

## THE EXPANSE OF NATURE

THE question of property rights has several aspects, some of them argued about for centuries, all of them interesting from one or another point of view. In respect to the rights of ownership of land, there seem no end to the moral relativities involved. There is seldom any argument, moral or otherwise, about the right of a husbandman to a piece of land sufficient to raise crops and livestock to care for his family and to supply food for a reasonable number of other people, but when arable land to the extent of twenty-five thousand or more acres is controlled by a single proprietor, corporate or individual, and farmed by what amount to industrial techniques, making survival impossible for the small or medium-sized farmer, destroying in effect dozens of rural communities, urgent social and even philosophical questions are raised.

Fifty and sixty years ago, such vast holdings in California's Central Valley led to a series of strikes, mostly unsuccessful, against the large farmers, charging underpayment of labor and indecent working conditions. The struggle of the agricultural workers was described by Carey McWilliams (*Factories in the Field*) and by John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*), but it was not until Cesar Chavez entered the scene, early in the 1960s, to organize the United Farm Workers of America, and apply Gandhian nonviolence, was there much success in gaining fair contracts for the field workers, who were by then mostly Mexican.

In a recent article, Ivan Illich broadens the question of property rights to include much more than land. He starts out with the meaning of "the commons."

People called commons those parts of the environment for which customary law exacted specific forms of community respect. People called commons that part of the environment which lay

beyond their own thresholds and outside of their own possessions, to which, however, they had recognized claims of usage, not to produce commodities but to provide for the subsistence of their households. The customary law which humanized the environment by establishing the commons was usually unwritten. It was unwritten law not only because people did not care to write it down, but because what it protected was a reality much too complex to fit into paragraphs. The law of the commons regulates the right of way, the right to fish and to hunt to graze, and to collect wood or medicinal plants in the forest.

An oak tree might be in the commons. Its shade, in summer, is reserved for the shepherd and his flock; its acorns are reserved for the pigs of the neighboring peasants; its dry branches serve as fuel for the widows of the village some of its fresh twigs in springtime are cut as ornaments for the church—and at sunset it might be the place for the village assembly.

Next he turns to English history:

When today, in Europe, with university students I use the term "commons" . . . my listeners immediately think of the eighteenth century. They think of those pastures in England on which villagers each kept a few sheep, and they think of the "enclosure of the pastures" which transformed the grassland from commons into a resource on which commercial flocks could be raised. Primarily, however, my students think of the innovation of poverty which came with enclosure: of the absolute impoverishment of the peasants, who were driven from the land and into wage labor, and they think of the commercial enrichment of the lords.

In their immediate reaction, my students think of the rise of a new capitalist order. Facing that painful newness they forget that enclosure also stands for something more basic. The enclosure of the commons inaugurates a new ecological order. Enclosure did not just physically transfer the control over grasslands from the peasants to the lord. Enclosure marked a radical change in the attitudes of society towards the environment. Before, in any juridical system, most of the environment had been considered as commons from which most people could draw most of their sustenance without needing

to take recourse to the market. After enclosure the environment became primarily a resource at the service of "enterprises" which, by organizing wage-labor, transformed the market. After enclosure the environment became primarily a resource at the services of "enterprises" which, by organizing wage-labor, transformed nature into the goods and services on which the satisfaction of basic needs by consumers depends.

This, as anyone can see, is a sort of transformation that still goes on, to which it is hard to imagine a limit. From one point of view, it represents a change in the practical side of life from a subsistence economy to a market economy. Resourcefulness in using a small portion of the natural environment for the support of one's family is no longer enough. One needs capital, a sense of business management, and exclusive access through ownership of a substantial quantity of land, and also one needs to acquire the skills of mass production. Also some sagacity in marketing. Another need, which develops over the years, is a system of laws favorable to the interests of investors and large landowners, creating what is known as a capitalist society. Finally, one needs a submissive labor force, although an important economic goal today is to keep it as small as possible.

What other uses of the commons that remain, one wonders, will also be developed, by those who have the means and discover the methods of more or less exclusive access? This is the sort of question that Ivan Illich is raising.

For illustration he takes the roads of Mexico, where he lived for years, as an example. He says:

What a difference there was between the new and the old parts of Mexico City only twenty years ago. In the old parts of the city the streets were true commons. Some people sat on the road to sell vegetables and charcoal. Others put their chairs on the road to drink coffee or tequila. Others held their meetings on the road to decide on the new headman or to determine the price of a donkey. Others drove their donkeys through the crowd, walking next to the heavily-loaded beast of burden; others sat in the saddle. Children played in the gutter, and still people

walking could use the road to get from one place to another. . . .

In the new sections of Mexico City, streets are no more for people. They are now roadways for automobiles, for buses, for taxis, cars, and trucks. People are barely tolerated on the streets unless they are on the way to a bus stop. If people now sat down or stopped on the street, they would become obstacles for traffic, and traffic would be dangerous to them. The road has been degraded from a commons to a simple resource for the circulation of vehicles. People can circulate no more on their own. Traffic has displaced their mobility. They can circulate only when they are strapped down and are moved.

The great majority of the people, in short, have been turned into dependent consumers who have lost their access to the land and who require the services provided for them by industrial and commercial entrepreneurs. They have forgotten how to use the natural skills of human beings in getting their necessities from the land and the sea. The commons have been restricted to "parks" where behavior is regulated and restricted to pleasure-seeking. It is largely as Illich puts it:

Enclosure undermines the local autonomy of community. Enclosure of the commons is thus as much in the interest of professionals and of state bureaucrats as it is in the interest of capitalists. Enclosure allows the bureaucrat to define local community as impotent to provide for its own survival. People become economic individuals that depend for their survival on commodities that are produced for them.

The air waves are part of the commons. Once their silence was for all. But early in this century electronic science brought the loudspeaker into being.

Up to that day, all men and women had spoken with more or less equally powerful voices. Henceforth this would change. Henceforth the access to the microphone would determine whose voice shall be magnified. Silence now ceased to be in the commons; it became a resource for which loudspeakers compete. Language itself was transformed thereby from a local commons into a national resource for communication. As enclosure by the lords increased national productivity by denying the individual peasant to keep a few sheep,

so the encroachment of the loudspeaker has destroyed that silence which so far had given each man and woman his or her proper and equal voice. Unless you have access to a loudspeaker, you are now silenced. . . The issue should therefore be clear: how to counter the encroachment of new, electronic devices and systems upon commons that are more subtle and more intimate to our being than either grassland or roads—commons that are at least as valuable as silence. Silence, according to western and eastern tradition alike, is necessary for the emergence of persons. It is taken from us by machines for speaking and for thinking, as we are already dependent on machines for moving.

Such a transformation of the environment from a commons to a productive resource constitutes the most fundamental form of environmental degradation.

(These extracts are taken from Illich's article printed in *Green Revolution*, Fall 1985, published by School of Living, RD 7, Box 388, York, Pa. 17402.)

There is of course another way of thinking about all these things. The practice of the arts and sciences is what distinguishes us from the animals. The use of fire, the wheel, and more recently of electronic devices has released us from much tiresome drudgery and made possible a variety of activities that have little or nothing to do with "survival of the species," but are refining and enriching in effect. This multiplication of capacities has led to numerous opportunities for specialization and the development in some individuals of particular abilities that open the way to leadership of various sorts, often suiting the peculiar potentialities of a comparatively small number of individuals.

As a result, we have the kind of society that exists today, along with groups, both large and small, of people who seem to be at different levels of "progress" along the path of development that the industrial nations have followed. But we have now reached a point in the evolution of specialized abilities where manifest malfunctions are appearing. The excessive accumulation of wealth by a few individuals and corporate formations has produced monopoly situations which enable business managers to dictate the

patterns of the lives of millions of people. They do not regard their decisions as having this effect, but simply as necessary actions in pursuit of the goals of enterprise, in conformity, no doubt, with "the laws of nature." The employment of children in the mines and mills of the early nineteenth century was similar in nature. It hardly occurred to the employers that using children for these long hours of work was an inhuman practice, since it was in the service of the division of labor that had proved so efficient in the ways pointed out by Adam Smith.

Today the specialized efficiencies of technology under the guidance of scientific knowledge of physics and chemistry have led to disaster after disaster bringing the gradual realization that the application of these methods amount to an attack on the planet, diminishing or even destroying its natural processes. In *Machina Ex Deo* (MIT Press, 1968), Lynn White, Jr., gives an account of this development:

Natural science, conceived as the effort to understand the nature of things, had flourished in several eras and among several peoples. Similarly, there had been an age-old accumulation of technological skills, sometimes growing rapidly sometimes slowly. But it was not until about four generations ago that Western Europe and North America arranged a marriage between science and technology, a union of the theoretical and the empirical approaches to our natural environment. The emergence in widespread practice of the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature can scarcely be dated before about 1850, save in the chemical industries, where it is anticipated in the eighteenth century. Its acceptance as a normal pattern of action may mark the greatest event in human history since the invention of agriculture, and perhaps in nonhuman terrestrial history as well.

Almost at once the new situation forced the crystallization of the novel concept of ecology; indeed the word ecology first appeared in the English language in 1873. Today, less than a century later, the impact of our race upon the environment has so increased in force that it has changed in essence. When the first cannons were fired, in the early fourteenth century, they affected ecology by sending

workers scrambling to the forests and mountains for more potash, sulfur, iron ore, and charcoal, with some resulting erosion and deforestation. Hydrogen bombs are of a different order: a war fought with them might alter the genetics of all life on this planet. By 1285 London had a smog problem arising from the burning of soft coal, but our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess. With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order.

Prof. White asks:

What shall we do? No one yet knows. Unless we think about fundamentals, our specific measures may produce new backlashes more serious than those they are designed to remedy.

An honest endeavor to think in terms of "fundamentals" may take us into regions of inquiry where we do not want to go. Can it be wrong, we ask ourselves, to work toward "progress"? This seems a ridiculous idea, and doubtless is so. But it must be nonetheless admitted that our progress has created ever more threatening circumstances. What if our kind of progress is at odds with true progress? What, then, would be *true* progress?

But we can hardly answer this question without prior consideration of whether or not there is some transcendental meaning for our lives. This takes us into the area of philosophical religion. What are we? Are we mortal or immortal? Is all of us immortal, or only a part? The immortal part of us, we could say, is the part that contributes to true progress, and the rest of human nature is something out of place, or irrelevant to the goal of human development, or even an obstacle to it.

Are we ready to consider such questions, to say nothing of answering them? Some few individuals may be ready, and may have already found working answers, but one suspects that what they say is unlikely to be welcomed by the great majority. But if they should be right, or at least on the way to being right, we are driven to

the conclusion that there are numerous differences among the ways people think about such things, and that for the most part many people do not think of them at all.

Yet there are certain ideas which are part of the common human heritage and have been used in many societies with good effect. It is useful to examine them, as Ivan Illich does in his discussion of "the commons." The commons, we might say, include the land, the sea, the air, the streams and lakes, and all else provided by Nature—the circumstances, for us the abundant fruitfulness, of our host, the earth. The commons are not a possession of man, but the field of his being. By care and nurturing practice, humans may gain "use rights" of some portion of the commons, and those use rights create responsibilities toward the land. These were the circumstances of the English peasants before the enclosures began in the eighteenth century.

The argument for enclosure of the common lands by the lords, who were, so to speak, the knowledgeable agriculturalists of their day, better able to use and care for the land than the peasants, was that they would make the land more productive. The Parliament of England accepted this claim and turned the commons over to the lords. Without this resource for their subsistence, the peasants couldn't survive on the land, and were obliged to seek employment in the factories that were developing in various parts of the country. This was accounted "progress," since the land was in some cases made more productive while the factories turned England into the "workshop of the world."

The same argument, broadly speaking, was used to justify colonization of Asia and Africa by the colonizing powers of Europe. The same or a related argument is made the justification for the vast farms of agribusiness and other undertakings, such as the multinationals, which have made production for profit their credo and religion. And all these activities have grown large enough to be classed as monopolies or semi-monopolies,

turning the whole world into a vast market economy and its population, the workers for wages or salaries, into various levels of consumers.

The socialist programs of various sorts have been designed to remedy social injustice, although in general they all retain the same methods of production that are used in the free enterprise states, so that the same anomalies and excesses result, with the additional problem of an enormous entrenched bureaucracy which resists change or reform.

Should, then, progress be abandoned and a deliberate return to medieval simplicities adopted as the solution? Gandhian and Schumacherian programs could be offered by the dozen, with little effect so long as progress is defined as it has been for the past two hundred years by the leaders and makers, as well as the followers, of the market society. But sooner or later, whether through moral intelligence or as the result of widespread disaster, the acquisitive habits and goals of modern society will have to be replaced with conceptions of human good more in accord with what is today only the wisdom of the few. There are uses of technology—even high technology—which preserve the distinction, made by Jacques Ellul, between tools and machines—tools amplify the capacities and powers of individuals while machines require machine-tenders, men and women who increasingly lose their independence and versatile self-sufficiency. The restoration of the earth depends upon the restoration of balance in human life, which includes individual competence in both judgment and life's daily tasks.

How might an education of this sort proceed? It has already been undertaken by a few pioneers—out on the land, in the studios and workshops of craftsmen, in the vision of the bioregionalists. These few are hoping to turn the commons back to be once more the unowned yet available expanse of Nature in its full health of being understood.

## *REVIEW*

### LEADER, HERO, MARTYR

MARTIN LUTHER KING, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929, and since that day was this year declared a national holiday, there has been a noticeable renewal of interest in his life and work. Earlier this year Harper & Row brought out a large book, *A Testament of Hope—The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.* (\$22.50), edited by James M. Washington, a Baptist minister and authority on Afro-American religious history.

King was fourth in a line of Baptist preachers, starting with his great grandfather, and showed his capacities early in life. He did so well in grade and high school that he entered Morehouse College before he finished high school, in 1944, at fifteen years of age. He was a licensed preacher in 1947 and graduated from Morehouse in 1948 with a degree in sociology. That year he began studies at Crozer Theological Seminary and later earned his doctorate at Boston University School of Theology, receiving it in June, 1955. Two events in these early years, Washington says, proved to be decisive influences—first, his marriage to Coretta Scott, a graduate of Antioch and a singer, the other event the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, which was undertaken, with King's leadership, after Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man as required by law in Alabama. This was in 1955. For 381 days King led the successful boycott against the Montgomery public bus system, and he founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. He was then twenty-eight years old. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, and he was assassinated in 1968, before he was forty.

In his use of logic, Dr. King combined his belief in the power of nonviolence with the firm determination of a man of principle. In an article appearing in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1962, he said:

A few weeks ago, I was convicted in the City Court of Albany, Georgia, for participating in a peaceful march protesting segregated conditions in that community. I decided, on the basis of conscience, not to pay the fine of \$178 but to serve the jail sentence of forty-five days. Just as I was about to get adjusted to my new home, Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy and I were notified that some unknown donor had paid our fines and that we had to leave the jail. As the *Atlanta Constitution* suggested shortly after, we have now reached a new landmark in race relations. We have witnessed persons being ejected from lunch counters during the sit-ins and thrown into jails during the freedom rides. But for the first time we witnessed persons being kicked out of jail.

Victor Hugo once said that there is nothing more powerful in all the world than an idea whose time has come. Anyone sensitive to the present moods, morals and trends in our nation must know that the time for racial justice has come. The issue is not *whether* segregation and discrimination will be eliminated but *how* they will pass from the scene. . . .

What of the future? Will it be marked by the same actions as in the past? This is not easy to answer with precision. Certainly there will still be resistance—but I am convinced the old South has gone, never to return. Many of the problems today are due to a futile attempt by the white South to maintain a system of human values that came into being under a feudalistic plantation system and that cannot survive in a democratic age.

If the South is to grow economically, it must continue to industrialize. Day after day, the South is receiving new, multi-million-dollar industries and with the growth of urban society the folkways of white supremacy will gradually pass away. The arrival of industry will increase the purchasing power of the Negro and with that will come improved medical care, greater educational opportunities and more adequate housing. And every such development will result in a further weakening of segregation.

While as a theological student King had learned about the method of non-violence in the struggle of a people for freedom, his visit to India convinced him of its applicability to the blacks in the United States, and the circumstances of the bus boycott in Montgomery revealed its immediate relevance. In the *New York Times Magazine* article quoted above he said:

The method of nonviolent resistance is effective in that it has a way of disarming opponents. It exposes their moral defenses, weakens their morale and at the same time works on their conscience. It makes it possible for the individual to struggle for moral ends through moral means.

One of the most persistent philosophical debates throughout the centuries has been over the question of ends and means. There have been those, like Machiavelli, who have argued that the end justifies the means. This, I feel, is one of the greatest tragedies of communism. Read Lenin as he says "Lying, deceit and violence are justifiable means to bring about the aim of a classless society."

This is where the principle of nonviolence breaks with communism and any other method which holds to the same belief. In a real sense, the means represent the ideal in the making—the end in process. So, in the long run, destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends because the ends are preexistent in the means. . . . Psychiatrists, believing that many of man's inner conflicts are rooted in hate, are now saying "Love or perish." And this is the beauty of nonviolence. It says you can struggle without hating; you can fight war without violence.

It is my great hope that as the Negro plunges deep into the quest for freedom he will plunge even deeper into the philosophy of nonviolence. As a race, Negroes must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship—but they must never use second-class methods to gain it. They must never succumb to the temptation of using violence in that struggle. . . .

The Negroes' goal is freedom. I believe we will win it because the goal of the nation is freedom. Yet we are not passively waiting for deliverance to come from others out of pity. Our destiny is bound up with the destiny of America—we built it for two centuries without wages; we made cotton king; we built our home and homes for our masters and suffered injustice and humiliation. But out of a bottomless vitality we continued to live and grow.

If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not extinguish our existence, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We feel that we are the conscience of America—we are its troubled soul. We will continue to insist that right be done because both God's will and the heritage of our nation speak through our echoing demands.

In the introductory note by the editors of *Playboy* to their interview with King—called by Washington "one of the finest that we have in print"—there is an account of his everyday life during the bus boycott and after:

When King's home was bombed during the siege, thousands of enraged Negroes were ready to riot, but the soft-spoken clergyman prevailed on them to channel their anger into nonviolent protest—and became world-renowned as a champion of Gandhi's philosophy. . . . Within a year the Supreme Court had ruled Jim Crow seating unlawful on Montgomery's buses, and King found himself, at twenty-seven, on the front lines of a nonviolent Negro revolution against racial injustice.

Moving to Atlanta, he formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an alliance of church-affiliated civil rights organizations which joined such activist groups as GORE and SNCC in a widening campaign of sit-in demonstrations and freedom rides throughout the South. Dissatisfied with the slow pace of the protest movement, King decided to create a crisis in 1963 that would "dramatize the Negro plight and galvanize the national conscience." He was abundantly successful, for his mass nonviolent demonstration in arch-segregationist Birmingham resulted in the arrest of more than thirty-three hundred Negroes, including King himself; and millions were outraged by front-page pictures of Negro demonstrators being brutalized by the billy sticks, police dogs and fire hoses of police chief Bull Connor.

In the months that followed, mass sit-ins and demonstrations erupted in eight hundred southern cities, President Kennedy proposed a civil rights bill aimed at the enforcement of voting rights, equal employment opportunities, and the desegregation of public facilities; and the now famous march on Washington, two hundred thousand strong, was eloquently addressed by King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. By the end of that "long hot summer," America's Negroes had won more tangible gains than in any year since 1865—and Martin Luther King had become their acknowledged leader and most respected spokesman.

He earned it the hard way: In the course of his civil rights work he has been jailed fourteen times and stabbed once in the chest; his home has been bombed three times and his daily mail brings a steady flow of death threats and obscenities. Undeterred, he works twenty hours a day, travels 325,000 miles and

makes 450 speeches a year throughout the country on behalf of the Negro cause. Inundated by calls, callers and correspondence at his SCLC office in Atlanta, he also finds time somehow to preach, visit the sick and help the poor among his congregation at the city's Ebenezer Baptist Church, of which he and his father are the pastors.

Asked about the role of songs in the Negro struggle, King replied:

Since slavery the Negro has sung throughout his struggle in America. *Steal Away* and *Go Down, Moses* were the songs of faith and inspiration which were sung on the plantations. For the same reasons the slaves sang, Negroes today sing freedom songs, for we, too, are in bondage. We sing out our determination that "We shall overcome, black and white together, we shall overcome someday." I should also mention a song parody that I enjoyed very much which the Negroes sang during our campaign in Albany, Georgia. It goes: "I'm comin', I'm comin'/And my head *ain't* bendin' low/I'm walkin' tall, I'm talkie' strong/I'm America's New Black Joe."

The more than 600 pages of this book touch on every aspect of the black struggle for freedom and equal treatment.



## *COMMENTARY* A TRANSFORMATION

YEARS ago we used to have lunch in a Thrifty drug store here in Los Angeles. Now and then a group of black girls would come in for a malt and a sandwich, talking with one another, laughing and joking. The most noticeable thing about them was not their color but their speech. It wasn't the speech we used to hear from black people, but typically American speech. The tints of their skin faded away to nothing, or rather took on the charm of their color, rather than identifying them as black. A feeling of pleasure was the result of this experience. They really belonged in fact as well as in principle. They were no longer blacks but simply Americans. Today, as the years go by, more and more dark people give this impression. It is more or less what Martin Luther King is quoted as saying in Review. A splendid assimilation is going on which in time will make all forms of segregation things of the past. We will all learn to forget about race.

Meanwhile, a prophecy made in the *Nation* a long time ago has now come true. The Negroes, the writer said, are about to enter the Forum and make themselves heard. And they are certainly worth listening to. The book about King quoted in this week's Review is all the evidence we need.

Other races are forging ahead in all the professions in the United States and commanding respect. A while back we spent a brief time in a highly regarded hospital in this area, being impressed by the number of Asians on the staff—doctors, nurses, and technicians were Japanese or Koreans, or blacks, all highly competent so far as a layman could tell.

We are at last beginning to realize that there is no favored race, no chosen people. They are all simply human beings, some more talented than others, but not because of color, facial structure or race.

Something good is happening in this country, almost without our noticing it.

Again, years ago, a friend was so impressed by a sculptured head of Sun Yat Sen that he remarked that he could never again think of this great leader as a Chinese. He was, of course, but before that he had the mien and dignity of a human being. This makes one find it easy to understand the recent achievement of the Chinese in health and nutrition for their people—which puts the rest of us to shame. Apparently, behind the façade of discouraging international events, a real transformation is taking place.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### WORDS AND FASHIONS

HAVING recently had a letter from a reader asking about the uses of words, we draw on a column by Jim Quinn in the *Nation* for Jan. 18. Quinn quotes from William Safire's department, "On Language," in the *New York Times Magazine*, launching an aggressive criticism of Safire's "weekly list of words we should worry about." The language conservatives, he says, are "a small-minded bunch, so removed from erudition and so mentally lazy that they are strangers to the most primitive of research methods: looking words up in the dictionary."

All you need to demolish most Safire articles is a couple of good historical dictionaries: *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* and its supplements. I'll take a single column, "Invasion of the Verbs," from October 6, 1985, as a sample of Safire's method.

"Invasion of the Verbs" warns us against the new verbs that are "being coined every day." An adwriter from N.W. Ayer has heard a conductor say, "The last two cars of this train will not platform at Talmadge Hall," and is appalled at the presumption of the working class. *To platform* seems as bad as that other voguish verb, *to parent*. Phil Gailey of *The New York Times* reports that politicians talk of *profounding* the issues. Safire himself has come across *liaise* and *post-mortem* used as verbs. Worst of all, Harold C. Schonberg of *The Times* has overheard an editor say that fresh news "mooted the story." And "I hoot," adds Harold, "at the moot."

Yet converting nouns into verbs is common practice in the development of English. Sometimes the new verb catches on, and sometimes it doesn't: is the decision a matter of conservative prejudice or taste? Quinn lists a number of words that are now as much verbs as nouns—all of them familiar: *hand*, *mouth*, *eye*, *bed*, *house*, *father*. He comments:

The structure of modern English makes this functional shift easier for us. In most Indo-European languages you can tell what a word is by looking at it.

In English you often have to have the word in context. "The cage" is a noun, in "I *cage*" the word is a verb; and in "the *cage* door" it works as an adjective. If speakers of English stop shifting words about in this way they won't be conserving the language, they'll be inventing a radically different one.

Some of the supposedly new words have almost ancient histories. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, shows that *to platform* first appeared in print in 1793, and among its users have been Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Abraham Lincoln. Quinn goes on with old neologisms:

*To parent* has been around since 1663. *To profound*, listed as obsolete by the *O.E.D.*, started in 1412 with Lydgate; Sir Thomas Browne is cited for three separate shades of meaning. *Liaise* is relatively new, though it is one year older than Safire. The *O.E.D.* calls it "services slang" and dates it from 1928. Among those who have used *liaise* as a verb without harm to the English language are Louis MacNeice (*Holes in the Sky*) and Lawrence Durrell (*Mountolive*). *Post-mortem* is cited first as an adjective (1837), then as a noun (1844), then as a verb (1871); but new words are usually around for years before they finally appear in the conservative medium of print, so all three of those forms were probably used simultaneously. *Moot* as an adjective has only been around since 1577. The noun and the verb are much older; the *O.E.D.* gives the same year for the appearance of both, circa 1000. *Moot*, a verb before the Norman Conquest, a verb almost from the dawn of English as English, has continued in ordinary use down to this very day—among its users are William Langland (1362), John Henry Newman (1848), Andrew Lang (1902). Webster's adds Edmund Burke and many contemporary citations, including *Commonweal*. *Moot*, that humble and ordinary verb, may be—thanks to the wit of Harold C. Schonberg and the language expertise of William Safire—the oldest word in the English language ever attacked as new.

Well, usage is certainly a high authority in matters like these, and Mr. Quinn's examples are undoubtedly illustrious, but if, in questioning current usage, Mr. Safire and others, without bothering to look words up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, can find these verbs awkward and

inappropriate, then the usage has certainly not caught on, and it seems worth inquiring why. Quinn doesn't go into this, but one may think he should, before landing so hard on the conservatives. Some nouns become verbs easily, and contribute brevity to expression, while others, when used as verbs, seem puzzling, awkward, and strained, although usage will nonetheless decide for or against their common use. These considerations simply show the price we pay for the enormous linguistic flexibility of the English language. The intangible factor of taste, so well described on occasion by Jacques Barzun (in Follett's *Modern American Usage*) is our only protection against verbal monstrosities.

Another aspect of this debate is the level of discourse. Jack Smith, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, chooses the language now used by the business community as fair game. He began his diatribe for Jan. 23 by saying:

Through I try to keep up on gobbledygook, so I can read my junk mail, I am told by Jan Schrag of Van Nuys that I am behind the times in my grasp of the current "corporate mumble." Specifically, Schrag says she has noticed my use of the term *corporate ladder*, which is now out of date. "There are no corporate ladders in today's business world," she informs me. "They have been stored in a warehouse in Chatsworth, and have been replaced by *opportunities for advancement*."

Young college graduates, Jan Schrag, informed him, looking for jobs with progressive concerns, will say in their applications:

"Objective: A position with a growth-oriented organization that provides opportunities for personal and professional advancement and meaningful financial rewards."

Schrag says that after interviewing many of these young applicants, she has figured out that what they want is "a job where they can move right along and make a lot of money."

With the help of gobbledygook, Schrag says, today's corporations seem to have risen above problems that used to trouble them in the past. In fact, they no longer have any problems. "At worst," she explains, "they may have *areas of concern*." But

these areas of concern are welcomed as *opportunities for success*. "And since they have no problems," she points out, "they don't need to talk about them. In fact, today's executives don't talk at all—they *communicate*."

Since corporations no longer have problems, executives no longer meet to discuss them. "If two or more executives are inspired to communicate about an area of concern," she says, "they *touch base*." And since there are no problems, they find no solutions. What they do is "evaluate data and strategize programs designed to maximize opportunities for success."

Another of Jack Smith's correspondents, John J. Mehl of Yerba Linda, relates that he listened to a radio program about "hyperactive children," discovering, however, that "that's not the word any more." These children, according to Mr. Mehl, "are now said to have an 'attention deficit disorder'."

For conclusion we go to Jacques Barzun's introductory essay in the Follett book referred to above.

It is of course by means of the critical spirit that one learns the unteachable things about writing. One forces oneself to be critical about everything one reads or hears, and this must not exclude what one says or writes. Self-criticism, which begins by being an arduous discipline, ends by becoming second nature. . . . The great classics are no better off when they rely on habit or technique without self-inspection. James Fenimore Cooper, who could write superb narrative prose when he resisted his mania for calling every bullet *a leaden messenger* and every eagle *a monarch of the air*, would from time to time produce a sentence that in its perfection of chaos staggers credulity. In *The Pathfinder*, one of his Indians, startled by the smoke of an unexpected campfire, stands on tiptoe watching it: *Then, falling back on his feet, a low exclamation, in the soft toned that form so singular a contrast to its harsher cries in the Indian warrior's voice, was barely audible.*

Indeed, a gem of chaotic meanings.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Peacemakers

THERE is a broad variety of paths in life, some of them necessary to take, some we are compelled to take, and some wholly voluntary and uncompelled, although not feasible for everyone. Among the voluntary and uncompelled paths are those dictated by conscience, which makes them compelled for those who take them, often to the bewilderment—and sometimes the embarrassment—of those who feel no inner mandate to follow. Thoreau is a good example of a man who lived almost entirely by this inner necessity. Those who do only what is required of them by an outside authority are too numerous to need example, although many people who conform do so because they feel no sufficient reason for objecting.

There are two compelling forces, custom and governmental authority or law. Yet there are those who choose not to conform for reasons of conscience—the conscientious objectors, for example, who refuse to kill or be trained for killing in some branch of the military service. Some of these, if they qualify according to government specifications, are allowed exemption provided they perform some service indicated by federal regulations; otherwise, they are tried in court and sent to prison for varying lengths of time. Violators of custom are likely to be ostracized by the social community, although not always. Thoreau had many friends and admirers who had little trouble putting up with his preferences and quirks. Those who refuse to pay taxes, as he did, are eventually prosecuted, although the government seems reluctant to proceed against them, perhaps from fear that the publicity might make the idea of non-payment of taxes a popular form of resistance to authority.

In the *Peacemaker* for last January, a journal issued monthly in support of conscientious objectors to war, tax refusers, and other militant pacifists (address: Box 627, Garberville, Calif.

95440), the lead article is devoted to tax refusal. It begins:

You can spend your money once—if you spend it on guns and bombs, you can't spend it on food and shelter.

This is a simple and logical principle which probably no one would question. Why then do people spend their money for implements of destruction when they could spend it instead for the worthwhile things of life?

People tend to do what others around them are already doing; they let the current routine shape their lives. The world was already round—even when almost everyone acted and believed otherwise. So the number of people believing something or doing something should say very little about what is right or even acceptable.

People leave schools, take jobs, and without much thinking begin to pay federal income taxes—just as everyone around them does. But an individual's income tax buys a lot of war.

It not only buys war by direct payment, but it also buys war by giving it moral support. People need to ask themselves: Do I really want to buy that kind of thing? Perhaps the answer is Yes. If the answer is No, one ought to make some major changes.

Years ago, when many Americans were trying to retain slavery and wrest from the Mexicans a large territory we know as Texas, one man, Thoreau, thought the matter over and then decided that even if everyone else paid the tax, he would not. In his day the war tax was in the guise of a poll tax. In ours, it's in the guise of an income tax and a telephone tax.

Whether a person agrees or disagrees with war policies or war activities is of little concern to the war-making state if he or she allows life and money to be conscripted.

There will be those who are in moral agreement with this argument, yet will feel that there are serious obstacles to non-payment of taxes. That is certainly true, and the determined tax-refuser will have to consider such alternatives as the following:

Some people will choose to rearrange their work so that they will be able to make out-right refusal of those taxes which are now being taken from their pay before they see it and turned over to the government via the withholding system. Others will choose a life

style that avoids taxable income. Only some such basic response as this can effectively challenge the vast power being brought to bear by the government on the lives of human beings.

For counsel and help in considering such questions, *Peacemaker* publishes a *Handbook on Nonpayment of War Taxes* (64 pages, \$2.50) which may be purchased from the group at the Garberville address. In another article in the Jan. 15 issue, one of the editors, Paul Encimer, says:

As individuals, Peacemakers can always agree to differ, but as a "movement" Peacemakers has accepted and promulgated a position that emphasizes noncooperation with the main institutions, not only of militarism and war, but also of "violence, coercion, exploitation and injustice," as enumerated in the *What Is Peacemakers?* a leaflet developed at business meetings over the years to represent Peacemaker philosophy.

This leaflet begins:

Peacemakers is a movement dedicated to the transformation of society through the transformation of the individuals therein. By committing ourselves to work toward living in line with our beliefs, we can each in a small though significant way begin to change the world. Although the movement is widely scattered, individuals within it try to keep in touch with one another for mutual support and occasional collective action. Our unity better enables us to search for truly nonviolent ways of living for peace.

Peacemakers are those individuals who accept and try to practice the principles of the philosophy we state in this leaflet and who consider themselves members. There is no statement to sign, no membership fee, no national office.

Paul Encimer says in his article:

Personally I am experimenting with the Green and Bioregional movements as a way to start asserting the sovereignty of communities at the base, so to speak. It's a wide-open field because there is so very little (almost no) sovereignty at the local level—cities and counties are creatures of higher levels. A federal government boycott would leave us free to keep sovereignty in the hands of individuals to create processes for mediation, conflict resolution and nonviolent self-defense. In lots of places, Greens and Bioregionalists are reshaping the way we think about the "state." The idea here is to create a political

entity founded on its natural unity rather than arbitrary lines.

It seems well to remember, in thinking about these things, that nonconformity and noncooperation begin with a few individuals of heroic determination, who slowly become more numerous from the support of others, and finally achieve their objective by bringing about a situation in which decent people can join without reluctance or moral embarrassment, and without suffering penalties imposed by an outside authority—since that authority no longer exists.