

DEPARTURE AND RETURN

THE drive toward decentralization—now evident in many parts of the world—is animated by various motives, but the reason given by René Dubos in his *American Scholar* essay might be taken to generalize most of them. People, he said, "are increasingly subject to rules determined by anonymous forces which are the expressions of economic and technological imperatives." These forces now affect every aspect of our lives, directing our activity, confining our enterprise, and redefining our "freedom" in ways that are beginning to seem intolerable. So, as Dr. Dubos says, "All over the world, provinces and regions try to recover their individuality by cultivating their folklore and their traditional ways of life, their literature, and their arts."

The age of proud empire is certainly over. The Roman genius for road-building and common law no longer excites admiration, while the British flare for conquest and colonial administration invites diatribes instead of praise. Even the Founding Fathers of the United States are beginning to be regarded with suspicion: Wasn't their desire for a strong central government a serious mistake? Wouldn't the loose affiliation of the states provided by the Articles of Confederation have been a better arrangement? A powerful centralized government was supposed to usher in a better life for all, but as Edward Goldsmith now remarks in *The Stable Society*, "the human experience during the historical period in which institutionalized government and objective knowledge were first utilized for social control has been one of wars, massacres, intrigues, famines—in other words, of precisely those discontinuities which social and ecological control should eliminate." This period, he says, "is a stark contrast to that which preceded it: during the Paleolithic, man's life appears to have been as stable and satisfying as that which is

enjoyed by other forms of life on this planet until they are disturbed by man's disruptive activities."

The comparison is extreme, and there have been societies more diversely attractive than Paleolithic man's which might be chosen for models, but the temper of Mr. Goldsmith's comment seems true to the spirit of our times. However, a more acceptable account of the communitarian social ideal might be the one proposed nearly 2,500 years ago by Lao tse:

Were I ruler of a little State with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them. I would have the people look on death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armour, they should have no need to use them. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be content with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay, if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the two peoples should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

Even if Lao tse's paternalistic dream leaves something to be desired, the qualities of his village-state have much in common with the utopian visions and even experiments of today. Lao tse's pacifism is also peculiarly appealing in the present. It may come as a surprise to some readers that the U.S. Selective Service and Training Act is still a part of the law of the land and that the draft could begin at any time Congress decides to empower the Selective Service System to issue orders to young men to report for induction (after providing funds for administration). At present plans are in the works for radical changes in drafting procedure. The

September *Bulletin* of the Los Angeles Area Committee for Conscientious Objectors provides this summary:

(1) The new rules may not be a revision of the old ones. To be legally effective they will have first to be published in the Federal Register; (2) they [SSS officials] have also worked on restructuring the machinery of the System.

(1) Concerning the new regulations, one of the seemingly definitely planned new rules is that a registrant's complaint over a I-A (available for military induction) classification will *not* be heard by a local board at a Hearing until *after* he has been mailed an Order to Report for Induction; he *then* has 15 days to ask for the Hearing. If there are only one or two more regulations like this it will be quite correct to say . . . this isn't a new ball game, it's a new kind of game.

This is especially bad for the C.O. Although this perhaps effective "sweep-them-off-their-feet" maneuver is aimed at all, it is our strong opinion that it hits the C.O. registrant harder. All other objectors to a I-A classification can more easily present a *prima facie* case on short notice because their claims are objective; the C.O., with a subjective claim, needs impressive corroboration. To get this in most instances he should have had, *in advance*, informed advice, aid, and time. Further, many of them (like all other people, especially youngsters) often don't crystallize their beliefs on such matters as conscientious objection until something compelling arises.

(2) The machinery of the System will include (literally) machines such as computers. The chief plan is to do all the ordering from Washington.

All the work these men are doing is patently to speed things up and to close, as much as possible, all the . . . "loopholes." Since the period 1863-1965 produced not quite 1,000 of what lawyers call "reported cases" (nearly all appellate), and the Vietnam period produced over 1,500 *more*, it is evident that there exists much material for their thoughtful (?) attention to the end of speeding up the delivery of the young men and women to the military. [Copies of this *Bulletin* may be obtained from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, 4607 Prospect Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90027.]

For the youth who may be involved, this is a peculiarly insidious example of centralized

authority; Don't question or think, but *obey*, is the plain indication of these plans.

Meanwhile, if one is out of the reach of the military by reason of age, there are other controls and hindrances to personal freedom which keep growing more intrusive, since so many once-optional services have become practical necessities. Commercial institutions are now enormous and ordinary citizens may be overwhelmed by the lordly arrogance of bankers, insurance companies, apartment-house agents, and sometimes of even mechanics whose skills we can no longer do without. In countless ways people have lost not only their self-reliant independence, but their native capacity for it. Specialization has made almost everyone incompetent to supply the most elementary needs, and in large cities you can see long lines of people waiting patiently to be told what to do—often by some bureaucrat, who may not be snarling but who is likely to be indifferent. As a result, there is deeply felt longing to get out of the tangle of rules and directives meant to assure institutional efficiency, or mere convenience, with nothing to do with the needs or wants of the people.

In short, we have no difficulty in understanding why so many are seeking or talking about another kind of life—a life which can be shaped by the personal intelligence of the people who live it. Of course, there are several elevations for contemplating this increasingly evident yearning for change. A young fellow may say he just wants to get a piece of land somewhere—a place where no building inspector will bother him for putting up a cabin that doesn't come up to code. He'll have a garden, keep a goat, and make some article he can sell by mail, or he'll work on odd jobs available in the region. If enough young fellows do something like this, observers will call it decentralization. Meanwhile, in today's cities, there are people who are ignoring or defying authorities of various kinds, relying on the moral authority of their own absolute need and the manifest neighborhood decay and loss of morale

among owners and administrators. An article in *Community Planning Report* for Aug. 28 relates:

In Philadelphia, housing activist Milton Street has helped about 300 families become homeowners. These families did not go to banks for mortgage loans. They simply moved into abandoned housing and made needed repairs with the aid of Street's North Philadelphia Block Development Corporation. They call it "Walk-In Urban Homesteading."

In Baltimore, the St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center has helped 700 tenant families become homeowners since 1972. They provide counseling, negotiate prices between tenants and landlords, help secure mortgage loans, and in some cases outbid the "speculators" for houses on the market. Then, they sell the homes to the families that have lived in them for years.

In Washington, D.C., a neighborhood group called the Adams Morgan Organization "drew a battle line at Seaton Street" and helped nine low-income families who had been served eviction papers to bring suit against their landlords. The families now own the houses from which they were almost evicted. Their neighborhood organization persuaded a local lending association to provide financing.

While such events may seem small and unimportant, they represent a turn in human attitudes, with some recovery of individual authority. Noticing these things is like making a litmus paper test for minute changes in community life—showing that at least some people are deciding to manage their own affairs as well as they can. This is a practical form of decentralization, although without anyone going anywhere. It is evidence—like a lot of other evidences—of a mood that is gaining strength.

This brings us to the comment of a reader who says:

Whenever I read about centralization versus decentralization, I find two pretty essential considerations missing.

1. Massive shifts do not take place because we say they ought to take place or ought not to take place. They are not subject to political action. They simply take place. We are spectators (even as we, by collective actions, make these things happen). They are subject to events and developments which are

beyond our control or even beyond the control of our world leaders.

(2) Centralization and decentralization are pictured as mutually exclusive. That is a mistake. They are two faces of one and the same coin. They sustain each other. If we see regionalization reappear, that is because centralization makes it possible. And of course, today's regionalism has very little to do with the regionalism of the past. Then the region was the limit of people's reach. The island my wife grew up on, ten miles long, had three dialects and I of course was a stranger. Today we have reached the end of the earth. That has set us free to return to our regions. . . . We have not lost sight of our national interests in favor of local squabbles. What has in fact happened is that our loyalties have moved up beyond the nation state. And even those of us who are less idealistic, or less inclined to think these things through, can see that the nation state has lost some of its importance. The state no longer protects us from foreign armies or foreign competition. In fact, it sometimes seems as if the state has become the enemy. . . .

The long-awaited communications revolution—which finally appears to be gearing up for take-off—will move us a long way toward the final equilibrium of centralization-and-decentralization. A long way, also, toward Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the total Individual within total Humanity. The end of dualism. No longer either-or, but both.

These observations add some subtlety to the equation. Our correspondent seems to be suggesting that while we may be moving toward objective decentralization, we can at the same time be increasing our *subjective* centralization. Aided by advances in communications, we may feel ourselves to be members of the world. Our "country" is simply the land or region where we have made our home, which sustains our existence and has our willing service and stabilizing support.

It is true enough that such trends often seem to come about whether or not people intend them. The Crusades were meant to free the Holy Land from infidel rule, but what they actually accomplished was a healthy respect on the part of Europeans for Islamic culture and civilization, to say nothing of Saracen military skills. World War II was waged against Nazi infamy and Japanese

expansionism, but its long-term effect may prove to have been some first-hand acquaintance on the part of Americans (first soldiers, then others) with the high philosophies of the East. Who, in the West, would have heard of Gandhi, had there been no great war to give prominence to his opposition to all war? Edmund Taylor's *Richer by Asia* (1947) might be taken as an early (and perhaps the best) example of scores of works which wore away at the parochial thinking of Western man.

These are of course broad tendencies, with many exceptions to be noted. Military and commercial enterprise may take the representatives of a nation around the world, adding only to their egotism. Books like *The Ugly American* could not be written if this were not so. And in *The Reformation of War*, issued in 1923, the urbane military historian, General J. F. C. Fuller, gives this account of the typical British soldier—whether private, sergeant, subaltern, or general:

I have watched him in two long wars struggling against odds, and I learnt to appreciate his virtues, and his failings, and his indomitable courage. He is a man who possesses such natural pride of birth that, through sheer contempt for others he refuses to learn or to be defeated. He divides humanity into two classes: Englishmen and niggers, and of the second class some happen to be black and others white. He only condescends to differentiate between these subclasses by calling the latter dagoes. To him, all white folk, outside of his own little islands, are such. From these he has nothing to learn, yet he is tolerant as he would be to his dog; he has, in fact, raised the vice of contempt to a high virtue and on this virtue is the British Empire founded.

But it was in England, in 1960, that Czeslaw Milosz, an emigré Pole, described for the *Listener* (Feb. 18) the changes in attitude which he saw all about:

There has never been such curiosity about the whole past of Man on Earth, nor so many signs of exploring civilizations in their sinuous growth. We enter a sesame of our heritage, not limited to one continent. And this is accessible to the many, not only to some specialists. For instance, there has never been so great an interest in the art and music of

the past. A price has to be paid, and recorded music or reproductions of paintings have their reverse side in cheap "mass culture." There is also a danger of syncretism. Yet a new dimension of history, understood as a whole, appears in all its dependencies. We deplore the dying out of local customs and local traditions, but perhaps the rootlessness of modern man is not so great, if through individual effort he can, so to say, return home and be in contact with all the people of various races and religions who suffered, thought, and created before him.

Interestingly, what our correspondent (quoted earlier) terms the dualism of centralization/decentralization is considered by a scientific thinker under the general heading of "Departure and Return." Calling attention to the all-pervasiveness of this polarity, he says:

Among the great number of cyclical processes occurring in the universe, the cyclical isolation of systems—called here departure and return—is of foremost importance as a morphogenic process. It serves both to increase variety and optimize survivability. Genotype/phenotype, sleep/waking, dark age/renaissance are all examples of cyclical isolation. An alternative high level/low level of interaction manifests itself as concentration/diffusion in extension space and as homogenization/heterogenization in similarity space. (Albert G. Wilson, *Sixty Years*.)

In other words, the movement back and forth between decentralized and centralized social forms is the human expression of a universal and cosmic process, and depending on what you think lies behind cosmic processes, seeing this either adds to or subtracts from the dignity of the human enterprise in either direction. Something of this point of view appears in our correspondent's suggestions when he says that great movements of population are beyond our control, even though we make them happen. And there is certainly a sense in which this is true. But for individuals such moves may now be more deliberate and have in mind chosen human goals. One family may go to Idaho and develop land which promises health and a natural environment for children to grow up in—with little interference from government and less intrusion from commercial enterprise.

Another family may move to the city to obtain violin lessons for a promising child, or because a great philosopher can be heard to speak there. Cities, besides being marts of trade, are centers of learning. Ideally, different areas for the exercise of contrasting freedoms are available in centers and wide-open spaces. In the country we take part in the community of nature, while cities give hospitality to the community of minds. Our reader's idea that the "communications revolution" will put an end to this division seems reasonable enough, and it would seem to follow that as we understand these matters more clearly, we'll have a lot more to do with balancing the centralizing with the decentralizing tendencies.

But all this seems pretty dreamy, if you look at the cities of today. They are suffocators of culture and vicious enemies of ordinary health. Their governments are often corrupt, commonly desperate, and their streets are schools of dishonesty and vice. The open areas of the country are owned by corporate farmers who have driven most of the rural population to the cities in search of work, and the deserted small towns are monotonously similar in decay.

So, against odds, people are moving around, breaking loose, experimenting with inner and outer migrations. But most of all, they are *thinking* about these things. Fortunately, the world is still pretty loose-jointed in a lot of places. There are openings and interstices in the system where new ways can take root. Life is not only tenacious, it is ingenious and inventive. We may surprise ourselves during the next twenty-five or so years.

REVIEW

NEW SCIENCE—TWO LEVELS

HANDMADE (Harmony Books, 1974) is a lovely, illustrated book by two intentional wanderers, Drew and Louise Langsner, who went abroad in search of community. During their travels they lived in Greece, Switzerland, Turkey, and several other countries. They say at the end:

We left the United States with the intention of studying rural architecture, feeling instinctively that these structures held generations of wisdom that may be of benefit to those seeking a healthy relationship with the earth today. We quickly discovered that we were not satisfied taking photographs of buildings but wanted to know the people living inside these dwellings, and to learn about their lives. Thus the subject of *Handmade* expanded and we found ourselves apprenticed to our farmer and craftsmen hosts. We travelled, rather like journeymen, moving from shepherd to wheat farmer, cheese maker and cooper, until we knew it was time to put the pieces together and absorb what we had learned.

The book is filled with fine photographs, careful drawings, and intelligible descriptions of the grain of life—the traditional life—of the regions they visited. There is much on the growing and preparation of food, with numerous recipes, usually simple ones, which may please collectors of such information.

The word "holistic" has a wide range of meanings. It applies to a single living organism or individual and also to the entirety of nature or the world, considered as a unit. A holistic approach to the meaning of life forms conceptions in terms of the working and the ends of these wholes. The ends may often seem obscure, but we learn something about them by seeing how the various wholes work—how they work within themselves and in relation to other wholes, and to the larger whole which includes all. By studying all these workings, we come to see that our true search is for the rules of balance between autonomy and interdependence. The interdependence cannot be fruitful unless the autonomy is vital, and vice versa. The subtleties of all these relationships

seldom submit to classification, yet they seem capable of being known—that is, there are impressive examples of a harmony achieved, here and there around the world.

The Langsners describe the examples they were looking for:

In this book we emphasize the importance of small, tenable cycles in the development of a better world community. In many instances handcrafts and hand farming may be found more efficient than mechanized techniques. Large scale agriculture is renowned for extremely high yields. However, statistics are complex. In terms of farmer's man-hours there is no argument. But the mechanized farmer is only an operator of one cog in a process that requires incredible amounts of fossil fuels, and draws on the combined energy of an entire economy.

After citing a familiar comparison—while the Chinese wet rice farmer gets back fifty times the energy he expends on producing his crop, we get back only one twentieth of the (fossil) energy consumed by our production methods, making the Chinese peasant a thousand times more efficient, holistically speaking—the authors conclude:

The energy deficit of "factory farming" results from the cost of producing chemical fertilizers, electricity, gasoline, and farm machinery—often using non-renewable sources.

It is through whole systems whose relationships with nature are understood that we choose to attempt our solutions. . . . The satisfaction of feeling independent from the weight of a megalithic technology is another benefit of this practice. Foods taste better, bodies are healthier, even the frequency of dental caries is diminished. Other practices, such as raising one's food, composting wastes, building shelter from indigenous materials, and reforestation, involve more effort but yield greater returns for a healthy life and a sense of oneness and harmony.

The Langsners are not going to become Greek or Turkish or Bavarian peasants. Nor are they "going back to the past." Their purpose is plain enough—to bring certain practical wisdoms of the past into the present. What was once an instinctive or intuitive awareness of the laws of holistic living will become for them a rational

course—the intuitive way reinforced and amplified by deliberated understanding.

Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, who teaches at Vanderbilt University, is called a mathematical economist, but in his book, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Harvard University Press, 1971), he seems more a philosopher than anything else. Entropy is a word which covers the meaning and implications of the second law of thermodynamics. It says that once energy is spent, you can't get it back. It also says that the spending of energy is a universal cosmic process, and that life is an agency which hastens its operation. This author does not quote Buckminster Fuller's declaration that "man is the only anti-entropic force in the universe," but the idea seems to pervade many of his discussions. The book will seem difficult for the ordinary reader—you need to feel at home with some very learned language—but the philosophical asides all through its pages make careful reading worth the effort. The quality of Prof. Georgescu-Roegen's thinking is shown in a concluding passage of his introduction:

Man's natural dowry, as we all know, consists of two essentially distinct elements: (1) the *stock* of low entropy on or within the globe, and (2) the *flow* of solar energy, which slowly but steadily diminishes in intensity with the entropic degradation of the sun. . . . We need no elaborated argument to see that the maximum of life quantity requires the minimum rate of natural resources depletion. By using these resources too quickly, man throws away that part of solar energy that will still be reaching the earth for a long time after he has departed. And everything man has done during the past two hundred years or so puts him in the position of a fantastic spendthrift. There can be no doubt about it: any use of natural resources for the satisfaction of nonvital needs means a smaller quantity of life in the future. (The distinction between vital and nonvital needs—I hasten to admit with pleasure—is a dialectical one. Certainly, to plow a cornfield is a vital need, but to drive a Rolls Royce, is not). If we understand well the problem, the best use of our iron resources is to produce plows or harrows as they are needed, not Rolls Royces, not even agricultural tractors.

As a professor of economics—the science which, as we recall, starts out with the proposition that the sum total of human desires is insatiable—Prof. Georgescu-Roegen is firmly pessimistic. Only the stern mandates of nature, he thinks, will make us reform. But he is firmly hopeful about this:

The realization of these truths will not make a man less impatient and less prone to hollow wants. Only the direst necessity can constrain him to behave differently. But the truth may make us foresee and understand the possibility that mankind may find itself again in the situation in which it will find it advantageous to use beasts of burden because they work on solar energy instead of the earth's resources. It also exposes the futility of the human pride that overcame some scholars on learning that by A.D. 2000 we may be able to feed people with proteins derived from crude oil and thus solve the population problem completely and forever. Highly probable though this conversion is, we can rest assured that sometime, perhaps sooner than one may think, man will have to reorient his technology in the opposite direction—to obtain gasoline from corn, if he will still be around and using internal combustion engines. In a different way than in the past, man will have to turn to the idea that his existence is a free gift of the sun.

Our only means of informing the reader about this book is quoting from it. The text comes into being around a series of economic abstractions we but vaguely understand, but that doesn't seem to matter much, although it prevents a "review." It is the stance of the writer, his rejection of humbug, and his para-scientific outlook that comes through on almost every page. For example:

We . . . are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the problem of the ecological balance, even if limited to that between man and micro-organisms, is so complex that no human mind can comprehend it. Any cure of an infectious disease vacates an ecological niche which may turn out to be much more dangerous than the dislocated ones. Incredible though it may seem to the uninitiated, a famous microbiologist gave this counsel to his equally distinguished colleagues of a symposium: "If a universal antibiotic is found, immediately organize societies to prevent its use."

Another example:

Still more telling is the statement by James Shapiro, of the Harvard group which in November 1969 succeeded in isolating a pure gene. Anti-scientific—protested Shapiro recently—are those who "dump pesticides on Vietnam . . . perform heart transplants without first learning about rejection, and give masses of antibiotics to people who don't need them," briefly, those who interfere with the life processes without caring an iota about the unforeseen and incalculable consequences of their actions. In shocking contrast, only a few weeks thereafter Christiaan Barnard—as reported by the press—declared that "At Cape Town, what I am aiming at is the brain transplant." Had he thought about this project beyond the purely surgical dexterity, he would certainly have said "body transplant," not "brain transplant." My point is that in the operation Barnard is hoping to achieve it is the brain's donor, not the brain's recipient, whose life is saved. Barnard will certainly not be able to save the life of a genial scholar struck by a fatal cerebral tumor, for example, by transplanting the brain of a moron donor.

This writer believes that the fundamental business of man, and of a great deal of science, is learning how human beings think. No machine can help us in this. Echoing Vico, he concludes by saying: "Only one man's mind can find out how another man's mind works by using the bridge provided by the familiar mental categories and propensities that are common to both."

COMMENTARY ANOTHER TURNING-POINT?

READERS impressed by the insight of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (see Review) who would like to read more of what this specialist turned generalist has to say—and in fairly simple form—may find in his contribution to Herman Daly's *Toward a Steady-State Economy* (W. H. Freeman, 1973) what they are looking for. In fact, this book as a whole is a successful attempt by scientific and economic thinkers to show that sound science and sound ethics support each other when the short-term goals of an exploitive and acquisitive mode of life no longer monopolize attention.

Georgescu-Roegen begins his paper by pointing out that while physics has long since abandoned the mechanistic dogma, economists have clung to it with stubborn determination. Their theories, moreover, are all based on assumptions which neglect the finite character of the earth's resources and ignore the fact that the energy obtained from these resources is irrecoverable after it has been used. His analysis is based on an understanding of the law of entropy. Free or available energy—as in a piece of coal we can burn to get heat—means low entropy. Smoke, cinders, and ashes represent high entropy. We can't use them. The economic enterprise is the pursuit of low entropy, in one or another form.

Exploring the illusions of classical economics, Georgescu-Roegen says:

Economic thought has always been influenced by the economic issues of the day. It has also reflected—with some lag—the trend of ideas in the natural sciences. A salient illustration of this correlation is the very fact that, when economists began ignoring the natural environment in representing the economic process, the event reflected a turning point in the temper of the entire scholarly world. The unprecedented achievements of the Industrial Revolution so amazed everyone with what man might do with the aid of machines that the general attention became confined to the factory. The

landslide of spectacular discoveries triggered by the new technical facilities strengthened this general awe for the power of technology. It also induced the literati to overestimate and, ultimately, to oversell to their audiences the powers of science. Naturally, from such a pedestal one could not even conceive that there is any real obstacle inherent in the human condition. . . .

With natural scientists preaching that science can do away with all limitations felt by man and with the economists following suit in not relating the analysis of the economic process to the limitations of man's material environment, no wonder that no one realized that we cannot produce "better and bigger" refrigerators, automobiles, or jet planes, without producing also "better and bigger" waste. So, when everyone (in the countries with "better and bigger" industrial production) was, literally, hit in the face by pollution, scientists as well as economists were taken by surprise. But even now no one seems to see that the cause of all this is that we have failed to acknowledge the entropic nature of the economic process.

Instead of relying on the energy supplied to us by the sun, we have made ourselves dependent on machines and the planetary stores of energy to keep them running. The ox or water buffalo, fuelled by sunlight and chlorophyll, is replaced by the tractor, which requires rapid depletion of the earth's energy resources. The same replacement occurs in the use of artificial fertilizers. "The upshot is that the mechanization of agriculture is a solution which, though inevitable in the present impasse, is anti-economical in the long run."

The hard common sense of this analysis may take time to spread around, but the spur of want will probably hasten its acceptance. The ethical and ecological appeal of the argument has become obvious.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THOUGHTS ON COMPULSION

IN *New American Review* for April, 1969 (No. 6)
George Dennison, author of *The Lives of Children*, discusses the atmosphere created by A. S. Neill at Summerhill, throwing a useful light on the whole question of compulsion in education. He begins:

In our time, the most important example of freedom in education has been A. S. Neill's Summerhill in England. It is a residence school—a community, really—and its laws and customs are worked out by all participants. In spite of the great popularity of Neill's book, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child-Rearing*, the school itself still has an undeserved reputation for anarchy. Its actual distinctiveness lies not in the absence of regulations but in the kinds of regulations it makes use of, and in its manner of arriving at them. There is a General School Meeting every Saturday night. All questions pertaining to the life of the community are discussed here and are settled by vote. Where certain kinds of rules (e.g., bedtime regulation for the young) tend to survive in one basic form, the others are changed frequently or refined. Penalties are extremely specific. One lonely boy, for example, was cured of stealing when his fellows voted to give him money for each offense.

The question of course is: What sort of general morale and temper of human relations are needed to support this way of "running" a school? Neill was no doubt largely responsible, but there are English family and cultural traditions which silently contribute. It would be, as many have observed, much more difficult to have a school like that in the United States. But this sad fact does not in the least reduce the importance of the ideal. Though difficult, it is still *right*. Self-imposed rules or compulsion have a constructively different effect on children.

To give more of an idea of what it was like at Summerhill, George Dennison quotes the following from a report by John Holt after his visit there:

It was the young children, six, seven, eight, who made the strongest impression on me. The older children, though free, seemed not to have had their freedom long enough to be able to relax with it and take it for granted. The little ones were quite different. Occasionally, very rarely, in a particularly happy family, I have seen little children who have seemed wholly secure, at ease, natural, and happy. But never before this meeting had I seen so many of them, in one place, least of all in a school. They were joyous, spontaneous, unaffected. I wondered why this should be, and at the party I thought I saw why. More times than I could count, I would see a little child come up to a big one, and with a word, a gesture, or a clutch of the hand, claim his attention. I never saw one rebuffed, or treated anything but lovingly. The big kids were always picking them up, hugging them, swinging them around, carrying them on their shoulders. For the little children, Summerhill was a world of big people, all of whom could be enjoyed, trusted, and counted on. It was like living in an enormous family, but without the rivalries and jealousies that too often plague our too small and too possessive families. . . .

Tough-hearted indeed would be the reader who is not made a bit melancholy by this idyll! How could *we* ever do that? But whatever we might be able to do in this direction, the important point is that doing it has absolutely nothing to do with public laws and legal issues. It is true that the heavy institutional atmosphere usually created by compulsion would prevent any such accomplishment. This is the essential argument in behalf of voluntarism—for both children and adults—but eliminating compulsion would only make a better atmosphere *possible*, not assure it.

George Dennison considers this question:

Summerhill is our chief point of reference, too, for the question of compulsory attendance. This is an issue much discussed by libertarian teachers, and is one that will become important on a larger scale if the present liberalizing tendency in education should ever really alter our public schools. Should we compel attendance or not? Neill tells us that at Summerhill the children are in no way pressured into attending classes. Unfortunately, he does not tell us enough of what happens in the meantime. Some few purists that I have observed have bent over backwards on this issue, creating a kind of vacuum between themselves and their students in order to give the students'

volition enough room to mature. This, it seems to me, is an error. It arises, in good part, from posing the problem in terms of attendance and compulsion.

Called for is an understanding of people—children—not an argument about rules:

. . . the whole issue, as we know it in this country, testifies to a really peculiar anxiety and lack of faith on the part of adults. Would children really abandon school if they were no longer compelled to attend? Or, more properly, would the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and the participation in large-scale social life with their peers suddenly lose all attractiveness?

This question is important and should not have a short answer. We are talking about the attitudes of, say, boys and girls in early adolescence, which seems to cover the ages when the young feel the oppressions of compulsion most acutely. A few years ago, in the Los Angeles area, there was a school begun by a Rogerian psychologist which took students who were under threat of jail or similar punishment if they did not attend some kind of school. These youngsters were filled with disgust and rebellion. Sometimes, the psychologist said, it took a whole year for them to realize that in her school they were really free. Then they began to show some spontaneous interest in the opportunities afforded for study. The pace of this change back to normal desire to participate varied with individuals. The point is that it did happen, and most of the youngsters were able to graduate from high school with good confidence and good marks. They had found that they could do it themselves, because they wanted to.

But a *demand* that they respond in this way would have utterly failed. It was their teacher's faith in them that made the response possible.

Mr. Dennison continues, providing a qualified defense of schooling:

The idea of school—though not in its present bureaucratized form—is one of the most powerful social inventions that we possess. It rests squarely on the deepest of necessities and draws on motives we could not disavow even if we wished to. Teaching is

one of the few natural functions of adults. Vis à vis the young, we simply cannot escape it. Further, our legitimate demand of the young—that in one style or another they be worthy inheritors of our world—is deeply respected by the young themselves. They form their notions of selfhood, individual pride, citizenship, etc., in precisely the terms that we put forward, converting our demands into goals and even into ideas of glory. I cannot believe that all this is so feeble that we need to rest the function of education on acts of compulsion, with all the damage that this entails.

The damage is of course hardly noticeable in schools which are airy, comfortable, and well staffed by friendly people. The children never think about staying home—or if they do, it is mostly in a joking mood. The compulsion is there, however, and its effect emerges in a number of ways. For example, a month or so ago, a public school official in Los Angeles declared on TV that the child, until he graduates from high school, "belongs to the State." This claim is bound to communicate itself at all levels, affecting teachers as well as pupils. John Holt has gone to some pains to catalogue its many effects. (In *Growing Without Schooling*—a newsletter available at \$10 a year, 308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.)

The really important considerations are given by Mr. Dennison:

school attendance, or classroom attendance, will take a simpler and If compulsion is damaging and unwise, its antithesis—a vacuum of free choice—is unreal. And in fact, we cannot deal with the problem in these terms, for the real question is not, "What shall we do about classes?" but, "What shall we do about our relationships with the young? How shall we deepen them? enliven them, make them freer, more amiable, and at the same time more serious? How shall we broaden the area of mutual experience?" If these things can be done, the question of more logical form, will lie closer to the fact that classroom instruction is after all a *method* (one among many) and deserves to be criticized in terms of its efficiency. It is not the be-all and end-all of a child's existence.

For more along this line, see Dennison's *The Lives of Children* (Random House, 1969).

FRONTIERS Psychological Frontier

REPORTS of campaigns for alternative sources of energy and the strengthening of community self-sufficiency throw light on the practical frontiers of social change, but the way people are thinking about present institutions is of equal importance. For example, an anarchist writer, Jack Robinson, reflects on the implications of what he calls Andrew Young's "truthful gaffe" in telling a French reporter that the United States has "hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people in prison whom I would call political prisoners." Naturally enough, Robinson supports Young's claim, quoting Thoreau's classic statement: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also prison." He continues (in *Freedom* for July 22):

It was no secret to Mr. Young [U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations] that numerous Black Panthers, not to mention several prisoners framed on grounds which can be interpreted as political—for example the nine blacks and one white sentenced to a total of 272 years in North Carolina—are political prisoners in the United States. It was however a State secret to many patriotic Americans—and a senator from Georgia thought Young should be impeached for, one supposes, giving away State secrets.

Some paradoxes may be added. Are there times when a non-political prisoner becomes one, by reason of a change in attitude? For example, Caryl Chessman was arrested on what might be called a "morals charge," carrying the death penalty. But if ever a man rehabilitated himself in prison, Chessman did. He was really executed for his refusal to conform or plead for his life—behavior which the State of California found extremely embarrassing. In other words, the character of Chessman's offense changed into a *political* issue: He was fighting for the correct application of due process. Surely it is fair to say that at this point he had become a political prisoner!

What this suggests is that as the meaning of definitions becomes morally accurate, they become popularly slippery. And this, in turn, is a way of saying that really accurate definitions are politically unusable, unless you are, say, an anarchist thinker true to an ideal or utopian conception of the social order.

We certainly need the anarchist thinkers, if only to keep track of the relativism of practically all political definition. For example, the following by Jack Robinson seems quite accurate as a trend analysis:

As the State becomes more embracing, even in this country [England], to protect us against our own excesses, it is obvious that prisoners become more and more numerous and offenses become more and more common.

The category of "political prisoner" was originally created (like the right of asylum) to preserve some democratic semblance and to observe "fair play." After all, if the opposition, by the fortune of politics, loses and finds itself in prison, it was once necessary to treat it honorably because next time it might be *your* party which loses out. This year's political prisoner may be the next decade's prime minister. A truism borne out by the history of the former British Empire.

Non-moralistic English realism, apparently, created the category. But this seems nonsense, today. *Our* political prisoners are not unlucky politicians but thinking underdogs. So the question becomes: Which definition are you going to take seriously, in your campaign for the right? Are you going to adopt a definition that people are likely to understand and agree with, or will you try to bring them up to date in their socio-philosophical views? What is "relevance" in a choice of this sort? Obviously, there will be differences among the best of men and women on this question. The important thing is to grasp what they are doing and see what they mean.

Some formidable facts bearing on this question are recited by Earl E. Talbot, a man who was in prison in Texas when he wrote the following:

The United States imprisons people at a higher rate than any other industrialized country: 230 individuals per 100,000 annually confined in the "land of the free." Whereas in the Netherlands the average is 18 per 100,000—one twelfth of the rate of our country.

With the possible exception of political prisoners in totalitarian states, prisoners in American penitentiaries serve the *harsh* sentences in the world. In 1974, 98% were serving sentences of *more* than one year. In contrast, 91% of Swedish inmates were serving *less* than one year! Prisoners in the United States serve sentences of several *years* for crimes which would draw only *months* in the enlightened Scandinavian countries. . .

Norman Carlson, Director of the Bureau of Prisons, seems to recognize the problem. In a recent speech he said, "The prison population of this country has gone up 25% in the past two years and is still rising. The number of people in carcerated has reached an all-time high of 283,000 sentenced adult offenders. . . . although we have no precise count, all indications are that the situation in local jails is even worse. . . . our first concern should be to keep as many individuals as possible out of institutions consistent with public safety. Efforts should be made to expand community programs to accommodate convicted offenders not considered a danger to the community. (*Peacemaker*, Sept. 1.)

The Director of the Bureau of Prisons has a congestion problem. He speaks to that troubling situation with a degree of common sense, describing the "halfway houses" already in operation around the country. Earl Talbot agrees, but remarks that there are prison-routine obstacles in the way of releasing men to these centers. (For an informing account of one such halfway house—quite successful, with a fine record—see any issue of *Betterway*, published monthly by Betterway Inc., 700 Middle Ave., Elyria, Ohio 44035.)

For a concluding irony, we quote from S P R Charter's new book *Outrage*. After a passage proposing that the colleges and universities of the country should grow as much as they can of the food needed to feed their students (with the students doing the work), he adds:

Parenthetically, isn't it strange and pointed that in the USA the most nearly self-contained units in terms of food each housing thousands of people, are the prisons of the country, with their prison farms and bakeries?