propriety like the use of *ain't* and the double negative.. But they should concentrate more than they now do on the problem of what might be called attractive efficiency. Much writing fails because it is both inefficient and ugly. . . .

The Tibbetts quote from two grammar texts on distinguishing between active and passive verbs. One of the passages looks as though you need a course in symbolic logic to understand it. The other one is better, but still confusing in spots. The authors comment:

> For anyone who tries to understand why grammar is so hard to teach, the partial failure of both *Roberts* and *Warriner* [the two texts] is instructive. Both texts give too much theoretical information. Roberts drowns the student in it. Warriner could cut his exposition at least by half. Grammarians often bewilder students and make teaching difficult because they want to "tell all." Even in relatively simple textbooks, they will try to tell us everything they know—and they know (or say) too much for good pedagogy.

Another example:

> Like the new grammar, the new math was a complex affair created by, and for, scholarly theorists. As early as 1962, Professor Max Beberman, one of the major figures in the development of the new math, raised serious objections to it: "I think in some cases we have tried to answer questions that children never raise and to resolve doubts they never had, but in effect we have answered our own questions and resolved our own doubts as adults and teachers, but these were not the doubts and questions of the children." Two years later, he commented that "we're in danger of raising a generation of kids who can't do computational arithmetic."
>
> In both the new math and the new grammar, the innovators had little experience of teaching people who were not theorists like themselves, who had in fact no need of theory but a great need of practical skill. The new grammarians did not live or work in the school world and had small interest in its problems. In their school texts, they tried to teach "morphemic analysis" (study of forms) or to put rigor in geometry at a time when many flesh-and-blood students could not add and subtract accurately, write intelligible sentences, or read well enough to fill out job application forms.

All of which makes a magnificent advertisement for John Holt's ideas, to be found in his newsletter ($10 a year) *Growth Without Schooling*—308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

FRONTIERS

The Long and the Wrong Way Home

AN article in the April *Rain* calls the present preparation for draft registration—for both men and women—"the leading edge of a strengthened U.S. commitment to a military buildup and a new cold war," caused, the writer, Dave McFadden, suggests, by "the overwhelming dependence of the Western world on imported oil from the Persian Gulf."

> In 1978, oil imports amounted to 45 per cent of all U.S. petroleum products consumed, over $39.5 billion, or about $11.5 billion greater than our entire balance of payments deficit. Today foreign oil supplies 22 per cent of our total energy needs. Although *Persian Gulf* oil constitutes only 34 per cent of our oil imports, it supplies 61 per cent of Western Europe's and 72 per cent of Japan's—both seen as part of America's "vital interests." Since the Arab embargo of 1973-74 we have actually *increased* our reliance on foreign oil. With an economy and transportation system geared to oil (35 per cent of our oil goes directly into motor vehicles), we have vividly seen the effects of rising prices and oil shortages. Dependence on imported oil for U.S. security has led, quite directly, to the announcement of the Carter doctrine and the danger of military confrontation. It is also leading to a deepening economic crisis.

Interestingly, at the end of March, a document made public by the Selective Service System warned that "more than half" those who register in a renewal of the draft may be expected to seek conscientious objector status, "particularly if females are made subject to involuntary military service." The S.S. document recommended that conscientious-objector status be restricted to practicing members of the religious sects which prohibit participation m war, and that no review of or appeal from Selective Service rulings be allowed.

The rejection of the Vietnam war by a large part of the youth of the nation was clear evidence of what is likely to happen if another such war begins to loom. It seems certain that there will be tense days ahead, especially for those now in their teens. The *Rain* writer proposes:

> A shift of national energy resources from nuclear, coal and oil to renewable sources over a period of years would contribute directly to our national security by fighting inflation, providing needed jobs, and removing a key excuse for foreign intervention . . . Such a strategy has been outlined in detail by Dr. Leonard Rodberg in a study for the energy subcommittee of the joint Economic Committee of the Congress. In "Employment Impact of the Solar Transition" (April, 1979), Rodberg shows how we could save 40 per cent of the nonrenewable fuels projected to be consumed by 1990. Solar systems could supply about 15 per cent of the total energy required while conservation technologies could save enough energy to prevent increases in total energy use between 1980 and 1990. Rodberg's findings are supported by the Council on Environmental Quality, Stanford Research Institute International and, most recently, by *Energy Future,* the excellent study by the Harvard Business School energy project. *Energy Future* stresses the great potential of conservation—that mix of insulation, weatherization, energy efficiency, co-generation, and industrial and commercial measures which, it is variously estimated, could cut between 30 and 40 per cent of our energy demand if we made a serious commitment.

Meanwhile, another view of the Harvard Business School study is provided in a comment in the April *Progressive* by John J. Berger:

> The oil policy recommended in *Energy Future* leaves control over U.S. energy prices in the hands of foreign governments and multinational corporations. Next, it allows large U.S. energy companies—which dominate once-competing energy sources—the chance to earn windfall profits by inflating domestic energy prices to parity with OPEC oil prices. Moreover, *Energy Future* has no suggestions on how to regulate more effectively the powerful corporate institutions that have helped us into our current energy problems.

This critic attributes the environmental approval of the Harvard book (edited by Robert Stobaugh and Daniel Yergin) to the fact that it does not advocate "massive expansion of nuclear energy and coal use," while stating emphatically that "nuclear power offers no solution to the problem of America's growing dependence on imported oil.

The conflicts implicit in the trends and inevitabilities here described seem obvious enough. The problem, for many, is to find individual solutions which will in the long run contribute to social solutions—when the time comes, as it must, to apply them. Those who concern themselves with the issues of war and peace, soft and hard paths for energy production, a conserving steady-state economy versus GNP growth, decentralized self-reliance in contrast to national management and expert planning, sometimes feel whipped into taking some form of premature action. Their lives are so much focused on future goals that impatience becomes their only emotion. To work all the time for a cause the success of which depends entirely upon changing the opinions of others may produce forms of pathology not unknown to psychiatrists. In this case the campaign for power becomes an end in itself, the ideals only instruments useful in electioneering. People may not *want* this to happen to them, but constant theorizing about what will become possible if a lot of other people see the light and change their minds may be just the way to make it happen.

In the April *Rain*—quoted above—there is an "Open Letter to the Ecological Movement" by Murray Bookchin which considers the dangers of trying to introduce new ways of doing things by using old methods of "persuasion." In one place he says:

> Ecology is being used against an ecological sensibility, ecological forms of organization, and ecological practices to "win" large constituencies, *not to educate them.* The fear of "isolation," of "futility," of "ineffectiveness" yields a new kind of isolation, futility and ineffectiveness, namely, a complete surrender of one's most basic ideals and goals. "Power" is gained at the cost of losing the only power we really have that can change this insane society—our moral integrity, our ideals, our principles.

His conclusion is to the point

> It is necessary, I believe, for everyone in the ecology movement to make a crucial decision: will the eighties retain the visionary concept of an ecological future based on libertarian commitment to decentralization, alternative technology, and a libertarian practice based on affinity groups, direct democracy, and direct action? Or will the decade be marked by a dismal retreat into ideological obscurantism and a "mainstream politics" that acquires "power" and "effectiveness" by following the very "stream" it should seek to divert? Will it pursue fictitious "mass constituencies" by imitating the very forms of mass manipulation, mass media, and mass culture it is committed to oppose? These two directions cannot be reconciled. Our use of "media," mobilizations, and actions must appeal to mind and spirit, not to conditioned reflexes and shock tactics that leave no room for reason and humanity. In any case, the choice must be made now, before the ecology movement becomes institutionalized into a mere appendage of the very system whose structure and methods it professes to oppose.

These are matters having to do with the very nature of constructive change.