

## PEACE AND PROTEST

THERE is a natural polarity in human efforts to alter or improve the world we live in. One pole is represented by the claim that it is necessary, first, to change the circumstances which surround us, in order to permit the decencies and natural excellences of people to have play and come to the surface. The other pole has expression in the view that we must begin by changing ourselves. Once this is accomplished, it is said, the external arrangements will very nearly take care of themselves, in spontaneous reaction to the altered nature of those for whom they exist and of whom they become a social extension.

Then there are those who, using common sense, say we have to do both. Difficult questions, however, remain. For one thing, it is easier to focus attention on bad or painful circumstances. Our environment, both natural and man-made, is continually producing events which seem to call for immediate action. When the river rises we need to get out there and shore up the levees. When a government remains indifferent to conditions and relationships which lead to the starvation of thousands of children, who can deny the force of the argument that the government should be replaced, the children fed? That such conditions now exist in many parts of the world is well known; and that cruelly oppressive circumstances are endemic in a number of countries is continuously made plain by the reports of Amnesty International. Worst of all, perhaps, is the threat of war, both nuclear and "conventional," which seems to worsen from day to day, with only brief interludes of lessened pressure. If governments are left to themselves, current historians point out, they are sure to engulf the world in self-destruction; governments, it is shown, are little more than powerful instruments of corporate self-interest, immune to moral considerations, and at the same time skilled in the use of partisan propaganda. Nation-states

of today are virtually all "terrorists," since their acts and intentions are responsible for much of the fear abroad in the world.

What can we do?

Weighing proposed answers to this question is the content of a new book by Bob Overy, a British pacifist who has been active in the peace movements of the past twenty-five years. His title is *How Effective Are the Peace Movements?* the publisher, Harvest House, Ltd. (2335 Sherbrooke Street, West, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3H 1G6). Basing his analysis on the practice of pacifists of various persuasions, the author divides his subject into three sections, giving attention to Movements to Eliminate War, Movements to Stop Particular Aspects of War, and Movements to Stop Particular Wars. His discussion makes a very good book, of interest to all who want to contribute in some way to putting an end to war.

Speaking of the movement for non-violent revolution, along the lines of Richard Gregg's *The Power of Nonviolence* (1935), Overy says:

The peacemaking of non-violent revolution starts with oneself. In this it is not much different from varieties of pacifism which stress the importance of individual conduct—"Let there be peace on earth, let it begin with me." But where pacifism emphasizes "peace" as a value for the individual, non-violent revolution is harsher, placing more stress on "equality" "freedom" and "liberation," and the necessity for conflict if change is to happen. War isn't so much the only or central problem as that it reflects all structures of oppression. In a view close to the Tolstoyan, non-violent revolutionists examine how their own lives fit into the surrounding system of inequality and unfreedom: then they try to break out of patterns which reinforce that system and to build alternatives. . . .

Fundamental then to this type of politics is the ordering of one's own life, that life being the only means of making revolution which one can legitimately control. Non-violent revolutionists have

begun to combine in all sorts of collective living and work arrangements as part of their effort to build non-oppressive organizations in an "alternative society." The idea of securing political or social power within the existing society in order to do good—as with capturing power through political parties or "getting to the top of your profession"—is scorned. But the problem that new institutions in an alternative society will inevitably constitute new forms of social and political power is a constant source of ambiguity and dispute. Particular efforts are being made to develop ways of organizing and coordinating groups which do not require hierarchical leadership, but the scale of such experiments is limited at present. . . . It is a revolutionary theory which is gradualist; it highlights the build-up of revolution as a process based on the quality of life as it is lived now, rather than as some decisive or explosive event which will come some time in the future. In this respect it is a pragmatic process based on the quality of life as it is lived now, rather than geared to constantly postponed expectations of transformations to come; it is a pragmatism which tries to promote pockets of idealism.

The moral issue here lies in the Tolstoyan distinction between the two aspects of the life of every human—the side of his freedom, in which he acts according to his own perception of right and wrong, and his "elemental swarm life in which he inevitably obeys laws laid down for him." The free man rejects the habits of the swarm when it goes against his conscience, and the same issue of decision ma' arise when he endeavors to act in concert with others. Interpreting Tolstoy (in *The Discovery of Peace*, Pantheon, 1973), Ronald Sampson writes:

Confusion arises, he says, when we wrongly transfer the notion of freedom which we rightly associate with self-regarding actions (actions of conscience) to those acts which we perform in conjunction with others and which depend not simply on our own mind and conscience but upon the contingency of other wills coinciding with our own. And the great paradox which lies at the heart of *War and Peace* is that the supreme example of man's unfreedom, that is to say, of his being bound by the chains linking his activities to those of others, is when a man enjoys what we term *power* over the lives of other men. Men seek power in order to impose their will on others, to do that which they want to do

and which they want others to do, which, being in a less powerful position they fear they would not be able to do. But, insists Tolstoy, a man is free in proportion to his non-possession of power. And the most powerful are the most unfree. "The strongest, most indissoluble, most burdensome, and constant bond with other men, is what is called power over others, which in its real meaning is only the greatest dependence on them."

The significance of this principle for the understanding of history is momentous. For conventional historians regard power not at all in the sense of Tolstoy's paradox but in the way that the vast mass of mankind understand it. History is made by men of power, so historians write of the activities of statesmen, generals, kings and diplomatists, men who are visibly possessed of power. Tolstoy does not quarrel with this at the level of actuality—he does not dispute its *descriptive* truth. But he relegates it to the despised status of the unpredictable, swarm-life of mankind, the life of enslaved men, living lives not free and thus not worthy of men.

There is an obvious question: Is there no part of the "swarm-life" that is tolerable for a person of conscience? Isn't it possible to be in it but not of it? Bob Overy speaks to this point:

At present non-violent revolution leaves out on a limb "non-violent revolutionists" like myself who are not part of a "revolutionary subculture" but remain in conventional settings where we live and work. Our values differ from those of our fellows at numerous points, yet if we make links and try to play an influential part at work or in the local community we become vulnerable to the criticism that we are "liberals" getting sucked into the dominant institutions. Non-violent revolution does not yet have a clear notion of what action is "progressive," that is, "going in the right direction," and what is not; it lacks an adequate theory of how to work on the "inside" and "at the margins" of the institutions it criticizes; it lacks charity (and political sensitivity) toward those who for various reasons can go with it only part of the way. Moreover, for individuals spending years of their lives in nuclear families, in suburban neighborhoods, in conventional jobs, it seems especially pretentious and even a little absurd to call themselves "non-violent revolutionaries"—and so they tend to fall back on marginally safer labels like "radical pacifist," "alternative socialist" or "non-violent anarchist"; that is, these individuals accept psychologically that they are part of an active

permanent minority, rather than of a potential revolutionary movement.

Why, it may be wondered, should these distinctions and labels matter so much, or at all? They may matter a great deal to those who are endeavoring to give their movement objective definition, including standards to live up to. Could there even be a movement without such distinctions and definitions? How can we judge ourselves and one another if we don't distinguish between the right and the wrong relations with the existing society?

Yet this "absolutism" in classification overlooks the fact that in every age of transition, a great many people, while they are thinking things over, are bound to have one foot in the past and the other in the future, especially since there is always room for debate about at least some aspects of both camps. The reason why there is no clear notion of what action is "progressive" and "going in the right direction" is that decision is at first always a subjective consideration. Involved is a gradual restructuring of one's value system; and at the same time, for some, there remains a natural reticence to being labeled or classified as being on either the "right" or the "wrong" side. Identification of what is wrong with the existing society is easy enough, but defining what will be good or better may prove exceedingly difficult, especially since, as history shows, the righteous and progressive political movement almost invariably, upon gaining power, becomes an establishment which resists further change. On the other hand movements do embody the spirit, the courage, and persistence that lead to change.

This is the paradox or contradiction discussed with understanding by Bob Overy. Apparently, we need to have movements, yet the danger of externalizing their moral principles, and the conversion of those principles into shallow slogans, is ever present—a tendency that is likely to shut out the best of humans. Some remarks by Abraham Maslow concerning his self-actualizing

subjects (in *Toward a Psychology of Being*), drawn from an early paper, have application here.

I recall my healthy subjects to be superficially accepting of conventions, but privately to be casual, perfunctory and detached about them. That is, they could take them or leave them. In practically all of them, I found a rather calm, good-humored rejection of the stupidities and imperfections of the culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it. They definitely showed an ability to fight it vigorously when they thought it necessary. To quote from this paper: "The mixture of varying proportions of affection or approval, and hostility and criticism indicated that they select from American culture what is good in it by their lights and reject what they think bad in it. In a word, they weigh it, and judge it (by their own inner criteria) and then make their own decisions."

Movements, then, we might say, arise when the signs of a condition needing remedy become so painfully evident—as for example the threat and frequency of war—that the "inner criteria" can be generalized as the stance and overt program of change. The danger, of course, is that those "inner criteria" will then be relegated to second place, with behavioral definitions of righteousness taking their place. When this occurs, the moral vision and intensity of the movement is thinned, and while the simplicities of its appeal may attract "followers," its actual strength is diminished by the lowered quality of thinking among them. In the process, self-righteousness becomes a noticeable feature in its undertakings. This, again, shuts out the more perceptive and reflective members of society. Movements, we might say, are necessary but not sufficient. Without the grounding in almost undefinable attitudes of mind, they become mere shells. Yet movements sometimes show that they *have* this grounding, and win widespread support from individuals of exceptional character.

Maslow's further remarks about self-actualizers are one indication of the grounding:

They also showed a surprising amount of detachment from people in general and a strong liking for privacy, even a need for it.

"For these and other reasons they may be called autonomous, i.e., ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society (insofar as they are different). It is in this sense that they are not only or merely Americans but also members at large of the human species. I then hypothesized that "these people should have less 'national character,' and that they should be more like each other across cultural lines than they are like the less-developed members of their own culture."

The point I wish to stress here is the detachment, the independence, the self-governing character of these people, the tendency to look within for the guiding values and rules to live by.

It hardly seems necessary to say that the people Maslow is describing will never be a cause of war.

In one place Bob Overy speaks of the "reactive" efforts of peace movements, calling them "despairing responses to the fact that our social and political systems are controlled by people who are incapable of giving us peace." He adds: "Occasionally we erupt in protest against the latest illustration of this sad truth, but we never manage to get to the root of the problem and succeed in constructing a social and political system which will give us peace." The reason may be that there are not enough self-actualizers to go around. Which is a way of suggesting that the human race is still in the early stages of its *moral* evolution.

Yet far from being discouraged, Overy points out that the anti-Vietnam war struggle in the United States did put an end to that war, and he is convinced that "the lifeblood and the trigger of the popular American movement against the Vietnam war was the courageous individual civil disobedience of peace movement activists." His own recommendations in relation to the British opposition to nuclear weapons installations suggest a change from the *mass* actions of the past:

My feeling is that a strong case can be made for a different direct action strategy this time against nuclear weapons. There is no question that a *willingness to sacrifice oneself* is fundamental to this type of action. But to concentrate all this idealistic commitment for a few national set-piece actions

which challenge the state at its most strongly defended points seems foolhardy. I would advocate a strategy which does not concentrate support *nationally* but tries to develop it locally; which looks not to *mass* action, but as far as possible to *small-group* or *individual* action. Moreover, the action should be to minimize the risk to the movement by focusing on subsidiary issues where the vital interests of the state are not so directly affected and a victory may be more easily won. Ideally, too, the action should be *defensive* rather than *aggressive*, and the range of direct actions taken should not be *narrowly political* but should reflect a broad social movement, involving a transformation in the daily lives of the activists.

This calls for an example, and we have one which may not suit Bob Overy very well—it was a demonstration against nuclear power, although the relation between power and weapons has been shown to be quite close—yet it gives opportunity to reflect on the meaning and limitations of overt protest. We quote from a chapter in Wendell Berry's *The Gift of Good Land* (Northpoint Press, 1981):

On June 3, 1979 I took part in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience at the site of a nuclear power plant being built at Marble Hill, near Madison, Indiana. At about noon that day, eighty-nine of us crossed a wire fence onto the power company's land, were arrested, and duly charged with criminal trespass.

As crimes go, ours was tame almost to the point of boredom. We acted under a well-understood commitment to do no violence and damage no property. The Jefferson County sheriff knew well in advance and pretty exactly what we planned to do. Our trespass was peaceable and orderly. We were politely arrested by the sheriff and his deputies, who acted, as far as I saw, with exemplary kindness. And this nearly eventless event ended in anticlimax: the prosecutor chose to press charges against only one of the eight-nine who were arrested, and that one was never brought to trial.

And yet, for all its tameness, it was not a lighthearted event. Few of us, I think, found it easy to decide to break the law of the land. For me it was difficult for another reason as well: I do not like public protests or crowd actions of any kind; I dislike and distrust the slogans and the jargon that invariably stick like bubble gum to any kind of "movement."

He gives his reasons, which are several. Already there were over sixty power plants in the Ohio River Valley, either working, planned, or under construction. "Air pollution from existing coal-fired plants in the valley is already said to be the worst in the country." The people have nothing to say about the erection of these plants, and are expected to sacrifice their health—among other things—"to underwrite the fantasy of 'unlimited economic growth' " In addition, some power companies had decided that nuclear power is the answer to the "energy problem." Two such plants were under construction in that part of the Ohio River Valley, the inhabitants "being taxed to promote an energy policy that many of them consider objectionable and dangerous." Further, while the plant planned for Marble Hill would be in Indiana, it would obviously have an effect on Kentucky, where Berry lives. "The people of one state thus become subject to a decision made in another state, in which they are without representation. And so in the behavior of big technology and corporate power, we can recognize again an exploitive colonialism similar to that of George III."

Berry also gives his reasons for opposing *nuclear* power, based upon facts reported in the newspaper, and confirmed by the accident at Three Mile Island. So he climbed the fence at Marble Hill, "casting a vote that I had been given no better opportunity to cast." Then he says:

But even though I took part wholeheartedly in the June 3 protest, I am far from believing that such public acts are equal to their purpose, or that they ever will be. They are necessary, but they are not enough, and they subject the minds of their participants to certain dangers.

One of these dangers is simplification of issues; another, self-righteousness "In the midst of the hard work and the risks of opposing what 'we' see as a public danger, it is easy to assume that if only 'they' were as clear-eyed, alert, virtuous, and brave as 'we' are, our problems would soon be solved." This is a patently false notion. He is talking about nuclear power plants, not the

prospects of nuclear war, yet elements of parallel remain. Many people know the truth of what Berry says, yet let it be obscured in the rush of action. The following applies to protests of all kinds:

The roots of the problems are private or personal, and the roots of the solutions will be private or personal too. Public protests are incomplete actions; they speak to the problem, not to the solution.

Protests are incomplete, I think, because they are by definition negative. You cannot protest *for* anything. The positive thing that protest is supposed to do is "raise consciousness," but it can raise consciousness only to the level of protest. So far as protest itself is concerned, the raised consciousness is on its own. It appears to be possible to "raise" your consciousness without changing it—and so to keep protesting forever.

Yet protesting may be right and necessary. "As a father, a neighbor, and a citizen, I had begun to look on the risk of going to jail as trivial in comparison to the risks of living so near a nuclear power plant." The prospect of war—any sort of war—may make many other considerations seem trivial. What some people are doing about the threat of war, their different ways of doing it, and the attempt to measure their "effectiveness," is the subject of Bob Overy's book, making it a good one for the general reader. No one can escape the "effectiveness" of modern war.

## *REVIEW*

### THE ORIGIN OF CAPITAL

A GREAT change is now going on in the way we think—about ourselves and the world. With some assurance, we say that this change *is* going on, although the matter remains arguable. More people, no doubt, are indifferent to the change than those who believe they see and welcome it, yet as Buckle pointed out more than a century ago, major alterations in cultural outlook proceed gradually, and the result of the "new opinion" will "depend on the condition of the people among whom it is propagated." The change we are thinking of is replacement of the idea that the driving force of human life is and must be self-interest. For some two hundred years this claim has been the central article of faith in the Western world. Today it is being questioned, and our condition is getting us ready for recognition of other motives. What is our condition? We are sufferers of the multiple disasters growing out of the aggressive pursuit of self-interest. We also suffer from the psychological distortions produced by believing that self-interest is the law of nature.

No doubt self-interest, the struggle for existence, competition, and related doctrines by which we try to live have their place in the scheme of things, just as the conditioned reflex has an evident role in human behavior. But there is equal or greater reason to think that other goals animate the most fully developed human beings. Today a number of writers are proclaiming that the neglect in theory of higher—human qualities is responsible for the endless troubles of the modern world. While this view used to be regarded as "sentimental" or "romantic," it is now being taken seriously, for the very good reason that it makes sense—a sense we are beginning to understand. Good books of the time are exploring and revealing that sense.

One book is *The Liberation of Capital* (Allen & Unwin, 1982, \$24.50) by the late Folkert Wilken, a German economist determined to revise the basic assumptions of economic thinking. Readers who value the work of E. F. Schumacher, who undertook (with notable success) the same task, will find in

Wilken a similar inspiration and power of reasoning. (His earlier book, *The Liberation of Work*, was reviewed in MANAS for April 29, 1970.) However, while Schumacher wrote (deliberately) with broad popular appeal, Wilken, using Germanic thoroughness, brings technical knowledge of past economic thinking to criticism and analysis of this theory, undertaking the reeducation of economic specialists. He offers close argument to the readiness of an increasing number of thinkers to consider conceptions that have long been neglected or ignored. He begins by getting rid of the idea of "economic man."

"Economic man" is a unit ever in need of more goods and services. A famous labor leader was once asked what his union wanted. "More!" he exclaimed. This unnatural zest for accumulation, plainly in evidence for more than a century, led Emerson to remark that "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Wilken gives economic man his due but insists that theory based on things alone—as are both capitalism and communism—cannot possibly bring order to the desperate economic, social, and psychological conditions of our time. He maintains that the fundamental flaw in typical economic thinking is its (materialistic) assumption concerning the nature of man, his life, his needs, his qualities. He provides this analysis of our methods of production, consumption, and competition:

[Overproduction] arises in any economic system which sees continuous growth as the basic premise of its operation. How does this arise? General social development, being the result of a combination of a materialist outlook with technological advance, has been guided more and more by the idea that the future progress of technology should be an end in itself. With irresistible force, and particularly in this century, the prejudice has insinuated itself into the human psyche that an absolute value attaches to domination over matter and to the possession of material goods. From this matter-transfiguring conception have developed particular forces which shape the development of the contemporary economic system. The more people seek security in matter the more Angst they feel about their existence. It is this anxiety which, along with a need for esteem, is one of the principal causes of the competition to possess more. This competition, a matter of life-style, systematically drives the market towards competitive battle.

A basic intention of Wilken's book is redefining the conception of capital. For him capital is not simply money invested in a business. It is not only, as Marx proposed, the ill-gotten gain of the entrepreneur amassed at the expense of his workers. While this is indeed one source of capital formation, Wilken identifies several others, including market speculation, the printing of money, and monopolistic pricing. But he declares that the primary source of capital is the creative capacity of the human mind. Here he seems to provide a scholarly exegesis of the keynote of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (the book with far-reaching influence on Gandhi, shaping his economic thinking). Ruskin wrote:

. . . .THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy and of admiration. That country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest, who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of possessions, over the lives of others.

A strange political economy; the only one nevertheless that ever was or can be: all political economy founded on self-interest being but the fulfillment of that which once brought schism in the Policy of angels, and ruin into the Economy of Heaven.

This may sound airily high-flown, yet Wilken has the capacity to convert Ruskin's poetry into the prose of hard-headed analysis, proposing land trusts, cooperative ownership of corporations, and associations for strengthening local economies and cultures. "Blueprints," however, are inadequate. Wilken says: "Fundamentally speaking, no organic working community, no common ownership, can be created simply by working out an intellectual plan or a mechanistic organization; but the individualistic peoples of the West have it in them, in the right circumstances, to bring such schemes to life, and to take responsibility for them." In short, a mature, well-working economy can be created and sustained only by mature individuals.

Plainly "adolescent" excesses and the motive of "always more" can never be balanced out by "market forces." Instead we make one mess after another.

This recalls the expression of another hard-headed writer, Louis Halle, who says in *The Ideological Imagination* (1972):

All the individuals who live together in a society are under a necessary discipline on which the survival of the society and its members depends. They have to abide by a common code of behavior that safeguards the rights of all and the health of the whole. In its most elementary form this means that they have to remain within certain confines of moderation, not giving free rein to their appetites, to their passions, or to the impulse to make their opinions prevail by any means over the opinions of others. If this discipline is not voluntarily maintained as self-discipline, then there is no alternative to the imposed discipline of the police state. There is either the self-discipline that prevails in a high state of civilization, or there is the terroristic discipline that is enforced from without.

This, surely, is the verdict of history.

Discussing the ownership of land, Wilken has parallel passages of similar moral and practical common sense. Speaking of a trust arrangement providing use-rights and stewardship obligations, he says:

Thus, the new arrangements would be self-generated and socially creative, offering fulfillments for individuals to develop themselves, and in particular giving scope to young people wanting individual responsibility and social involvement. Now it has to be recognized that resistance to this self-generating approach may come from people who are unwilling to take trouble, and content to leave it to governments to resolve social issues. Personal responsibility is an effort, of course, and some people may want to save themselves this effort. This is where the doctrine of remote political common ownership has been so thoughtless, in creating a generalized and depersonalized form which however contains the same principles as the private property system it seeks to replace. This form secularizes, as it were, the old religious form of ownership of early times. Now there are many signs that the state is becoming overloaded with problems, which pass to it because the market economy is unable to solve them. Therefore, every responsibility which can be taken on by individuals acting in the common interest helps to relieve this overloading and this may perhaps prove the spur to people shaking off this widespread indolence. That is in fact the only way in which conditions can be prevented from sinking into a nadir of apathy, the only way in which the correct actions can be taken.

**COMMENTARY**  
**A SPARTAN PROGRAM**

along these lines. As we hear of them we tell about them in these pages.

POLITICS is an obsessive preoccupation, these days, for the simple reason given by Folkert Wilken in the quotation from *The Liberation of Capital* on page 8. The modern state, he says, has been "overloaded with problems," heaped on its shoulders by the failure of the market economy to solve them. The market economy works well enough on a small scale. But when the system grows nationwide and international, multiple abuses enter the picture, such as the capacity of large combinations—cartels, multinationals, various sorts of monopolies—to control price and eliminate competition, as well as to obtain legislation which defeats the simplicities and distorts the information of the market system as it operated, say, a century or more ago.

The naive solution for political problems is to attempt to apply the "common sense" of that time—throw the problems back to the market system, wholly ignoring that it cannot possibly cope with them as it now operates. The intelligent solution is both difficult and long-term. It would mean a concerted and deliberate drive to take back responsibilities which have been delegated to the state. And this, too, is or seems impossible on a large scale. So reformers, seeing so much injustice, insist that the government must put things right. But at our stage of complexity of organization, the government *can't* put things right; it doesn't know how. Probably no one knows how, because the problems grow out of a complexity that is over everyone's head.

Taking back responsibility from the government seems the only answer. But how does one do this? Again, we hardly know. One way to begin, however, would be to define our problems in the terms of individual and small-group capacity to solve them. The others are too big, and won't go away except through a gradual wearing-away from the spread of individual responsibility. There are already people working



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves APPROPRIATE MOCKERIES

WHILE there may be values in computers and the art of programming of which we are ignorant, a letter on this subject from a man in Quebec (in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, March 27) seemed worth repeating. He said:

"What's an American?" goes a somewhat esoteric riddle. Answer: "Someone who uses a \$10,000 machine to split infinitives."

Maybe it's a silly comment; but the story about computer literacy in the *Washington Post* section (Jan. 30) reminded me of an old friend whose own tale, alas, is true. Old Friend has given up the Anglican priesthood to take a course in computer education. Over a coffee one day, he tells me about the wonderful software he is creating: it takes half an hour to describe and uses mathematical logical concepts I can't quite grasp. What does it do? It allows first-graders to sit in front of a terminal and draw triangles. When I ask him why he can't achieve the same educational goal with a box of pipe cleaners, there is a long silence. At last the explanation stumbles out: "It's not what they do with it that counts: what's important is that they should get used to using the machine."

So Johnny, with the blessing of every educational institution in North America, suddenly has a billion more games to play. Perhaps one Johnny in a thousand will have some purpose that will make it all worthwhile. The other 999 will be inert consumers of more or less trivial software sold by a small class of electronic impresarios.

What we should be teaching Johnny, of course, is first of all to know when he has something worth saying or making; then to use the most direct and effective means to say or make it. If we don't, the computer will extend our wits in the same way that the automobile extended our horses.

Another example of this sophisticated way of making fun appears in the Foreword of the Winter *et cetera*, by Jay Rosen, one of the editors. He begins:

Any comedian working today knows that the language of news, advertising, and prime-time

television is hilarious when repeated on stage. No exaggeration or comic twist is required; the laughs come instantly at the moment the language is recognized. Just mentioning a popular show or a heavily promoted product is often enough to amuse an audience. People laugh because they are relieved to be free of their individual responses to an absurd demand television makes on everyone. The demand is always the same: to treat the impossible claim as plausible, the ridiculous pretense as serious, the obvious ploy as subtle—in short, to perceive the completely motivated world of television as unmotivated, natural, innocent. No one can respond to television in this way, and yet the demand is continuously, absurdly made.

Television intends to say what cannot be reasonably said. It announces this intention by denying it so feebly that only a kind of brute power remains: the power to ignore all proportion in language, to speak in excess, to always claim more meaning for things than things deserve.

We all know what Mr. Rosen means: The intense, hardly controlled excitement in the voice of the man or woman reading the commercial—as though the fate of the world (read consumer) depended upon the swirling importance of what is said. Why do we put up with it? Why don't we boycott manufacturers and advertisers who systematically insult the intelligence of the watcher or hearer? Why don't we recreate the world in which, if somebody has something to sell or a service to perform, he hangs an unostentatious symbol over the door of his dwelling, knowing that that is all he needs to do? Today, not to belabor the point, a great deal of unnatural effort is required just to live a natural life. Isn't that enough to show that we must be doing a great many things wrong?

In evidence of the degree to which we have submitted to the marketing psychology, we draw on some remarks by Steve Baer (proprietor of Zomeworks) in *CoEvolution Quarterly* (Spring). Baer is introduced as "a sharp analyzer of the people-technology dance." He says:

It is often important to give customers a card. They need to remember you, your name, the company you work for and what you do. There is something

else here that is important: Don't have a handwritten card. The card should be printed, not on a typewriter or by hand lettering but by a printing press. The person to whom you give the card does not want your autograph. Besides needing the information on the card, he will be reassured by a glimpse of the machines behind you. Of course you yourself are there, but the introduction should be blessed by the other part of a proper team; you want an introduction by a robot. Don't imagine that your customer is prejudiced against people or against what you can do with your hand or a pen. He is merely investigating to be sure you are part of a bigger team of men and machines.

We offer Baer's somewhat sardonic insight to show that the best "research" may often be simple *thinking*. He goes on:

What accounts for this widespread need for evidence of teamwork between men and machines? Past success. Men and machines working together produce. Men have grown rich and powerful because of their partnership with machines. If people were at first suspicious of men when they introduced machines, it is no longer so. We are now suspicious if anyone tries something alone. This is taken to extremes: Without a dose of a machine's electricity, plain human speech is suspect. Obliging hosts, not wishing to offend, provide microphones for speakers at tiny gatherings. This is only good manners, even though there are only 20 people at the Kiwanis Club meeting.

Baer tells about a trade show where he showed a sample of a Zomework heat exchanger—a good one, but unconventionally made; it looked like a potter's hand work more than the product of giant metal rollers or stamping presses.

A passerby looked at it and as he left, he remarked, "It looks handmade." After this comment there was little to say. The price and the performance could not redeem such bad manners. . . .

The man who didn't want a handmade heat exchanger was simply being chivalrous to machinery. The handmade product, or the product that appears to be handmade, when offered to a mass market is offensive because it speaks of its maker's selfish refusal to become married to the many machines waiting to help. Promoters of such techniques are spotted as production perverts, homofabricators

instead of heterofabricators, and the lumpy metal that looked as if it had been shaped by hand yet sits on the same aisle with the products of mills, lathes, and screw machines is simply, regardless of price of performance, an embarrassment.

A brief passage by Michael Blee, an English architect, in *The Man-Made Object* (Braziller, 1966), provides a concluding comment:

For the primitive his wooden bowl is valued, fingered, felt and known; a true man-made extension, his spoon a prehensile projection of his own anatomy. Each of his few possessions has a similar intense reality, each is necessary and life-enhancing. It is surely experientially relevant to ask to what extent such identity can be offered by or demanded of the trivia of materialistic society, the paper plate, the plastic spoon. If identity depends wholly on scarcity, slowness, familiarization, frequent contact, then the contemporary urban environment denies all possibility of such experience.

## *FRONTIERS* Ecological Literacy

FOR hundreds of years, as cultural and economics histories make plain, people have been doing things in ways that, when expanded and extended by technological skills, invade, erode, and sometimes destroy their own life support systems. They didn't know any better, and in terms of effect at first it didn't matter much because of their limited power and the resilience of nature. Today it is different in two ways. First, most of the things we now do, armed with formidable technical know-how, are having an almost immediate effect. Second, now we *do* know better. The amount of available knowledge about what people are doing wrong is becoming impressive. Every week the mail pours in with indisputable warnings, and sometimes proposals so sensible that the failure to take them up becomes a diagnosis of where our basic troubles lie. Not enough people—especially among those who have power—care about or are willing to recognize that they are doing things wrong.

How do you get people to care? Nobody really knows. Dozens, scores, hundreds of people are working on it, no doubt with some success, since all over the world there are minorities struggling against stubborn ignorance of various sorts. But the ignorance is powerful, and those who profit by the ignorance of others, and from the ineffectiveness of the minorities as a result, keep on with what they are doing.

What can we do about that? Well, you can start shouting, jumping up and down, and insisting on attention to the sense of what you have to say. You make something of a dent by this means, if you have the determination, the knowledge, the persistence, and the patience to keep at it. Frances Moore Lappé is one with these qualities (see her *Food First*, written with Joseph Collins); Helen Caldicott is another who is getting through to people. And a number of others are doing all they can.

Meanwhile, there is another source of intelligence and strength—the magazines gotten out by scientists who keep up to date our information on things that really need doing. This week we have in mind one in particular—*Environment*, a monthly published at 4000 Albemarle Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016, at \$20.00 a year.

Take for example the April issue. Two writers, James D. Nations and Daniel I. Komer, both of the Center for Human Ecology, Austin, Texas, write on "Rainforests and the Hamburger Society." They focus on Central America, saying: "The destruction of rainforests in other areas of the world is sometimes even more dramatic than in Central America—as in the Amazon Basin where bulldozing, burning, and chemical defoliation destroy immense tracts of forest each year."

But nowhere is the loss of biological diversity more severe and nowhere is the United States' unwitting role in the deforestation more apparent than in the case of Central America.

Almost two thirds of Central America's lowland and lower montane rainforest have been cleared or degraded since 1950. At current rates of destruction, most of the remaining forest will be eradicated during the next 20 years, leaving only impoverished remnants in national parks and reserves. Despite the grim ecological consequences of such a prospect, some hope remains to break this cycle. Because the causes of deforestation in Central America are so apparent, the measures required to halt it are also obvious.

The invasion of the rainforests typically begins when logging companies take out valuable hardwoods such as mahogany and tropical cedar, while damaging non-commercial trees that are left behind. Between 30 and 50 per cent of the canopy, it is estimated, may be destroyed or harmed in this way. The loggers also leave behind the roads they have made, on which then come streams of endless peasants to occupy the land. They clear and burn to plant subsistence crops such as corn, beans, rice, and manioc, and a few cash crops. These migrants care little for the

welfare of the native inhabitants of the forest—the Indians—and lack understanding of the way to care for land of this sort. The writers say:

But to blame colonizing peasants for uprooting tribal people and burning the rainforest is tantamount to blaming soldiers for causing wars. Peasant colonies carry out much of the work of deforestation in Central America, but they are merely pawns in a general's game. To understand the colonists' role in deforestation, one must ask why these families enter the rainforest in the first place. The answer is simple: because there is no land for them elsewhere.

Throughout Latin America, seven per cent of the landowners control ninety-three per cent of the land. More than half the rural families in Central America are without enough land to support their families. After the colonization of the lumbered areas, companies come in and buy the land, which they use for growing luxury export crops and grazing beef cattle. During this process, the fertility of the land rapidly declines from misuse. Overgrazing and heavy rains erode the rainforest soils into wastelands. Meanwhile, the Lacandon Maya Indians demonstrate, in Chiapas, Mexico, the right way to farm rainforest areas to obtain subsistence crops by a system of agroforestry "that both conserves the rainforest biome and enhances its regeneration as a renewable resource."

Most destructive of these areas is the cattle grazing, which can be done for only seven to ten years. And while these transitional pasturelands produce beef for the market, the local people can't afford to buy it, and their consumption of beef declines. Where does the beef go? Mainly to U.S. meat packers, who sell to the fast foodchains. The American house cat "eats more beef in a year than the average Central American." Big banks finance beef production in Central America because of the assured market in the U.S. "Since 1963, the World Bank has provided funds for cattle ranching activities to every Central American country except El Salvador." Sometimes the banks claim they are helping to close the nutrition gap in Central America, but instead they are "compounding the

problem of malnutrition by facilitating the export of high-quality food from the region and by helping to convert agricultural land to the production of export crops." The writers conclude: "Americans must be made aware that when they bite into a fast-food hamburger or feed their dogs, they may also be consuming toucans, tapirs, and tropical rainforests."

Another *Environment* article reports in detail the progress of solar voltaics—cells which convert sunlight into electricity—in the United States and elsewhere. America pioneered this renewable source of energy—discovered by researchers at Bell Laboratories in 1954—but today, as a result of reductions in funds supplied by the government to hasten essential cost-reduction in the manufacture and use of these cells, "the United States is now in danger of losing its lead in the industry to European and Japanese competitors." A third article describes the Lorena stove, a method rather than a product, which, if widely adopted by the people of the Sahel in Africa, could conserve by accomplishing a ten to twenty per cent saving of firewood, rescuing "millions of trees." The stove is constructed of a mixture of sand and clay and costs only \$10 to \$15 when owner-built. The problem is that Africans don't have that much money, and there are cultural resistances to change. This article is a valuable education on giving aid to "under-developed" lands. *Environment*, finally, seems an irreplaceable source of literacy in the entire area of ecology, reporting responsibly on a variety of technical matters in a non-technical way.