

INSTRUCTION ON THE WAY

IF you want the world to wake up—the people, that is, who need to wake up—"What you have to hope for," Wendell Berry said recently, "are catastrophes that will be instructive but not devastating."

Well, who needs to be waked up? In some sense all of us, no doubt, but in this case, since Berry was speaking of economic processes and goals, the need is on the part of those who manage our predominantly economic society, and also those who made them the managers and keep them there.

We started out with this because from recent reading it appears clear that more or less what Berry ordered is now coming our way—a very instructive catastrophe—and whether or not it can be kept from being devastating remains to be seen.

As to the reading: in the Jan. 1 *Washington Spectator*, a twice-a-month newsletter, the editor, Tristram Coffin, collects a long series of quotations from banking experts, financial writers on leading newspapers, and columnists who analyze economics. They all comment on the public debt of the United States, on how it got so enormous, and on what, if anything, can be done about it. One of these writers notes that the total public debt, as of last August, was \$1.57 trillion, which includes an increase of \$400 billion since 1981. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the deficit for the fiscal year of 1985 will reach almost \$200 billion and perhaps go over that figure. According to Felix Rohatyn, who helped rescue New York City from bankruptcy:

The budget deficit is causing the national debt to grow at a rate almost twice that of GNP. This is a prescription for national bankruptcy. If that rate continues, interest on the national debt will grow to more than \$200 billion a year by the end of the decade.

Other opinions:

The *Christian Science Monitor* reported in November: "The falling value of the U.S. dollar on foreign exchange markets has created a new concern among some economists: that the 'virtuous economic circle' of the last two years will turn into a 'vicious circle' of renewed inflation and stagnation."

A *Washington Post* editorial states: "The signs of profound economic instability are getting clearer. The dollar is overvalued. The budget deficit is now compounding, as the Treasury borrows to pay interest on borrowing. American standards of living are being raised by the enormous amounts of foreign money pouring into the country, but that won't last forever. Within a year, this country will have a bigger foreign debt than Brazil or Mexico."

Lawrence L. Kreicher of Irving Trust of New York believes that the balance of payments deficit will rise to \$125 billion, "so interest rates will climb" to attract foreign capital.

Economics columnist Hobart Rowen cites "a banking system creaky enough, according to Treasury Secretary Regan, to have sprouted 70 failures last year plus 20 S&L failures."

A basic element in the American economy is agriculture. Mr. Coffin takes note of the fact that a great many farmers are in trouble. Of farmers with outstanding loans, 17% could not make payments in 1984. More such failures are expected this year. Moreover—

The farm depression is sweeping into business and farm machinery as well. Ten Wisconsin counties asked for emergency small business loans, because the lack of farm income has hurt retailers. Caterpillar Tractor announced layoffs of 2,450 workers in Illinois and Indiana.

The *Economist* believes the next big shock to the U.S. economy will be from farm loans. Farmers owe "well over \$190 billion—much of it to small agricultural banks, almost 7% of which had losses in 1983." Last summer and autumn, 10 banks with 25% of their loans to farmers failed. Over a quarter of the

loans to the Farmers Home Administration were delinquent.

Another serious problem—perhaps the major one—is the bad loans that our banks have made. Close to 800 banks are on the "special problem list" because they are late in interest payments. Most banks, it is said, have lent amounts that "far exceed their reserves."

The problems are not only farm loans but foreign loans made in 1970 when the banks had petro-dollars galore. For example, Manufacturers Hanover Trust has made an estimated 15.8% of its loans to six "troubled developing countries," Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, the Philippines and Chile. Argentina has asked the banks for \$5.45 billion in new loans and a 14-year period in which to repay its outstanding debts.

The unstable political situation in at least three of these nations could mean that the principal will never be repaid and that banks will be fortunate to get interest. The Dean Witter Reynolds financial report says that "the financial condition of the New York banks" is a "major subject" in Europe. Bank analysts there say the banks are in trouble "and there are few if any positive remedies for this 'disaster. . . . They appear convinced that a 'cold shower' awaits the economy."

Meanwhile, at home, plants are closing around the country, throwing skilled workers out of jobs or to work in the service industries at much lower pay. For a conclusion, Coffin relates:

The Census Bureau last winter reported "a rapid increase in poverty from 1979 to 1982, even if the value of food stamps, public housing, Medicare and Medicaid benefits were counted as income. . . . Counting only cash income, there were 26.1 million poor people in 1979 and 34.4 million in 1982." (*New York Times*.)

Writing on "The Debt Crisis" in *Resurgence* for last November/December, John McClaughry begins:

The world of international finance is moving steadily toward a major calamity, and it is rapidly becoming obvious that the great bulk of the coming economic pain will be generously distributed among those who had nothing whatsoever to do with causing the problem: the common people.

McClaughry, readers may be interested to know, is President of the Institute for Liberty and Community, Concord, Vermont. He is also on the board of E. F. Schumacher Society. His discussion of the origin of the financial "calamity" is brief but convincing. He says:

The fateful war in Viet Nam produced large American budget deficits. As a result, the U.S. dollar became weaker and weaker in the world financial markets. In 1971 President Nixon finally terminated all connection between the dollar and gold, removing the only effective discipline to runaway money creation by the central banks.

Then in 1973 the Arabs began to jack up the price of oil. This resulted in huge transfers of Western currency balances to Arab accounts in the big international banks. The banks were obliged to find someone to borrow these balances to produce a stream of interest payments sufficient to cover the interest due the Arab depositors—and, of course yield a dazzling profit.

Mr. McClaughry now makes a point worth remembering:

The big banks might have scoured the countryside to locate worthy borrowers—independent small businesses, cooperatives, worker-owned factories, and the like. But it is not in the nature of big banks to do such things. That requires high administrative costs and uncertain risks. And so the big banks, as usual more interested in easy profits than in financing the sound community-based economies of their own people, sent their salesmen abroad to lend to foreign governments.

For, it is declared in the lending doctrine of the big banks, "governments do not default," a doctrine which blithely ignores sovereign defaults stretching back to 1327, when Edward III repudiated his foreign debts and brought down two famous Italian banking houses. And thus a second stage of this calamity began. Not only were the common people of the Western world denied access to this gigantic pool of loan funds—funds which their consumption of oil had created—but their governments and banks saw to it that the funds were transferred en masse to centralized state governments of the Eastern Bloc and the Third World whose rulers squandered what they did not steal in financing top-down, bureaucratic "development" schemes, and in consuming more imported goods—notably Arab oil.

Now we are entering the third stage, which will be characterized either by widespread and open defaults by the debtor nations, or by elaborately disguised efforts to mask de facto defaults with elaborate loan reschedulings. Either way, the common people will have to suffer.

The present strategy of the banks, McClaughry says, is to pour borrowed money into the International Monetary Fund, which then lends it to insolvent borrowers who use it to keep up their interest payments to the big banks. The IMF imposes stringent conditions on these borrowers, "aimed at shrinking their imports from the West (causing unemployment in export industries) and expanding their exports to the West (producing fierce competition for domestic industries)."

All this is ultimately financed by the common people, through taxation, or higher interest rates, or the relentless depreciation of their savings through central bank inflation. There is of course no requirement that the IMF loans be used in any way to finance the prosperity of the common people—the independent small businesses, the cooperatives, the worker-owned industries, the village credit unions—of the Third World countries.

What should "the people" do about all these nefarious and deceptive undertakings? They should, McClaughry says, rise up and prevent the government from bailing out the big banks, which distributed generous loans so carelessly. They should also, he adds, put "a stop to further IMF quota increases and to schemes for transferring the near worthless loans from the big banks to the taxpayers."

And it means strong restrictions on the power of central banks to create "money" out of thin air, backed by nothing more than the promises of the bankers and experts and politicians who have led us to the brink of this chaos.

Second, they should insist that Western aid to the Third World be channeled through nongovernmental people-to-people organizations which aim to improve the economic prospects of the people, in their neighborhoods and villages, and under their own control, making use of technology appropriate to their needs. If only a fraction of Western aid to the Third World since World War II that was wasted or stolen could have been put at the

disposal of the people themselves, working together to produce goods of real value, a dramatic start would have been made in coping with the grinding poverty and political instability of many Third World lands.

Finally, he suggests that communities or regions take steps to protect themselves against the reduction to worthlessness of official currencies, in the attempt to salvage "the reputations and balance sheets of the big banks." They might do this by the issuing of alternative currencies backed by reserves in essential commodities. This, he says, has been successfully tried and found to work—in Scotland and New England in the nineteenth century, and in Austria in the twentieth. Government attempts to suppress such grassroots remedies would have to be resisted, since such efforts by officialdom are to be expected. Mr. McClaughry concludes:

We are, all of us, likely victims of the coming economic debacle, which is caused directly by overgrown economic institutions, collaborating with overgrown national governments in the exercise of special privilege, pursuing narrowly defined economic goals to the exclusion of the well-being of humanity both at home and abroad, subsidizing waste, incompetence and corruption instead of investing in thrift, industry, value and reputation, wholly unconcerned about anything but their own power and perquisites.

It is time that the common people, both of the West and of the Third World, began to extricate themselves as best they can from the difficulties imposed on them by their governments and their economic and financial elite. In the long run, sound local economies, where local people, businesses, and financial institutions produce things of real value to people, will prove to be the salvation of the race.

Vast international economic institutions, making use of monopoly and special privilege conferred by their handmaiden governments, manipulating worthless promises, attempting ever more desperate expedients to stave off approaching collapse, are to be pitied. Their passing will, however, largely go unmourned.

We might say that John McClaughry has made the coming catastrophe quite instructive, before it happens. He has also shown how it might be made salutary but not "devastating." But

what he proposes certainly underlines Wendell Berry's further observation that the age of the individual is over. Not just understanding but full cooperation at the community level would be required to reduce the impact of the economic collapse. Is the disintegration of the present society and way of doing things sufficient to produce the disillusionment that seems a prerequisite to a deliberated order of community autonomy such as he proposes? Does anything like that maturity and, indeed, courage, yet exist? Two or three Bellamys, a half dozen Schumachers, and at least one Arthur Morgan, if we had them for leaders, might put it over. Yet we ought not to think of it as a "national" movement, but perhaps as a bioregional movement, taking somewhat different forms around the country.

Have we left something out? Yes, we have. We've left out a grassroots educational effort along the lines of the thinking of, say, a merger of the ideas of Thoreau, Berry, and John Holt. Called for is almost complete redefinition of what human life is about, what it is for, and how it might be lived for both individual and community benefit in self-support and community enjoyment. Thoreau's ideas are the heart of the matter. No matter how we dilute him, we shall still be gainers from even a little of his example and advice.

We have been reading lately in the first section of *Walden*, titled "Economy," which seems appropriate enough. He knew well that he was a minority of one, yet that did not deter him. In one place he began with a wry humor:

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can old man, you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind,—I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons the enterprises of another like stranded vessels. . . .

It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward

civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them; or even to look over the day-books of the merchants, to see what it was that men most commonly bought at the stores, what they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence; as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors.

Now comes a musing discussion of what he calls the "necessaries of life," which of course turn out to be food, shelter, and clothing. But all, he shows, have become far more elaborate and complicated than they need be. What else is a man likely to want, or need?

At the present day, and in this country, as I find by my own experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade, wheelbarrow, &c., and for the students, lamplight, stationery, and access to a few books, rank next to necessities, and can all be obtained at a trifling cost. Yet some, not wise, go to the other side of the globe, to barbarous and unhealthy regions, and devote themselves to trade for ten or twenty years, in order that they may live,—that is, keep comfortably warm,—and die in New England at last. The luxuriously rich are not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot; as I implied before, they are cooked, of course *à la mode*.

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none had been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward. We know not much about them. It is remarkable that *we* know so much of them as we do. The same is true of the more modern reformers and benefactors of their race. None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what *we* should call voluntary poverty.

Why are we quoting Thoreau? Because he is the best instructor we have in learning to live like human beings. And that, surely, is what we need, and will need more and more in the years of ordeal which lie ahead. Thoreau may not speak directly, on a one-to-one basis, to our present

sense of need, which grows more and more specific. Yet this mode of indirection is characteristic of all real educators. They can only supply the right raw material with which we may educate ourselves. If there is no imaginative inference by the learner, no education takes place.

Reading Thoreau is something like living a life; what symmetry it gains we must contribute. And so we end with the following:

If I should attempt to tell how I have desired to spend my life in years past, it would probably surprise those of my readers who are somewhat acquainted with its actual history. It would certainly astonish those who know nothing about it. I will only hint at some of the enterprises which I have cherished.

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment, to toe that line. You will pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from its very nature. I would gladly tell all that I know about it, and never paint "No Admittance" on my gate.

REVIEW

AN UNEVEN REPORT

A BOOK that we have been struggling to understand—for too long and with little success—is *Nietzsche* by Martin Heidegger, the second volume of Heidegger's four on the German iconoclast, brought out last year by Harper & Row (\$19.95) in a translation by David Krell, who is the editor of them all. Except for a little reading of Nietzsche years ago—a vain attempt to get through *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and some enjoyment of certain of his books as the work of an unruly and often brilliant disciple of Schopenhauer—we brought little knowledge of him to this Heidegger volume. We now seem to have less, which may be a healthful state of mind.

Heidegger finds two essential themes in Nietzsche's philosophy—the will to power and the "eternal recurrence of the same." These themes are complementary and essential to each other. The return of the same provides the field where the will to power must operate—and we should note that the will to power is the nature of Being—all the beings that are. But there are no examples, no illustrations of what he means. All through this book we kept wondering why both Nietzsche and Heidegger speak of the doctrine of eternal return as though it were a great discovery and also hard to bear, when it seems common sense to say that we encounter the same situations again and again. It is because of this endless repetition of happenings that we are able to acquire knowledge, speak of the laws of nature, and from experience learn to make predictions. Events and our experience are obviously cyclic in character, and why should this be such a burden? It is simply a condition of life. Heidegger speaks of the doctrine of return as Nietzsche's "most abysmal thought" and treats it as a great mystery from which, he says, there are only two routes of escape:

Either one avers that this thought of Nietzsche's is a kind of 'mysticism that our thinking should not bother to confront.

Or one avers that this thought is as old as the hills, that it boils down to the long-familiar cyclical notion of cosmic occurrence. Which notion can be found for the first time in Western philosophy in Heraclitus.

This second piece of information, like all information of that sort, tells us absolutely nothing. What good is it if someone determines with respect to a particular thought that it can be found, for example, "already" in Leibniz or even "already" in Plato? What good are such references when they leave what Leibniz and Plato were thinking in the same obscurity as the thought they claim to be clarifying with the help of these historical allusions?

This seems unnecessarily cavalier, to say the least. One does not dispose of Leibniz and Plato with a wave of the hand; the fact is, there is no novelty at all in the "Eternal Recurrence of the Same," but only a restatement of one of the universal processes of all life and being. Why try to patent the idea? Why make discussion of it so *heavy*?

Since our effort to profit from reading this book has proved so fruitless, we might conclude by speaking of three ideas which are generally used to characterize Nietzsche's thought. He was, it seems, a better man and thinker than popular interpretation has allowed. Citing the familiar passage about the death of God in *Zarathustra*, Heidegger in effect asks, Does he mean that God is *really* dead? and replies:

Yes and no! Yes, he is dead. But which God? The God of "morality," the Christian God is dead—the "Father" in whom we seek sanctuary, the "Personality" with whom we negotiate and bare our hearts, the "Judge" with whom we adjudicate, the "Paymaster" from whom we receive our virtues reward, that God with whom we "do business." Yet where is the mother who will take pay for loving her child? The God who is viewed in terms of morality, this God alone is meant when Nietzsche says "God is dead." He died because human beings murdered him. They murdered him when they reckoned his divine grandeur in terms of their petty needs for recompense, when they cut him down to their own size. That God fell from power because he was a "blunder" of human beings who negate themselves and negate life. In one of the preliminary sketches for *Zarathustra* Nietzsche

writes: "God suffocated from theology; and morals from morality." Well, then, God and gods can die? In a preliminary study to *The Birth of Tragedy* sketched circa 1870, quite early in his career, Nietzsche notes: "I believe in the ancient Germanic dictum, 'All gods must die.'"

As for the meaning which "will to power" had for Nietzsche, in some collateral reading while working on this book we found clarifying material on this question in the second volume of Walter Kaufmann's *Discovering the Mind* (with long sections on both Nietzsche and Heidegger). "Plainly," Kaufmann says, "Nietzsche, unlike many of his detractors, did not associate 'power' exclusively or even primarily with military or political power." He gives several quotations in evidence. One is a note in *The Gay Science*:

The Germans think that *strength* must reveal itself in hardness and cruelty; then they submit with fervor and admiration: they are suddenly rid of their pitiful weakness . . . and they devoutly enjoy *terror*. That there is strength in mildness and stillness, they do not believe easily. They miss strength in Goethe.

Another is a note to *The Will to Power*: "I assess the *power* of a *will* by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage." To Nietzsche's mind, Kaufmann says, "one-upmanship, aggressiveness, jingoism, militarism, racism, conformity, resignation to a drab life, and the desire for Nirvana were all expressions of weakness." A longer passage is from *The Antichrist*:

The most spiritual men, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction . . . their job is self-conquest, asceticism becomes in them nature, need, instinct. . . . Knowledge—a form of asceticism. They are the most venerable kind of man; that does not preclude their being the most cheerful and the kindest. They rule not because they want to but because they *are*. . . . When the exceptional human treats the mediocre more tenderly than himself and his peers, this is not mere courtesy of the heart—it is simply his *duty*.

Heidegger also corrects the familiar image of Nietzsche as the advocate of the ruthless superman. In *Zarathustra*, speaking of the transition from the man of the past to the

Overman, he has the teacher say: "For *that man be redeemed from revenge*—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms." Commenting, Heidegger says:

How strange, how alien these words must seem to the customary view of Nietzsche's philosophy that we have furnished to ourselves. Is not Nietzsche supposed to be the one who goads our will to power, incites us to a politics of violence and war, and sets the "blond beast" on his rampage?

The words "that man be redeemed from revenge" are even italicized in the text. Nietzsche's thought thinks in the direction of redemption from the spirit of revenge. His thinking would minister to a spirit which, as freedom from vengefulness, goes before all mere fraternizing—but also before all vestiges of the sheer will to punish. It would minister to a spirit that abides before all efforts to secure peace and before all conduct of war, a spirit quite apart from that which wills to establish and secure *pax*, peace, by pacts. The space in which such freedom from revenge moves is equidistant from pacifism, political violence, and calculating neutrality. In the same way, it lies outside feeble neglect of things and avoidance of sacrifice, outside blind intervention and the will to action at any price.

Nietzsche's reputation as a "free spirit" arises from the spirit of freedom from revenge.

"*That man be redeemed from revenge.*" If we pay heed even in the slightest way to this spirit of freedom in Nietzsche's thinking, as its principal trait, then the prior image of Nietzsche—which is still in circulation—will surely disintegrate.

One other discussion by Heidegger of Nietzsche's stance deserves notice. Here he is drawing on maxims formulated during the period of *Zarathustra*. One of these points out that self-reliant individuals must stand on their own. Another declares: " 'I no longer believe in anything'—that is the correct way for a *creative* human being to think." Heidegger asks:

What does it mean to say "I no longer believe in anything"? Usually such an asseveration is testimony to "absolute skepticism" and "nihilism," doubt and despair of all knowledge, all order, and hence a sign of flight in the face of all decision and commitment; normally it is an expression of dissolution, where nothing holds and nothing is worth the trouble. Yet

in the present instance unbelief and unwillingness to take-for-true mean something else. They mean refusal to embrace without further ado whatever is pre-given refusal to rest content and delude oneself with merely ostensible decisions; refusal to shut one's eyes to one's own complacency.

For Nietzsche, he goes on, it means:

"I will not have life come to a standstill at *one* possibility, *one* configuration; I will allow and grant life its inalienable right to become, and I shall do this by prefiguring and projecting new and higher possibilities for it, creatively conducting life out beyond itself." The creator is thus necessarily a nonbeliever, granted the designated sense of belief as bringing to a standstill.

This seems clear enough, yet one longs for a writer who does not require elaborate commentary on what he says in order to be understood. For example, Arthur Morgan, in his *Search for Purpose*, says virtually the same thing as what Nietzsche meant, yet requires no further explanation:

Perhaps the most difficult decision I ever made was that my own deep conditioning should be examined. When I did arrive at that conclusion I went far beyond the immediate issue I arrived at the conclusion that free, critical inquiry cannot be free so long as there is an emotional drag holding one to particular beliefs. Desire or intent to justify a particular belief or attitude leads to unrepresentative selection and inaccurate weighing of evidence. It would be my aim not to try to make myself believe any doctrine or theory, nor to try not to believe. I would want my beliefs and opinions to be my best judgment from the evidence, not adopted because of comfort or courage I would get from believing.

COMMENTARY
MUSING ON EDUCATION

EVERY now and then we get a letter from a reader who, commenting on something said in *MANAS* about the need for education, asks, challengingly, "Education for whom?" and then goes on to point out how much the answer will affect anything that is said. Or as one subscriber did, he may also say that each one has his own interests, direction, and pace of learning, and then wonder how, this being the case, education can be "planned"!

What such comments seem to neglect is that all real teachers know these things perfectly well and make them the foundation of everything they do. In recognition of this our lead article for this week calls for "a grassroots educational effort along the lines of the thinking of, say, a merger of the ideas of Thoreau, Wendell Berry, and John Holt," concerned with "what human life is about, what it is for, and how it might be lived for both individual and community benefit in self-support and community enjoyment." For a swift generalization, the proposal seems comprehensive enough. And if you go to the writers named, the subject is opened up by illustration after illustration. Moreover, it seems quite reasonable to go to these writers because they all exercise a great deal of influence, affecting the lives of their readers.

There is, after all, only one kind of real education—self-education. Good teachers do not exactly teach, but they find ways of stirring others to teach themselves. People can of course transfer the "facts" they know to other minds, but growth in understanding must be individually accomplished, and any "influence" which gets in the way of this is anti-educational. That is why Nietzsche said that "belief" brings one to a standstill. A comfortable belief is a substitute for knowledge. Yet we all have beliefs, and we can hardly do without them, since we must continually act without much knowledge in many if not most

areas of our lives. So, if we can, we need to regard our beliefs as "working hypotheses," better than nothing but needing confirmation from experience. Arthur Morgan's summary at the end of *Review* seems about the best way to think about the human situation. The trouble with education, especially planned education, is that the educators want it to come out in a predictable way—the way that suits them. And that is anti-educational.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

AN ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL

THE story of how to get a parent-run secondary school going in an area where it hardly seemed possible is told in last year's November/December *Resurgence*. The place where it happened was the village of Hartland, in North Devon, England. The prime mover in the school's founding was Satish Kumar, editor of *Resurgence*, whose child, Mukti, a boy, had finished elementary school and was ready for the next grades. But they didn't exist except at a traveling distance by bus of thirty miles round trip, every day, the students having to be carried to the Bideford "comprehensive," with 1800 pupils—too many, and too far away for Satish Kumar's taste.

This is what happened, according to Richard Boston, in an article which appeared in the *Guardian* and was later printed in *Resurgence*.

Kumar found that a disused Methodist chapel was for sale.

. . . Satish bought it at auction for £20,000. This presented a problem, since he didn't have £20,000. He appealed to the readers of *Resurgence* not just for gifts but for investments. Readers were invited to buy a share of £2,000 in the property. This meant that, if the venture failed, the building could be sold and everyone would get his or her money back. They needed ten shares and got eleven.

The resulting school is called "The Small School." Now why would anyone want to "invest" in such an enterprise? All that you could say for it, at the outset, was that there was no "risk" involved. But this leaves out of account the feeling *Resurgence* readers have for the magazine. It stands for things that the subscribers believe in, and how often can you find a paper like that? A certain kind of "family" feeling develops which is good for everyone; strengthening to everyone, you could say. So that would be one reason for helping to make a go of Kumar's idea for a school.

Today it seems to be working well. Richard Boston goes on:

In the past two years the Small School has raised a total of £80,000 for repairs, new buildings, equipment and teachers' pay.

The fees are £300 a year. This is a lot for parents who are mostly agricultural workers, but payments can be made in kind—by providing food for the school meals, for example, or fuel for heating, or by providing help of some practical kind. Unemployed parents can send their children free. The community is not an affluent one, but evidently a number of parents found paying for the unknown quantity of the Small School an attractive alternative to the free but distant and impersonal comprehensive. The school started with nine pupils, which was about half the number of leavers from the primary school that year. There are now eighteen pupils, and the intake of five years' primary school leavers should bring them to 40 or so.

Who teaches what?

The headteacher, Colin Hodgetts, has returned to teaching after some years working in charities such as Save the Children and Christian Action. The husband-and-wife caretakers also teach part time, as do the other teachers. A local doctor gives lessons in biology and human anatomy one morning a week. Tim Neville, a former teacher who used to be a designer with Cona coffee and is now a self-employed electrician, gives lessons in physics and technical drawing. A potter and a weaver come in to teach pottery and weaving. A housewife who used to be a typist teaches typing and shorthand. In fact, anyone around risks being roped in, as I soon discovered when I found myself giving an impromptu history lesson on the part of England I live in.

Colin Hodgetts sees it as a positive advantage to have a substantial proportion of the classes taken by non-professional teachers. They are members of the community whom the pupils will come across outside school hours. Also, he argues, they are respected for making their livings by using the skills and knowledge they impart in class.

Moreover, the people who do things like that usually enjoy them. They get interested in the young people and afford a touch with life that conventional institutions seem to guard against as some kind of infection. Having some amateurs do teaching is a real step toward *Paideia*—the situation in which the whole community is teacher,

not by organization and plan but by natural inclination. This is not something that can ever be purchased. Boston says:

There is a strong emphasis on practical activities such as pottery, weaving and carpentry. The garden, which is very popular, beautifully kept by the pupils, produces herbs and vegetables for school meals and teaches them how things grow. One boy I talked to was positively eloquent in his enthusiasm for the compost heap. A girl was digging an enormously deep hole in the ground as part of an investigation of the strata of the soil.

There are few complaints about school meals since the pupils plan the menu themselves and take in turns (two a day) to cook and serve meals and do the washing up—a more useful preparation for most people's lives than many of the subjects which I was taught at school without leaving a trace behind. Theresa Thome, aged 14 (one of a family of fourteen), finds lunchtime very different from Bideford's. "In Bideford you all have to queue up and you have to wait your turn, and then go to the cash desk. The food was not very good at Bideford. You don't get very big portions, whereas here the food is excellent, because we can cook our own food. You don't have to eat what you don't like, you just have what you want. It is a more homey atmosphere. We all sit around the table, serve each other.

On the schooling:

As much as possible the boundaries of conventional "subjects" are broken down. Thus a project on the history of the motor-car takes in social history, transport, design and engineering. Pre-history takes in archaeology, geography, evolution, dinosaurs, the Piltdown fraud and all sorts of other things. In this way the curriculum covers a wide range. None of the children is as yet of an age to take CSE or O levels, but there's no reason why they shouldn't in due course. Exams, though, are seen as a by-product rather than a goal.

The emphasis is on educating the whole child. "Learning to live together, respect and tolerate one another, are as important as history and geography," Colin Hodgetts says. He speaks of educating for self-reliance, fulfilling creativity, understanding the meaning of work, learning to be happy of the quality of life, of giving more than lip-service to moral and spiritual development as well as academic achievement. There is considerable freedom of choice in what is studied. The ideal would be for

every child to have his or her own tailor-made syllabus.

A lot depends on the children and their attitudes toward learning. And also on the wisdom of the teachers, who have opportunity to help the young toward wise decisions.

What seems evident is the inestimable value of direct human response to a felt need by people themselves, starting with Satish Kumar. Then, the fact that from the beginning the program has been improvised, in a resourceful "make-do" spirit, gives a freshness and enthusiasm for whatever they do. Such an atmosphere can't help but appeal to the young, since there is practically no trace of the regimentation of a professionally "organized" institution.

Relations between teachers and taught are of first-name familiarity, but good manners are expected and (from what I saw) are practiced. Close personal relationships limit the possibilities of bad behavior, which does not mean that there are no discipline problems. The difference is that at most schools pupils are kept in as punishment: here they are sent home. This is the only form of punishment, has only been exercised twice, and with devastating effect. Generally problems get worked out at the weekly pupils' council meetings (without adult supervision) and regular meetings of teachers and parents at the Small School Society meetings.

How is the school supported?

As yet the school has had no public money, although its existence must be a saving to the local education authority. They will apply for government support in due course, and believe that when they have been going for five years and have grown to full size, they will be able to make out a good case for receiving it. More than that, their ambition is to become a model for education in rural areas, a small school rooted in the community, an example to be followed by others.

Why not?

FRONTIERS The Future of Electric Power

IN ENVIRONMENT for December, 1984, three writers Sherman Fehrer, Frank Young, and Richard Zeren—who work for the Electric Power Research Institute, a planning center founded and funded by the electric utility industry—report on a survey of industry opinion concerning the present and future problems of the utilities of the United States. Eighty utilities were asked to provide a consensus or "corporate" response. There was a high rate of return, with replies from 65 concerns—organizations responsible for more than 60 per cent of the electricity sold in the country in 1982. They were asked about their most pressing problems and the research needed to help meet them. The replies showed that first in importance is the maintenance of financial health. The second was meeting and dealing with environmental concerns over toxic substances (PCBs) and acid rain, and the disposition of wastes from both nuclear plants and the use of coal. The authors say:

Regional variations for the 1984-1994 period are interesting. Acidic deposition, ash and scrubber sludge disposal, regional air quality, and radioactive waste disposal rank highest with respondents from utilities in the northeastern regions of the country. In the western region, hydroelectric effects on biota, atmospheric visibility, AC-DC transmission line electric field effects, right-of-way management, and carbon dioxide are seen as more important.

While the respondents indicated that "they were not planning to build nuclear plants in the foreseeable future," they showed "a high interest in protecting the investments they have already made and in preserving nuclear fission as a resource for electricity production." They look to research, development, and demonstration for help in meeting their environmental and financial problems.

From this report we turn to Worldwatch Paper No. 61, issued late last year (Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.,

Washington, D.C. 20036 \$4.00), titled *Electricity's Future: The Shift to Efficiency and Small-Scale Power*, at the end of which the writer, Christopher Flavin, says:

The world's electricity systems have barely changed, but already the potential for a major transition in the decades ahead is evident. Since 1980 orders for central power plants have greatly slowed in many countries, and in the interim, a surprising array of alternative strategies has emerged. With the right incentives, opportunities for improving electricity efficiency and using decentralized technologies are enormous. It may be possible to forego not only oil- and gas-powered generation in many areas, but also coal-fired plants, which are among the heaviest contributors to the world's most pressing pollution problems.

More fundamental changes may be ahead. David Morris of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance believes that today's new generating sources are only a prelude to the most revolutionary of technologies—photovoltaic cells which if placed on rooftops could make each house its own power plant. Peter Hunt, a Virginia-based energy consultant, has a similar vision. He believes that within a decade both photovoltaics and fuel cells will fall in cost to the point where homeowners will call up the local utility and "tell them to come get the damned meter," completely disconnecting them from the electricity grid.

Such a scenario is now possible and perhaps even likely in some regions. But while some independent producers are disconnecting from the grid, long-distance transfer of electricity will likely increase to take advantage of huge differences in generating costs between regions. Already Canada is becoming a major power exporter to the United States, and northern and southern Europe are making similar transfers. Electricity grids will make it possible for independent producers to "wheel" their power hundreds of miles to consumers.

The future will likely bring a combination of large utility grids, smaller "mini grids," and many independent households and industries. Though complicated, such a system could easily be run and monitored by computer. A mixed system would also reduce overall costs and yet allow many users to operate independently if the wider grid shut down. Massive blackouts such as the one that hit much of the eastern United States in 1964 might become a thing of the past.

Technological change and institutional reform of the electricity system are now reinforcing themselves, and the long-run results may surprise even the most visionary thinkers. Whether complete decentralization ever occurs, moving in this direction is the best way to contain electricity costs and improve the industry's environmental record.

Needless to say, judging from the survey reported in *Environment*, the electric utilities which now serve the country will be the last to know or admit the desirability of this pleasant-sounding trend. Yet the evidence of it is before them. As Christopher Flavin says:

Amid the confusion and the hand wringing, many planners have missed the most important development in the early eighties: large central power plants no longer entirely dominate electricity planning. Since 1980, cancellations of nuclear and coal plants in the United States have far outrun new orders. In other countries plant orders have slowed to a trickle. Meanwhile 785 small-scale power projects, with total generating capacity of 14,000 megawatts, have been registered with the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Most will begin generating power within a few years. These projects will provide enough power to supply 4 million homes, or to satisfy two years of growth in U.S. power demand. The new sources include a mix of cogeneration, biomass, small hydropower, wind power, and geothermal energy.

In general, the electrical industry is in financial trouble. Its costs have sky-rocketed and many of the utilities invested in nuclear plants and got comparatively little return. As Flavin says, "the utility industry's long-term debt rose from \$42 billion in 1972 to \$125 billion in 1982," with interest charges reaching \$11.5 billion in 1982. Meanwhile, by the end of the century, the small-scale power projects, if completed, will supply as many megawatts as nuclear power now provides. He also notes that "Many utility executives still regard conservation as a public relations effort to impress regulators and politicians, rather than an integral part of utility strategy."

Judgments expressed in this pamphlet seem a just conclusion concerning the utility industry: The utility industry "as a whole has become staid and lethargic. . . . No one takes responsibility for

asking fundamental questions or challenging accepted practices. . . . The electricity business is in need of fundamental structural change." A growing number of people agree with New York's Governor Cuomo who believes that utilities in serious trouble should be allowed to go bankrupt instead of being bailed out by government, with the taxpayers eventually picking up the tab.