

THE CONDITIONS OF MORAL RENEWAL

EVERY day, in the papers, we read accounts of the serious problems besetting the world—problems about which we can do practically nothing, personally. We have no access, except very indirectly, to avenues leading to action, and the solutions—if solutions are thought to exist—seem to be in the hands of men who are themselves quite limited in their power to act. Presidents and diplomats are answerable to public opinion, and the restrictions on their use of power are so complicated that only a few political specialists can estimate what or how much national leaders are able to do, to say nothing of what they *ought* to do. We'd like to see the Jews and the Arabs more determined to get together to work toward a peaceful destiny in their part of the world; we hope that the Russians will see the point of composing their differences with the Chinese (and vice versa); and we think that South Africa should begin to move more realistically toward the creation of a multi-racial society with equal rights for all. And so on.

One might say that these are not *our* problems, since for Americans they are all in distant lands, but commentators are quick to point out that what happens in these various countries may have far-reaching effect on our lives. So we keep on reading the papers, usually forming tentative opinions in which we have little confidence because the factors involved are so obscure—obscure, that is, except in vague moral terms. What then are unquestionably our own problems, requiring our close attention?

One likely to interest everyone who heats his own home is the price of natural gas. At present, as pointed out by the *Wall Street Journal*, U.S. producers of natural gas can charge only \$1.75 for a thousand cubic feet of gas (by reason of government regulation). But these domestic producers are unable to supply the total needs of

the American people, so gas must be imported, and as the *Journal* editorial says, imported gas costs much more. If it comes from Algeria, the gas has first to be liquified in order to be shipped by boat, and then, after arriving here, must be revaporized and transported by pipe to points of distribution in this country. All this makes the cost of imported gas very much higher—\$4.50, the *Journal* writer says.

Confronted by such differences in the cost of what they sell, it seems sensible for the utility companies to set an average price based on the total costs of all natural gas. However, the present plan of the government is to insist that the utilities find some customers willing to pay the imported gas price, while allowing other buyers of this fuel to get it at the much lower controlled price. The editorial comments:

A utility isn't likely to go to the trouble of rounding up several thousand residential customers willing to pay a premium price. So it will almost certainly turn to industrial and commercial customers as potential purchasers of the expensive gas.

The *Wall Street Journal*, of course, advocates a single market price for natural gas with "no one subject to price discrimination." The government's idea, on the other hand, is to keep the price down for individual buyers (millions of voters) while making industry pay a premium price for fuel. After noting that industry is bound to pass along to consumers any additional charge, the editorial asks:

How long does this administration think it can spread the fiction that by shifting costs to industry it saves the public money? Industry's energy costs are not paid by the tooth fairy but by the buyers of its products. The costs in paperwork and public confidence of this deceit are getting higher all the time.

For any businessman, this comment must make a great deal of sense. But what if you are a

politician? Not without reason, the typical politician is convinced that the typical voter has little interest in elaborate explanations of why accepting a considerable price increase on the fuel to heat his home will be beneficial to the country at large, and therefore to him. He simply wants gas as cheaply as possible, and feels friendly toward officials who see that the price doesn't go up. So, what business economists call apathy the politician identifies as political reality. He is likely to believe that his survival in politics depends upon making the smallest possible demand for thinking among his constituency. Or, to put it less negatively, he knows that there are definite limits to public comprehension of the realities of public interest, and he instinctively attempts to hide whatever unwelcome facts he can't easily justify or blame on someone else.

Well, we can condemn the politicians for their self-preservative rules of behavior, but it seems necessary to admit that *any* person in office would have to deal with this problem in some way or other. After all, you have to *stay* in office in order to "do good," and even the best of men are required to be cautious and expedient when faced by the competition of clever demagogues. For such reasons it becomes harder and harder for good men to be elected when more and more things are going wrong, and they are less and less easy to explain.

Using other words, Richard Falk put this conclusion briefly in the current (No. 4) *Journal of the New Alchemists*: "The art of ruling an obsolete political order depends on obscuring the gravity of a situation from the citizenry." One thing we can be sure of is that the obscurity will continue. The socio-economic structures of our technological society, which hardly anyone can understand, guarantee obscurity for the common man. A more frustrating condition is hard to imagine.

There is no point in declaring that the people are too dumb to understand their own good and must be managed by an ideological elite of leaders

who "know best." The twentieth century has already seen several extreme experiments of this sort, and we know where they lead. What other course is there?

We can recognize but one—to reduce the size of the units of government, until they are small enough for the relations between cause and effect to be seen and understood by a majority of citizens. But this will take generations! It probably will.

Another way of looking at this problem is by contrasting the moral solution with a design solution. What is the moral solution? It involves getting everyone to do what is right. If this could happen, then no one would write books about moral man and immoral society. We would *have* a moral society. But we don't, now, have a moral society and we know how difficult it is to persuade people to do the (usually more expensive) right thing. Except in wartime the politicians don't dare to attempt it, and during wartime "the right thing" is usually quite wrong for decent human beings.

How can doing the right thing be made less difficult? The answer is simple enough. A great many people would like to do the right thing more of the time, but they are far from sure what it is. When righteousness gets too complicated, people feel obliged to become either true believers or tired cynics. The whole society grows morally sluggish as a result. The project, then, from a design point of view, is to make righteousness less difficult by making it less obscure. When you can see for yourself what ought to be done, and see intelligent ways of doing it, it becomes hard not to get busy. The good in human beings has then at least a fighting chance.

In other words, morality needs to be *rational*. Denied the light of reason by the complexity of life, morality must sooner or later explode in blindly fanatical enterprises or relapse into despair. Seeing this was what made E. F. Schumacher a great man. Small is beautiful means that when our economic relations are scaled to ordinary human

understanding, people are at least *able* to be moral in their everyday lives because they can see what they ought to do.

This is the reason for the almost constant attention in these pages to regionalism, the small community, decentralized sources of energy, organic agriculture, and related enterprises.

We should note that moral longing is closely associated with the creation of design solutions—which means adding knowledge to ethical intent. In his *New Alchemists* article, Richard Falk seeks a society which doesn't constrain people to wrong-doing:

. . . those who live in a faltering culture tend to examine its politics and economics but not necessarily its underlying values and beliefs. We accept that the governing process seeks to sustain economics that serve the dominant culture. Those who are deeply dissatisfied with economic performance because it is wasteful and unfair or destructive are characteristically at odds with prevailing politics, but do not necessarily draw the dominant culture into question. For instance most of the ideological/political struggles associated with socialism, fascism and liberalism that have produced much of the high-technology in our country are carried on within an accepted cultural framework of secular materialism. Only recently is the political question beginning to be posed in cultural as well as economic terms. . . . Such a cultural emphasis tends to convert political outlooks from a concern with "events" (the revolution) to a focus on "process" ("permanent evolution") . Cultural preoccupations also lengthen time horizons as the processes of change connected with underlying beliefs, values, myths and goals are slow and continuous. . . .

To seek or to create possibilities for cultural renewal is a radical expression, in the sense of going to the root of things. Due to its nature, such expression is rejected by almost all those who dominate present political and economic arrangements. In my view, to expect political renewal to emanate from the official institution of the state located in Washington is as foolish, though not quite as obviously foolish, as to expect cultural renewal to come from the TV networks or Hollywood movies. . . .

What has been difficult for political radicals in America to learn is that the climate for change does

not yet exist and that there is no quick fix for the polity once it is understood that the priorities for change are integrally linked with shifting values, as well as shifting power elites. But such an understanding is essential, for without a culture-based politics of renewal every prescription for either reform or revolution is certain to fail when put to the test. In addition, in the United States there is no basis yet for mobilizing support for radical change. Revolutionary initiatives, being premature, prompt counter-revolutionary tactics by the state. Indeed, modern experience with political revolutions increasingly is being interpreted by those Western radicals seeking fundamental structural changes as discrediting politics per se.

The politics here spoken of as discredited is the kind that is divorced from significant change in cultural values—the mechanistic politics of power. The "contingent politics" Mr. Falk is ready to endorse is "built upon an ethos of revolutionary patience: contingent because subject to further evolution and dependent on fallible visions and actions of people; revolutionary because fundamental; patient because the revolution may not possess the capacity to transform existing power structures for many decades." Further:

Technology is not the only realm where small is, or can be, beautiful; politics is paramountly such a realm as well. We need to envision how a perspective of smallness translates into social, economic and political forms of organization. . . . Such speculations spring from an understanding of the modern state, its role, its strengths and limits. To dismiss the state as "obsolete" overlooks the degree to which peoples of the Third World regard the building of strong states at this stage of their development as a progressive step enabling higher degrees of political, economic and cultural independence; i.e., the state as an instrument of anti-imperialism may be regarded in a positive light. Such a positive function of the state does not eliminate criticism of statism as it operates within and among the northern tier of advanced industrial countries, but it does complicate the issue of the state. . . .

The argument of this essay is that the political prospect of our time must be interpreted primarily in light of the possibilities of cultural renewal along specified lines of value change.

Interestingly, one of the last articles contributed to *Resurgence* (in the July-August issue) by E. F. Schumacher illustrates the role of a national state in Africa—Tanzania—in working toward a society based on true cultural values. He begins by pointing out that the essential economic functions provide only the physical basis of culture, the root of which is self-reliance, and when small nations lose their culture they also lose not only their economic independence, but also "the very possibility of gaining true development and independence." He continues:

Everything begins with people and therefore with the people's culture: their inner wealth, which begins with self-confidence, self-reliance. The so-called Arusha Declaration put forward by Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, speaks emphatically of self-reliance: the foreigner, whatever his intentions, will not develop Tanzania. If Tanzania is to develop, this will be done by the people of Tanzania. Self-reliance is a very important part of inner wealth.

Nyerere himself has said to his countrymen:

We made a mistake in choosing money—something we do not have—to be the big instrument in our development. We are making a mistake to think that we shall get the money from other countries. The development of a country is brought about by people and not by money. Money and the wealth it represents is the result and *not* the basis of development. . . . the four prerequisites of development are quite different. They are: People, Land, Good Policies and Good Leadership. In order to implement the policy of self-reliance, the people have to be taught the *meaning* of self-reliance and its practice. They must become self-sufficient in *food*, serviceable *clothes*, and good *housing*.

Such determination and vision on the part of an African president illustrate the point of Michael Polanyi's counsel:

To try to reform all the power structures at once would leave us with *no* power structure to use in our project. In any case, we will be able to see that absolute moral renewal could be attempted only by an absolute power and that a tyrannous force such as this must destroy the whole moral life of man, not renew it.

The most encouraging sign of the times, these days, is the number of unusual men and women who are out living on the land or working in the cities to generate the forms of social and community relations that make self-reliance possible. Self-reliance means reducing the areas of external dependency. To find and develop alternative sources of energy is a personally satisfying thing to do, and it also brings the individual into closer relationship with the natural world. He begins to become a part of the web of interconnections which pervade the natural world, and he may *feel* the expansive quality of the new values he is living by. The ideals which these values represent are already very much in the minds of a growing number. People have always held these ideals as moral abstractions, but they have not been able to act on them. Consequently, the ideals have weakened or been stripped of meaning.

Take for example the familiar demand for "autonomy." What does it mean? It ought to mean the replacement of the circumstances of dependence on forces outside our control by conditions under which we enter into voluntary relations of mutual responsibility and cooperation. Unless autonomy (or freedom) is recognized as the natural result of widening ranges of responsible behavior, it has only a neurotic meaning. True freedom is hardly more than latitude for choice in *giving it up*—that is, *using* freedom to work toward some worthy goal. Writing of these matters in *The Unsettling of America*, Wendell Berry observes that the self-serving version of autonomy may be only an excuse for irresponsibility, making the word "little more than a jargon term for indifference to the opinions and feelings of other people." He adds:

There is, in practice, no such thing as autonomy. Practically, there is only a distinction between responsible and irresponsible dependence. Inevitably failing this impossible standard of autonomy, the modern self-seeker becomes a tourist of cures, submitting his quest to the guidance of one guru after another. The "cure" thus preserves the disease.

All our ideals, it seems, are capable of this sort of inverted application. Wendell Berry has a severely critical passage on the effects of the isolation of the individual from direct participation in meeting his everyday bodily needs, pointing out that the present civilization, instead of recognizing the causes of psychological fragmentation, attempts "vast 'cures' that further centralize power and increase profits: wars, wars on crime, wars on poverty, national schemes of medical aid, insurance, immunization, further industrial and economic 'growth,' etc." The prescription:

Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed. Connection *is* health. And what our society does its best to disguise from us is how ordinary, how commonly attainable, health is. We lose our health—and create profitable diseases and dependences—by failing to see the direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving. In gardening, for instance, one works with the body to feed the body. The work, if it is knowledgeable, makes for excellent food. And it makes one hungry. The work thus makes eating both nourishing and joyful, not consumptive, and keeps the eater from getting fat and weak. This is health, wholeness, a source of delight. And such a solution, unlike the typical industrial solution, does not cause new problems.

This is one account of how the resumption of direct responsibilities for common needs generates the attitudes of and capacity for moral renewal. There are practical, everyday activities which are consistent with the longings of moral intelligence, and other activities which are not. Hence the importance of rearranging our lives for the gradual resumption of individual responsibility.

REVIEW

BOOKS ABOUT BUILDING

GIVING an account of books about do-it-yourself building, retrofitting homes with solar heating, or construction techniques applicable in only certain regions is likely to make the reviewer feel that he is using shotgun methods aimed at cloudy targets. The needs of people interested in such things are usually quite specific, geared to endlessly differing situations, while the books have to be broad, common-denominator studies. Too often, the most important details seem left out. Another problem is that there are so many of these books, most of them good. The reviewer may think of his friends and realize that no one can be expected to read *all* of them; but he goes on writing review after review, because the books keep coming out. How can this element of artificiality be eliminated? Probably it can't.

But perhaps it isn't altogether artificial, since it parallels an evident natural process—the way plants distribute their seeds. Many more seeds are produced than find the right growing conditions and develop to maturity. Nature uses shotgun methods, too, entrusting seeds to the wind or animal carriers, and this seems to work very well. Still another factor is at work—the extraordinary adaptability of plant life. Organic or vital intelligence has wizardry in making-do, in locating needed nourishment. Life goes on, even flourishes, devising its own conditions for growth and health.

These books, then, in all their profusion, are the seeds of a new and better cycle of life for human beings. Most of the writers seem conscious of this role and give their work the ardor of seeds bursting with life. One book with this quality is Robin Clarke's *Building for Self-Sufficiency* (Universe Books, 1976, \$5.95). The author, a Londoner who five years ago gave up his office job (he had been a writer and editor for fifteen years) and joined with some others to establish a rural commune in Wales on a 43-acre farm, started from scratch. He had none of the skills required for this enterprise, but found that with the help of friendly neighbors he could learn what he needed to know.

The commune fell apart but the house Clarke and the others built stands as a monument to another kind of success:

By far the most important was the discovery of my own abilities. . . . Concrete-mixing, drain-laying, carpentry, joinery, roofing, plumbing, wiring, guttering, rendering, farming, and even vehicle maintenance soon became part of the daily life. And we did them well.

So, I suspect, can everyone else. Yet in our society there is a mystique attached to such crafts which leads 95 per cent of us to declare ourselves incapable of them. This is profoundly untrue. Within six months of starting work at Eithin [the name of the commune] I think we had all realized that there was nothing we could not do on that site if we put our minds to it. Apart from time, there was never again any reason for us to call in outside help to do something of which we were not capable.

Building for Self-Sufficiency is not about the house they built, but a how-to book based on what was learned from building it—a curriculum covering tools, building materials, heat insulation, solar energy, wind-power, water supply and plumbing, waste disposal and composting, methane production, transport, and food. How did all this work out for the people involved?

None of us at Eithin were very practical people—we had all come from jobs where we used our heads a lot and our hands but little. Yet I still look at the house we built there with pride. It is certainly one of the most remarkable buildings in the British Isles, and it is built to a standard rarely found in contemporary homes. We had the thing watertight and habitable within nine months of starting work on the foundations. The building was a success.

So, too, was the solar roof we put on top to heat our hot water. And by the time I left, the 43-acre farm was running quite smoothly, thanks largely to the help of our neighbor Frank Ruscoe, who took it on himself to instruct us in the art of proper farming. We were pretty near self-sufficient in food. And we made out financially—just. . . . That is no mean achievement, particularly as we certainly never felt poor, and only rarely were overcome by the need to go to town to spend a couple of crisp fivers. We had more than enough to do, and the temptation to spend money, other than on beer in the local, was virtually

nonexistent. Technically, we lived far below the poverty line, but we were certainly never deprived.

Why did Robin Clarke write his book?

This is a book to browse through, to pick from, and to borrow from. It is not a recipe for life. There are limits to self-sufficiency which I think should always be respected. The aim is not to turn yourself into an overworked, half-crazed hermit. The aim is to make do with less, and to live better as a result—either by choice or through necessity. If you make yoghurt for yourself and your neighbor, and he keeps his and your gutters in good repair, you are both better off than if you each did both things for yourself. But, most assuredly, you'll be worse off if you pay someone else to do either; you'll also eat worse yoghurt and probably have leaking gutters.

Not the least virtue of this book is the good writing. These are times when there is great need to join thought with action. So, happily, a number of good writers, feeling this need, are learning how to do things which ought to be done and telling about doing them. You could say that many of the good generalists (writers) are learning some particular specialty and helping people see the importance it has to present-day life; and that at the same time there are thoughtful specialists, moved by the trouble the world is in, who are turning their well-trained competence to broader questions, becoming excellent writers in the process.

Architects are especially good candidates for becoming fine generalists. A house is a whole which has to work. So is a community or a town. People who design things that must work develop ways of thinking that are valuable to us all. This may be an explanation for the excellence of *Your Home's Solar Potential* (Edmund Scientific Co., Barrington, N.J., 1976, \$9.95) by Irwin Spetgang and Malcolm Wells. Wells is an architect who has worked for years on underground dwellings, exercising a wide influence around the country. He writes well. This book reflects his knowledge of what people who want to build homes are likely to ask and need to know. Many who are now thinking vaguely about adding solar water and space heating to their existing home—or about building a new one with these features—will appreciate this book. It steps scientific language down to a home-builder's level.

It tells how to survey a house for solar applications, how to anticipate costs and measure possible benefits. There are plenty of photographs and drawings. The authors say:

The survey is designed for use anywhere on earth, but it is most accurate for buildings in the temperate zones. . . . Still the survey will be of use to everyone—even if he lives in the more severe climatic regions—who has a sincere Curiosity about his home's solar suitability.

Homegrown Sundwellings (Lightning Tree, P.O. Box 1837, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501, \$5.95) by Peter van Dresser should be of value to anyone interested in solar heating who has access to adobe as a building material. A few years ago the author published what may be the best available example of regional planning in ecological terms—*Landscape for Humans*—a study of the conditions and possibilities of northern New Mexico. *Sundwellings* reports the findings of a research program undertaken in 1974:

It was conceived as a means of working with and strengthening the grassroots movement in New Mexico toward self-help solutions to the mounting problems of shelter, energy and food shortages. Intelligent use of universally available natural resources (mainly sun, earth and timber), and of the traditional skills of the citizenry were the keynotes. . . . the Sundwellings program was placed in the hands of a team consisting of engineer-physicists, architects, and solar researchers—most with long-term concern in this field and a personal familiarity with life and livelihood in rural and village New Mexico.

The group built test cottages and one complete dwelling which may now be seen in the village of El Rito, Rio Arriba County, N.M. The effectiveness of the solar adaptations is being monitored by the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. Numerous plans and drawings appear throughout the text. The main purpose of the book is "to show how solar energy can be harnessed by simple means to ease the burden of living costs in the home."

COMMENTARY

BOOKS ON EDUCATION

IN behalf of public understanding of research on education, the National Academy of Education from time to time publishes reviews of recent books. A now available review-essay on several "radical" attacks on public education and liberal histories of education in the United States is "The Revisionists Revised: Studies in the Historiography of American education" by Diane Ravitch. Those concerned with the trends of policy in public education will find this essay informing and interesting. But the general reader will soon reach the conclusion that unless he is prepared to devote a great deal of time in study of the questions raised, he will not be able to form any defensible conclusions. The subject is enormously complex. There is then the question: How much personal time and energy should be given to such inquiries? What, after all, is the value of knowing, as a specialist, a great deal about the theory and practice of public education, when the expectation of conveying a balanced understanding to the general reader must, in the nature of things, be very low?

It is for this reason that MANAS gives little space to such matters, feeling that the real solutions lie at the grassroots level, and are illustrated by the efforts of people like John Holt and Len Solo (see this week's "Children"). The following is from the conclusion of Diane Ravitch's review:

There have been at least two traditions of education commentary that exist side by side. One lauds the greatness of the public school, the other laments its lowly state. The first was the creation of promoters and local officials, waging intensive campaigns for public funds and stressing the accomplishments of the schools. The other was what Richard Hofstadter referred to as "a literature of acid criticism and bitter complaint." . . .

From this mixed bag of hope and despair, promise, and complaint, and from a motley company of idealists, pragmatists, cynics, and moralists, the politicalized historians select the passages and the

quotes that make their case against American schooling and the liberal tradition. A history that is rich with controversy is reduced to a single ideological line.

Simply for the purpose of recognizing the justification for this conclusion, Diane Ravitch's study is worth reading. It is valuable instruction on how one might best use one's time in behalf of children and the young.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

A PUBLIC SCHOOL FOUNDED BY PARENTS

[Len Solo, who tells this story, was one of two public school teachers who were fired (as was Jonathan Kozol) by the Boston public school system in the 1960s for deviating from the prescribed curriculum. He and his associate then formed the Teacher Drop Out Center (later the Teacher Information Center, 61 Surrey Lane, Sudbury, Mass. 01776), locating jobs for teachers and helping to staff schools. Meanwhile, Len Solo became Principal of the Cambridge (Mass.) Alternative Public School, where two hundred children attend from every district of Cambridge. Pupils are admitted through a lottery system that helps to maintain a balanced, heterogeneous school, half from working-class and half from middle-class homes. Half are girls, half are boys, while 30% are black, 8% hispanic, 5% other minorities, and 57% white.]

THE Cambridge Alternative Public School is committed to helping *parents* gain freedom. Actually, the school was founded by a group of parents in 1972. Most of these parents had successful experiences with their children in open classroom, parent cooperative pre-schools. They had observed classes, taught in classrooms, hired and fired teachers, helped make materials and furniture, helped develop curricula—i.e., they had participated in almost every aspect of *their* children's education. The experiences were good and the parents wanted to see these experiences continued into elementary school. They looked around at the neighborhood schools in Cambridge and saw that this type of education did not exist. So, over a period of two years, they met regularly, discussed schools, philosophy, educational practices, read books, visited schools, and talked with educators. This led them to draw up a lengthy, concrete proposal to establish an elementary school that would meet their ideals.

The parents then went about the messy business of persuading the Cambridge School Committee and the School Department to adopt the proposal. The persuasion was difficult

because the school system was quite conservative. The persuasion took many forms: making the proposal available to many people, getting signatures on a petition, talking with each School Committee member, talking with City Council members, talking with school administrators and School Department personnel, and talking with many groups of parents. The persuasion included long, argumentative meetings, sitting in on the School Committee, and the taking over of a wing of a newly constructed school as a proposed site for CAPS.

The persuasion was successful: the school was established—almost as exactly as the parents proposed.

Out of a total of 126 CAPS families, 40 may be said to be heavily involved helping out, in one way or another, at the school. Twenty-two families have made little or no contribution that I'm aware of, although they may have done so through channels other than the Parent Coordinator.

Sixty-four other families have come to work weekends (painting, building, etc.), given mini-courses, typed, and helped with telephoning. In terms of time, this kind of involvement has been very valuable, even though we have not classified it as "heavy." (Parent Coordinator's Report.)

How does a school—especially a *public* school—achieve such a high degree of parent involvement? First of all, as just noted, the school was founded by parents who were concerned about being equals with staff in the education of their children and who built this concern into their proposal as a fundamental tenet.

Secondly, we have established a good school that truly attempts to individualize its program: we really do care for children, care for them as humans, care for their intellectual, social and emotional growth. External evaluators have documented our children's academic achievements—which are better than average and have shown how our heterogeneous population lives together in a sharing way.

Third, our school is a school of choice: parents choose to send their children to CAPS.

They must visit the school before they apply and they can withdraw their children if the school is not meeting their expectations. This almost guarantees parent involvement. We do not require parent participation, though there has been some discussion about doing this.

Fourth, we have developed a number of structures to help the parents and the school to connect. I want to emphasize and elaborate on this fourth point because it is through these consciously developed structures that the concept of parent involvement is operationalized.

This involvement has to be seen within its historical context. For decades, parents and schools have dealt with each other as quiet enemies, but long ago schools emerged as the stronger party, having achieved *in loco parentis* status and having virtually excluded parents from any meaningful control or even influence, direct or indirect, over their children's education. This generalization holds true for every specific aspect of schooling: day-to-day curricula, long-range goals, facility planning, hiring, evaluation of students and staff, firing, etc. It is important to understand this context because *freedom involves the ability to see reality*: it is the pre-condition for freedom.

Our most important committee is the Policy Board. It consists of two staff (elected by the staff), five parents (including the chairperson of the Parent Council, all elected by parents), the Principal, the Parent Coordinator (who happens to also be a parent), and the Superintendent of Schools or his designee. All major decisions concerning the school are made by the Policy Board—all policies are established by this group and all committees are established by and report to this group at its regular monthly meetings.

The Principal has one vote on the Policy Board and is its administrative arm. I have no other power, except my ability to persuade and my membership on other committees (with one vote). Indeed, I was hired by a parent/staff committee and am evaluated yearly by the parents.

We have a Parent Council and every parent and staff is a member of this group. Our monthly meetings (usually held on a Sunday evening) begin with a pot-luck supper. This is followed by a meeting that first discusses the upcoming Policy Board agenda so that there is a wide viewing of this agenda and then there is consideration of any item that parents or staff think is important.

We have developed an extensive set of committees to handle the on-going work of the school. Most committees have equal numbers of parents and staff and each person has equal voting rights so that all issues undergo a shared decision-making process. We have a Hiring Committee that draws up job descriptions, advertises positions, interviews, and makes recommendations to the Policy Board and then to the Superintendent. Our Personnel Committee evaluates all staff members—through direct observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.—and recommends retention or non-retention. We have an Admissions Committee that decides who gets admitted to CAPS: we serve the entire city and get many more applicants than we have space for since we have deliberately chosen to keep our school fairly small. Other permanent committees include Building and Grounds, Library, a Social Committee and we have several ad hoc committees each year to deal with new issues as they arise. Decisions by the committees and the Policy Board cannot be over-ruled by the Principal.

There are other ways that we facilitate parent involvement at CAPS. We have a full-time Parent Coordinator whose major function is to help create an atmosphere conducive to open and informal communication and mutual trust among parents and staff and to assure that the school is a place where parents are welcomed and involved. She actualizes these concepts by working to establish committees, by seeing that they function well, and by setting up processes for parents and staff to work together.

Parents frequently visit the classrooms (they do not need appointments), help build furniture or room structures like lofts, type, teach mini-courses, volunteer as aides in classrooms, etc. We have a Parent Room with coffee and tea and places to talk and a crib and toys for younger children to be taken care of when parents visit.

We do not give tests or grades but have a detailed, written evaluation of each child twice a year. The reports are followed up with an extensive parent conference. Teachers and parents informally communicate a great deal during the year.

This past year, we set up a system of Room Parents who are responsible for communicating to parents what is happening in each classroom in monthly meetings and memos, and who are responsible, along with the Parent Coordinator, for getting the best possible communications going between parents and teachers.

This last point is important: the whole process of shared decision-making depends on a great deal of information that has to be shared between parents and staff. For example, parents who serve on the Personnel Committee have to meet to discuss what open education is all about, to develop a process of observation and reporting, to observe classes, to talk with teachers, to gain information that only staff have because of their daily involvement, to talk with parents and students, to share their observations with each other, etc. It is often a time-consuming and arduous and emotionally draining process.

The basic beliefs that inform these structures are contained in words such as *democracy*, *power*, and *control*.

Parents, by virtue of being parents, have the right to determine and control their children's education.

Our structures were established to *empower* parents, to allow them to actualize this basic right to control a significant aspect of their lives. We also believe firmly in democracy, in direct,

participatory democracy where all those involved have the right and duty to decide the processes by which they function. Inherent in this is the belief that our processes help to lessen the alienation that is so deeply rooted in our society. Inherent in this, also, is the belief that parents *do* have wisdom that can be tapped and that they often *do* know what is best for their children and that they *can* make decisions—within the framework of the basic tenets of the school.

A belief that is deeper and is the informing principle of the above two is the belief that *I am history*, that I can, I do, form my life, that what I do determines history, is history.

We have proven these beliefs time after time over the past six years: we have determined what our school is and we have successfully involved parents and staff in shared decision-making processes that determine the school. That is the best proof I know for this shared decision-making in schools. I do not think that parents are smarter or better than educators at running a school: I do think that parents and educators *working together* are better at making a school work well.

LEN SOLO

Sudbury, Mass.

FRONTIERS

Professional Independence

IN a guest editorial in *Science* for last Dec. 9, Clyde Z. Nunn assembles the results of various polls of newspaper readers, endeavoring to show that the claim of public loss of faith in science either exaggerates or asserts what isn't so. One readership study found strong public interest in health, nutrition, and environment, with readers under thirty especially concerned with environmental subjects. After noting that "the public's understanding of science is too limited to justify firm answers to questions about public appreciation of science," The *Science* writer concludes:

(i) Ambivalence, not rejection, best describes public attitudes; (ii) science is of considerable interest to Americans, but the scientific community should, when possible, relate science increasingly to problems of health, environment, energy, and society to maintain and expand this interest; and (iii) scientists and funding sources should encourage communication of science through the media (fewer science-related items appear in newspapers than the interest ratings indicate should be there, and only 11 per cent of the daily newspapers in the nation have science editors).

Whatever the facts in this uncertain matter, one important question—which Mr. Nunn does not mention—is whether reports and news stories about the findings of science actually tell what impartial scientists think about the major issues in "problems of health, environment and energy" now before the people. What if the facts have been distorted at the source? The man-in-the-street may not have the understanding to qualify as a judge of scientific matters, but he is certainly able to recognize a breakdown in integrity when it is pointed out. *Science*, in short, would do well to publish editorial comment on material which appeared in *Rain* for last December, dealing with the suppression by government contracting agencies of highly significant conclusions reached by reputable scientists who were hired by the government to do research.

There is apparently very good reason for distrust of governmentally institutionalized science on the part of the intelligent reading public. In the *Atlantic* for February 1971 Paul Jacobs reported on the twisting by the Atomic Energy Commission of the evidence of hazard in nuclear energy production, asking in conclusion: "Is it possible that nuclear energy as a cure for the power crisis may be worse than the disease itself?" The answer today must be: Not only possible but almost certainly so. A little earlier, *Environment* published a review of a book with the devastating title—"Population Control" Through Nuclear Pollution—by Arthur R. Tamplin and John W. Gofman, two scientists who worked in the AEC's Lawrence Radiation Laboratory and found themselves in strong disagreement with AEC policies.

The voices of such whistle-blowing scientists gave the AEC a bad name and the agency was finally reorganized as ERDA (Energy Research and Development Administration), a body which, unhappily, is building up an equally bad record. The December *Rain* story by Lee Johnson presents evidence indicating a tendency by ERDA "to suppress anything which (1) questions the goals of corporate-industrial America, (2) suggests that increasing numbers of Americans disagree with those goals, (3) suggests that energy questions should not be answered on technical and economic grounds alone, but thrown open to full public participation and debate which includes ethical, social and political questions, and (4) says that on-site soft technologies are the best way to go and should be installed immediately."

Lee Johnson lists several instances of suppression or distortion, having the effect of hiding the truth from the public.

A good example occurred last year. In August 1976, Stanford Research Institute (SRI) prepared a 400-page draft report on "Solar Energy in America's Future" which Stewart Brand (CQ, Fall '76, p. 68) considered "unusual, critical, insightful," and which William Metz (*Science*, Dec. 17, 1976, V. 194, p. 1260), in his article titled "The SRI Affair," called "a

recent solar study that reflected unfavorably on nuclear power," that "made some novel comparisons between solar energy and nuclear power and found that solar energy came out surprisingly favorably" and "also asked such previously ill-advised questions as what energy scenarios would lead to the best chance of survival by society."

Yet when the final document appeared from ERDA on March 1977, it was a gutted, 100-pager, although still rather risqué for an ERDA study. Major sections, on such vital topics as "net energy" and "social implementation of solar energy," were left out, and the 30 pages on "Values" or "Gestalt A, B and C" were axed to 10 pages.

Jim Benson, the contract manager at ERDA who at tempted to get the report through ERDA and out intact, eventually prepared a 38-page booklet, *Energy and Reality: Three Perceptions*, based on material removed from the final version.

What does one do about things like this besides rail at the government?

Paul Goodman had one idea. Since such issues involve professional expertise, he appealed to the professionals to stand up and get counted. If the public is to trust scientists, then the scientists have to merit trust. Trust in science, for the general public, is not trust in announced facts which ordinary people are not able to verify except by going to school for years, but trust in *men*—the highly trained specialists who know, or ought to know, that telling the impartial truth is their first professional responsibility.

This is the only way a technician can help to restore decision-making power and responsibility to the people. Scientists who show their determination in this direction earn the trust and confidence of the people. They prove that they have a moral identity independent of political authority, power, and money. (Incidentally, James Benson's 38-page pamphlet is available for a dollar from the Institute for Ecological Policies, 9208 Christopher St., Fairfax, Virginia 22030.)