

## SERVILE EDUCATION IN AMERICA

THERE is a movement afoot in this country to teach American children and youth to be servile, to give them an education fit not for free men and women but for slaves. We pride ourselves, somewhat excessively perhaps, on having gone to all the trouble of a devastating civil war to abolish slavery as a legal institution. We feel, sincerely, that the very idea that one human being might be the legal property of another is unnatural. Anyone expressing that idea would be considered either a monster or a bizarre eccentric, at least in the North. But to talk of labor as a commodity seems less bizarre and monstrous, though it usually entails thinking of a human being as a thing, a flesh-and-blood machine. And we are by no means above encouraging the young to think of themselves as primarily embodied "marketplace skills." There are still a lot of us who can unblushingly advise a youngster approaching a job interview: "Sell yourself!" We stopped tolerating slavery in 1863, but we tolerate a great deal that is slavish, some of it rather more than we did in 1963.

Though the opposite of a slave is a free man, none of us, of course, is wholly free. We are all constrained by history. Each of us lives, as Auden said, "In the prison of his days." Before James Watt invented the steam engine, almost all women, married or single, rich or poor, were engaged primarily in the manufacture of textiles. During the same period, eighty or ninety per cent of men were engaged in farming. But one can engage in farming in a variety of capacities. One can farm as slave, serf, sharecropper, hired hand, family farmer, landlord, and voluntary or involuntary member of a commune. Decisions about who will be what kind of farmer, though made under economic pressures are political decisions and have political consequences. Corresponding decisions in industrial societies are

equally political. And similar economies do not entail similar polities. Roosevelt, Churchill, Hitler, and Stalin all presided over industrial states. In other words, the nature and degree of the constraints our days impose on us can be modified politically. Whether our lives and the lives of our children and their children are relatively free or increasingly servile depends on what kind of people make political decisions and how well they do it.

Classical Greece and Victorian Britain were governed by rather small ruling classes. John Henry Newman found Aristotle's views on the education of the free citizens of the Greek city state applicable to the education of the gentlemen who were to govern Britain and amplified them into "The Idea of a University" (1852), which is still the chief document in the definition of a liberal education. Though Greece and Rome would have received more emphasis than we give them, what Cardinal Newman wanted the university student to study was the sort of thing our universities offer under faculties of arts and sciences: history, literature, philosophy, the sciences. Newman expected the educated man to know a lot of facts. "It requires a great deal of reading, or a wide range of information," he said, "to warrant us in putting forth our opinions on any serious subject." But mere knowledge was not liberal education, only a necessary condition of it. The liberally educated person, for Newman, was one who had acquired knowledge and internalized it. The facts and ideas learned had to be compared, arranged, systematized, reduced to "order and meaning." In other words, liberal education is a grasp of the relationships among the things we know. This grasp is the result of thinking as well as knowing. Our liberal arts colleges try to measure it, and indeed sometimes

succeed in producing it, with essay examinations. Newman called it an "enlargement" of the mind.

He knew that the enlargement of mind resulted in a number of benefits, but he considered it intrinsically, rather than instrumentally, valuable. One pursued it for its own sake. Not to do so was to diminish the distance between man and beast, to betray one's own humanity. In other words, the opposite of an enlarged mind is a stunted mind.

Because it lacks a context to put them in, the stunted mind can not absorb new experiences. Newman gave an example:

Seafaring men . . . range from one end of the earth to the other; but the multiplicity of external objects, which they have encountered, forms no symmetrical and consistent picture upon their imagination; they see the tapestry of human life, as it were on the wrong side, and it tells no story. They sleep, and they rise up, and they find themselves, now in Europe, now in Asia; they see visions of great cities and wild regions; they are in the marts of commerce, or amid the islands of the South; they gaze on Pompey's Pillar, or on the Andes; and nothing which meets them carries them forward or backward, to any idea beyond itself. Nothing has a drift or relation; nothing has a history or a promise. (VI, 5)

Newman's deficiently educated Victorian sailor sounds like a junketeer who used to represent me in Congress. Such a person is intellectually a child. No amount of study of the rules of the nautical road or the rules of the House can stimulate such a mind to grow into maturity. Newman, following Aristotle, excludes vocational training from liberal education on the ground that it does not contribute to the enlargement of the mind.

Aristotle is not entirely consistent, but he seems to have had in mind a two-class system. Trades would be practiced by slaves, whose intellectual deprivation was of no concern. They would be taught their trades but not liberally educated. All the free citizens of the city state, the people who were part of the polity, not only for their own good but also for the good of the

state, would be liberally educated. As Newman points out near the beginning of his essay, the opposite of "liberal" is "servile." It follows that an education that falls short of what is fit for a free citizen is a servile education.

Obviously, slave masters have an interest in preventing the intellectual maturity of their slaves. A slave who is an intellectual child is likely to be tractable, and if he's not, he's unlikely to be dangerous. In any two-class society, the rulers can be more secure if the ruled are stunted.

Newman, although he was an old-fashioned reactionary who believed in the divine right of kings, claimed not to fear the education of the masses, but he took no interest in it. Because gentlemen ruled Britain, it was their intellectual development that mattered. And though he believed the enlargement of the mind to be valuable for its own sake, he was aware that it had desirable effects. The lesser of these was that a man with a liberal education would, if he took up law, medicine, business, or politics, make a better lawyer, doctor, businessman, or politician than a man without a liberal education. The greater benefit was that a liberal education, in teaching one to "see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect [the] sophistical, and to discard [the] irrelevant," made one a competent citizen.

Producing a competent electorate was relatively easy in Newman's society: no women and only about a tenth of the men could vote. Though the more prosperous part of the middle class had been enfranchised in 1832 as a result of industrialization, the situation was not much different statistically from what it had been in pre-industrial Britain, when a small class of country squires, rentiers who did not have to worry about making a living, governed the country while a large class of illiterate peasants did the work of the agricultural economy without participating in the polity. In Newman's time, the industrialists and merchants who had pushed their way into the governing class with the squires saw no reason

why their employees should not be left outside with the peasants. Hence, there was little interest in teaching them anything beyond the minimum they had to know to be efficient workers.

In our society, with its commitment to universal suffrage, we seem obliged to provide a liberal education, or a close approximation, for everyone. There always have been a few people who have picked up a lot of information and learned to think without much schooling. But self-education is too inefficient and too unreliable to solve our problem

Jefferson warned repeatedly that unless our citizens were both vigilant and educated our liberty would be lost. In a democracy, nobody's liberty is secure if any large group is either negligent or incompetent in its civic duties. But Jefferson's insight has not gone unchallenged.

In fact, it was never accepted in the ante-bellum South. Slave owners deliberately stunted the intellectual growth of their slaves in order to keep them docile. In most places they passed laws against even teaching blacks to read and write. The prosperous slave owners who ran the South saw no reason to educate the poor whites either, since their interests, and presumably, therefore, their political goals, were different. Free public education was not general in the South until it was instituted by the military government when the North won the Civil War. But things began to slide, especially for blacks, after the North gave up the idea of reconstructing the South. After the blacks were disenfranchised, the schools were segregated, and black children were given an illiberal education. Maya Angelou, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), gives a moving account of the resentment black students in Arkansas felt in 1940 when a white politician explained that they would get new equipment for shop, home economics, and athletics, while the white school would get a new art teacher and some new science equipment. Between the lines of the politician's speech, Ms.

Angelou read the message that "the world didn't think we had minds."

In the ante-bellum North, something closer to Jefferson's model republic had established itself. Most people lived on small farms. Democracy prevailed, as did the public schools, which, though they left something to be desired, were not intended to inhibit anybody's mental development. It was, naturally enough, the educational system of the North that reconstruction sought to establish in the South. But at about the same time the North lost interest in reconstruction, it became very interested in industrialization. By the end of the nineteenth century, we had added to our social structure a class of industrialists, who emulated their British counterparts, and a class of industrial workers, many of whom had been imported from southern and eastern European pools of cheap labor.

In the early decades of this century, influential people began to advocate the division of the school population into two parts. The smaller part was to be given the liberal education that would make it politically competent, and the larger part was to be given "manual training." The idea seems to have been to make twentieth-century America resemble mid-nineteenth-century Britain, with its small, educated, ruling class and its large, uneducated, ruled class. The latter was to be trained to take a subordinate part in the economy but not taught to take an effective part in the polity. Its place in the North was to resemble the place of the black in the South and of the slave in Aristotle's world.

For several decades, our public schools staggered along trying to give some students the rudiments of a liberal education as preparation for getting the real thing in college, trying to give others an even more rudimentary version that left them unprepared for further liberal study but theoretically at least prepared for citizenship and some undefined sort of employment, and trying to give others more specific job training without giving them much else. During the same period,

the schools swung back and forth between a traditional approach to teaching that aimed at discipline and a progressive approach that aimed at spontaneity. Most of them did a poor job, and they have taken a lot of criticism, both from those who thought they were failing to train students' minds adequately to make them competent citizens and from those who thought they were not doing enough vocational training.

Our universities, meanwhile, were busy adding to the traditional arts and sciences a catalog of vocational offerings for undergraduates: journalism, business administration, education, technology, mortuary science, and so on. These differ from law school and medical school in that they offer vocational training not after but instead of liberal education. Like the public schools, universities have split students into one group whose mental horizons are to be helped to expand and another whose mental horizons are to be constricted.

In recent years, these rather unsatisfactory compromises have come under attack from those who want more vocationalism and less real education. They don't call it "manual training" any more; they call it "career education," though the dead-end jobs it is likely to steer kids into are not careers, and the training is not education. At one grade school, "career education" has taken the form of devoting a substantial amount of the sixth-graders' time to buying and selling candy. The announced rationale was that this activity would make them aware that commerce was an important part of our world. By the time a child reaches the sixth grade, he has spent hundreds-of hours watching commercials on TV. There is no way he can be unaware that commerce is an important part of our world. The time used in teaching these kids something they already knew was, of course, taken away from that available to teach them reading, writing, spelling, art, arithmetic, geography, and the other things they don't seem to be learning very well.

A central document in the career education movement is *Alternative to a Decadent Society* (1969) by former Governor James A. Rhodes (of Ohio), the impresario who brought us the Kent Massacre in 1970. In this book, advertised as something every schoolboard member should have, Rhodes expends a great deal of adrenalin denouncing the "snobbery" of those who want to educate everyone, though one might think the accusation could be directed with greater plausibility at those, including Rhodes, who maintain that the masses are incapable of liberal education and should be given something else instead. What he wants to give them instead is a vocational program starting in kindergarten or earlier and encouraging the child to think of himself as a prospective worker. There is no suggestion that he should also be taught to think of himself in any other way—as a free citizen of a democracy, for example—or as a mind capable of independent thought. At the end of tenth grade, or when he turns sixteen, the student is to choose vocational instruction leading to a particular kind of job. After high school he will have available to him a variety of two-year paraprofessional programs. Since paraprofessionals seem to imply professionals, we must assume that some students will be privileged to slip out of this groove and go on to other things.

Without going so far as to argue that our schools should have no truck with vocational training (for, after all, a person who can't make a living is not really free), one can propose that preoccupation of this sort with the future economic roles of our students is both futile and dangerous. It is futile because training doesn't necessarily lead to jobs. Rhodes argues that untrained applicants can't get jobs because they have to compete with trained applicants in an era when technology has eliminated the jobs for which "a strong back" is qualification enough. Let's look at an example. One man operating a back-hoe attached to a small tractor can do the work of several ditch-diggers. A back-hoe and a trained operator eliminate the jobs of several ditch-

diggers. Training the ditch-diggers to operate back-hoes will not lead to their employment as back-hoe operators unless the demand for ditches increases by several hundred per cent. We will merely have unemployed back-hoe operators instead of unemployed ditch-diggers.

For the last century or two, economic growth has created new jobs faster than technology has eliminated old ones, but it is by no means clear that this will continue to happen. And the bureaucratic inertia built into our educational system has made us much better at training people for the jobs that were available in the past than for those that are available in the present or those that will be available in the near future. Employment prospects for the graduate probably depend more on the health of the economy than on the wisdom of the career counselor. It is important to find a cure for unemployment, but Rhodes seems to have over-sold vocational training as such a cure.

And it is precisely a cure for unemployment that he wants the schools to provide, because he is terrified of the unemployed, especially the black unemployed. Twice he mentions riots in black ghettos, and twice he warns that our alternatives are to provide the young with skills or to "*fight them in the streets!*" In other words, his goal is, in part, to end racial unrest by diverting the attention of young blacks to courses in auto mechanics and typing. Maya Angelou's book suggests both the inefficacy and the inhumanity of this plan. In fairness to Rhodes, however, it must be said that his plan is not as racist as his rhetoric. He wants to do the same thing to most young whites. The larger goal is to produce a population of obedient wage slaves who will not criticize or interfere with the establishment.

Vocational students, he argues, "do not constitute a threat to society." What he means is that they don't demonstrate and aren't subject to unrest. If he's right, the situation is more frightening than if he's wrong. The obedient can be more dangerous to society than the intractable.

Dachau and Mylai were not the products of dissent.

It will surprise no one that Rhodes' idea of a university is the reverse of Newman's. He approves of "goal-centered" studies, those studies that one pursues not for their own sake but as means to some other end, in this case making money, since Rhodes seems incapable of conceiving that a student might have any other goal. Rhodes disapproves of liberal studies. He expresses outrage that a university in Ohio requires two years of liberal education of its students before they can begin vocational studies. He says that such requirements make no sense to students who arrive at the university with other goals. In other words, he wants education to be informed by the values of the uneducated. Rhodes' argument that all studies should be useful in some short-range financial way is not new. In ancient Rome the same argument was used—in opposition to the introduction of the study of Greek philosophy—by Cato, whom Newman describes this way: "He despised that refinement or enlargement of mind of which he had no experience."

The political aspect of Rhodes' views on higher education resembles that of his views on the public schools. In 1969, he found unrest among students of the humanities and social sciences but not among engineering and medical students. Liberal education was producing dissent and vocational study was producing either indifference or approbation of the Vietnam War. Today, most people think the doves were right and the hawks wrong. Liberal education seems to deserve some of the credit for ending that war. But the political ramifications of the dispute between the advocates of liberal education and of vocational training go far beyond any single issue of public policy. The dispute touches the essence of our form of government.

If every voter's opinion counts equally, and only a "wide range of information" and a grasp of the relationships among the parts of that wide

range of information can make one's opinion worth having, then every voter needs that range and that grasp. As voters, we need to know how to think, and we need to have some ideas and information to think with. A few manage to educate themselves remarkably well, but they are very rare.

High schools should be doing more, not less, to educate us. Publicly financed vocational training should be available after high school to those who don't want to go to college. Those who do should get a liberal education as undergraduates. Journalism, business, education, and so on, should be taught on the graduate level. A journalist, for example, who doesn't know history, economics, and government will not understand the world well enough to report it meaningfully. If he hasn't studied literature enough to develop sensitivity to the language, he won't write well either. Administrators, whether in business, government, or other enterprises, need more than anything else the enlargement of mind necessary to making sound judgments. Indeed, one of the problems with our universities today is that they are administered more and more by people who have no genuine education themselves, only a knowledge of the mechanics of management.

Most of us need to make a living, but unless we are prepared to leave the government to the two or three per cent who don't have that problem, we had better learn enough to be responsible participants. Liberty is always in danger, as Watergate recently reminded us. Unless we are willing to let the times they live in constrain our children and their children intolerably, we had better make sure that they can achieve the intellectual maturity of free citizens. The woods are full of would-be rulers who would rather have them servile.

Pittsburg, Kansas

V. J. EMMETT, JR.

## *REVIEW*

### AFRICAN FARM AND AFTER

IN September, 1936, with a sprig of heather but no radio, Beryl Markham, thirty-four years old, took off from the military air field of Abingdon, England, to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in a Vega Gull with a turquoise body and silver wings, built for her by Edgar Percival. She landed, twenty-one hours and twenty-five minutes later, nose down in a nameless swamp in Nova Scotia, a few miles from the Sydney airport, having completed the first solo flight across the sea from east to west. She had been a flyer in Africa, from 1931 to 1936, carrying mail, passengers, and supplies to little known places in the Sudan, Tanganyika, Kenya, and Rhodesia. Her book about these adventures *West with the Night*, was first published in 1942, and Ernest Hemingway, who knew her, said that reading it made him feel like a mere "carpenter with words." In a letter to Malcolm Cowley, urging him to read the book he said: "The only parts of it that I know personally, on account of having been there at the time and heard other people's stories, are absolutely true."

Beryl Markham arrived with her father in Africa in 1906, when she was four. He settled in Kenya to raise and train race horses. She says of him:

My father was, and is, a law-abiding citizen of the realm but if he ever wanders off the path of righteousness, it will not be gold or silver that enticed him, but, more likely, I think, the irresistible contours of a fine but elusive horse.

A lovely horse is always an experience to him. It is an emotional experience of the kind that is spoiled by words. . . . At seventy, in competition with the crack trainers of South Africa, his name heads the list of winners in the high-stake racing center of Durban. In view of this and other things, I demand forgiveness for being so obviously impressed with my own parent.

He came out of Sandhurst with such a ponderous knowledge of Greek and Latin that it would have submerged a lesser man. He might have gone down like a swimmer in the sea struggling with an Alexandrian tablet under each arm, but he never let his education get the better of him. He won what prizes there were translating Ovid and Æschylus, and then took up steeplechasing until he became one of

the finest amateur riders in England. He took chances on horses and on Africa; he never regretted the losses, nor boasted about the wins.

In the new edition of *West with the Night* (by Northpoint Press, \$12.50), the author's picture adorns the jacket. In her flying helmet she looks like Athene, and also recalls Freya, commander of the Valkyries. Her childhood experiences were appropriate to a career as a goddess. At, say, nine or ten, visiting a farm near Nairobi, she made the acquaintance of a full-grown pet lion named Paddy, who had never seen a cage. He couldn't go back to the bush because the other lions rejected his smell of men. He's harmless, she told her father, explaining she had seen people stroke him. "Which proves nothing," her father said. "A domesticated lion is only an unnatural lion—and whatever is unnatural is untrustworthy." He was right, as Beryl learned one day when the lion knocked her down and began to make a meal of her leg. Fortunately, enough men were nearby to save her, and the lion's owner, being much larger and plumper than a little girl, seemed a better choice to the lion. So Paddy went for his owner, who climbed a tree just in time. (It sounds unbelievable, but remember Hemingway's endorsement.) What happened to the lion? They caged him. He lived long years until the owner died and his wife, who loved him (the lion), was at last obliged to get a neighbor to shoot him. The author muses:

He had lived and died in ways not of his choosing. He was a good lion. He had done what he could about being a tame lion. Who thinks it just to be judged by a single error?

I still have the scars of his teeth and claws, but they are very small now and almost forgotten, and I cannot begrudge him his moment.

In her early youth Beryl Markham became a horse trainer like her father, and her horses won races like her father's. Then, one day, she met a flyer who had brought in from the bush a man somewhat the worse for an argument with another lion. She talked at length with the flyer, Tom Black, who told her, "Just remember never to fly without a match or a biscuit tin. And of course you're going to fly. I've always known it. I could see it in the stars." And so

she did. She learned in a Gipsy Moth with Tom Black for instructor.

For conclusion to our invitation to this book of sheer delight by an African—princess rather than queen, happily still alive, according to a hint by the publisher ("reprinted by arrangement with the author")—we repeat what she says about flying.

Tom Black had never taught another soul to fly, and the things he had to teach beyond the simple mechanics that go with flying are those things that have not lent themselves to words. Intuition and instinct are mysteries still, though precisely spelled or rolled precisely off the tongue. Tom had these—or whatever qualities they signify.

After this era of great pilots is gone, as the era of great sea captains has gone—each nudged aside by the march of inventive genius, by steel cogs and copper discs and hair-thin wires on white faces that are dumb, but speak—it will be found, I think, that all the science of flying has been captured in the breadth of an instrument board, but not the religion of it.

One day the stars will be as familiar to each man as the landmarks, the curves, and the hills on the road that leads to his door, and one day this will be an airborne life. But by then men will have forgotten how to fly; they will be passengers on machines whose conductors are carefully promoted to a familiarity with labelled buttons, and in whose minds knowledge of the sky and the wind and the way of the weather will be extraneous as passing fiction. And the days of the clipper ships will be recalled again—and people will wonder if clipper means ancients of the sea or ancients of the air.

"Trust this," said Tom, "but nothing else." He meant the compass.

"Instruments can go wrong," he said. "If you can't fly without looking at your airspeed and your altimeter and your bank-and-turn indicator—well, you can't fly. You're like somebody who only knows what he thinks after reading his newspaper. But don't mistrust the compass—your judgment will never be more accurate than the needle. It will tell you where you ought to be going and the rest is up to you."

In *The Dance of the Continents* (Tarcher, 1983, \$9.50), John Harrington, professor of geology at Wofford College, South Carolina, succeeds in making his formidable subject almost fascinating. He begins by recalling that Isaac Newton, when asked how he managed to discover the laws of

motion, replied, "By thinking about it ceaselessly." Then, for an explanation of scientific method, he draws on Conan Doyle, in whose tale, "A Study in Scarlet," Sherlock Holmes instructs Dr. Watson in the method of deduction. A twelfth-century Chinese genius, who found fossil bamboo near Yenchow and snail shells in the rocks of high mountains, is identified as one of the founders of geologic science, and Herodotus is disclosed as an earlier pioneer who drew "magnificent conclusions" from the raw data of geography. Mr. Harrington says this about science in general:

The business of science is research because science is an unfinished business. Much of the mystique of scientific thinking disappears as soon as we realize that no claims of omnipotence are made for it. There is no need to apologize for fallibility as long as levels of ignorance are properly acknowledged. There are very few laws and a tremendous number of wishy-washy hypotheses. Controversies abound. Ignorance is life. Science is a social subculture that operates very effectively because scientists share the same experiences and the same ways of doing things. Scientists think of themselves as hunters struggling in poorly known jungles rather than pontificators on pedestals of past successes. The doctrine of science is that there must be no doctrine, no creed, no constricting oath beginning with the words "I believe. . . ." Creative scientists work in an open-ended world of splendid uncertainty. Geologists are sometimes pitied, for their world is the most uncertain of all. Theirs is a historical science, rooted in a past that defies experimental research methods.

We learn that James Hutton, a Scot, began the modern science of geology by writing *Theory of the Earth* in 1785, a book that failed to get proper attention because it seemed to lack "descriptive precision." But this was only because numerous water colors and accurate line drawings were lost by the publisher, who issued the book without them. The drawings were found in 1968, at last restoring Hutton's reputation. These historical anecdotes are woven into Mr. Harrington's text. A closing sentence remarks that he and his readers "have found the earth to be a bold composition of interactions that seems to remain in a constant state of dynamic equilibrium."

## COMMENTARY A DEMONSTRATION

SINCE two of this week's articles (the lead and "Children") focus on education, emphasizing the tendency of administrators to divide students into two classes—the intellectuals and the mechanics, or the managers and the managed—this seems a good place to make a sort of confession.

The fact is, students are different. Either they don't all have the same potentialities—or if they do, they don't reveal them. Every teacher knows this, and the good teachers labor over the non-verbal students, trying to show them how to use abstractions and symbols. For that is about all intellectuality is—the capacity to manipulate symbols.

There is another distinction. Some students are self-starters; others, the majority, are not, or if they are, they start off in non-academic directions. But here we are talking about a rare quality; put simply, it is the hunger to know. Stirring, encouraging, stimulating that hunger is the job of the teacher; the rest is mainly routine.

In the old days, the young learned vocations from either family or some guild. This was the apprenticeship method Seidenberg speaks of in "Children." It is still probably the best way to become able to earn a living. Abe Lincoln became a lawyer this way. He "read" law in some older lawyer's office. But he became a *good* lawyer from an extraordinary will to know. He once told an admirer about how, in the law office, he kept coming across the word "demonstrate." The dictionary told him it meant "certain proof," but he didn't really understand what that meant.

I consulted all the dictionaries and books of reference I could find, but with no better results. You might as well have defined *blue* to a blind man. At last I said, "Lincoln, you can never make a lawyer if you do not understand what *demonstrate* means"; and I left my situation in Springfield, went home to my father's house, and stayed there till I could give any proposition in the six books of Euclid at sight. I then

found out what "demonstrate" means, and went back to my law-studies.

In short, the only real education is self-education. All the rest is little more than "conditioning."

But you can't teach self-education. All you can do is practice it, hoping that someone will notice and decide to do it, too.

## CHILDREN

### ... and Ourselves

#### SOME UNKNOWN SENSE

JOURNALISTS who graduate to being columnists often become middle-of-the-road moralists, their skill with words making fairly obvious preachments seem fresh and new. Ellen Goodman, who writes for a Boston newspaper, is especially good at this, and there are others who turn in congruous juxtapositions of ideas into effective ridicule. The *Los Angeles Times* has a columnist, Art Seidenbaum, who uses simple common sense to dramatize systematic mistakes. Last May 1 he turned to education in California, the state often claimed to be a "leader" in innovative teaching. He described an advisory session for the young:

We were at a meeting for young people working their way through junior high school, students who will graduate to the next stage of secondary education this year. They were listening to adults already advising them on their careers. One guiding voice talked about the need to have a major in high school. Another suggested the students begin to think about picking a university based on its strength in whichever job discipline the student wants to pursue. A third speaker kept repeating "the world of work" and "salable skills" as if they were the absolute amens for being educated. What do you want to be, they seemed to ask, when you're fifteen? I became annoyed, on the way to becoming upset.

A decade ago, I was worried about increased vocational training in high schools, railing against what seemed to be the new emphasis on "earning a living as opposed to learning a life." You don't understand, said the educators, explaining how students had to find places to support themselves in an increasingly specialized society, how the best ladders up from poverty were professional or technical and not arts liberal.

They didn't convince me. If work skills were the most important parts of education, then why not go back to apprenticeships? Why not let companies run the universities and high schools as basic training camps for industrial recruits? If college football has turned into an inexpensive minor league for professional football—block and tackle fundamentals

with a side order of social graces—why not let brokerage houses coach business schools?

Today's students, one advisor declared, want to learn engineering. He said nothing about the fact that there are now too many engineers, and that recent graduates are out on the highway pumping gas, like the graduate Ph.D.'s of a few years ago. Or they want to study "business," or at least take some computer-related courses. At the meeting Seidenbaum attended, "Nobody said much about language or history or philosophy, although the school administrators did mention the enlarged English requirement, presumably because colleges have not yet figured out a way to teach engineering, business or computer sciences to someone who can't read or write."

Language and a sense of history, Seidenberg says, are the bedrock of education. If you learn only some technical specialty, before long you may have to join the growing number of people who need "retraining" in order to find a job. He comments:

Sure, chemistry works. But so does literacy. In its least limited sense, literacy *is* a constant retraining program. These are citizens we are trying to train, people who will have to choose policies, respect laws, elect officials and accept responsibilities. Citizenship is a tough course for any individual and it must be learned early. Education, most particularly junior high and high school education, still has to serve person needs ahead of personnel needs.

Another brand of common sense appears in a new book by Nader Khalili, *Racing Alone* (Harper & Row). Khalili is an Iranian architect who got his education in the U.S. While going to school in the Los Angeles area, he passed on the road a Cadillac sunk in a ditch. The driver, an old and embarrassed man, asked him to report the accident to the Auto Club. But Khalili took his jack and prepared to change a damaged tire.

Just at this moment another car pulls over and a couple of students get out to help. In a few minutes we have his car out of the ditch.

The old man hurries over, thanks us, and offers a twenty dollar bill. I refuse it; the students take it.

Seeing my refusal, he gives me his business card and says he is the president of such-and-such a company. He is all uneasy and wants somehow to return what he calls "this great favor."

This man was so surprised at the moment when I stopped my car to help him that he didn't even know how to ask for help. He'd probably never learned how to ask for help, anyway. And now he immediately wanted to pay back what he thought was his obligation. This man was covered by more than six layers of insurance, but never thought that he might need the help of another fellow being.

As the students drove away and we, too, parted, I became even more convinced of two conclusions I had come to before: one was a realization of the ignorance of my own high school teachers back home. They used to tell us that the ideal way of training children was the American style of paying kids for their work. If you pay a child when he helps with the dishes at home, or the neighbor pays him to cut the grass, the child will learn to be independent and will understand the value of money. The teachers who told us this had no idea that when these same children grow up, they will never want to help anybody without being paid for it.

Now comes the kind of common sense that columnists seldom if ever use, an omission which needs no explaining.

My second conclusion was that the single most effective force leading toward the destruction of the very essence of the American heroic, pioneering character of extending the helping hand has been the insurance companies. They create a fear of the need for help, and then offer insurance—salvation; a superficial self-sufficiency and peace of mind.

And now, as we indiscriminately import packaged technology, we are not aware that such things come together in the same package.

Nader Khalili does not have command of the idiomatic English that Art Seidenberg uses, but this doesn't matter. He has access to the common sense that cannot be made into either a policy or a course in school without being denatured. Yet when people have it and use it, there is an indescribable effect on everything else—silver lining, golden glow—you name it, as the less inventive columnists used to say.

## *FRONTIERS* Central American "School"

HAVING asked for—and received—a copy of *Now We Can Speak—A Journey through the New Nicaragua* by Frances Lappé and Joseph Collins (Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1885 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103, \$4.95), we begin a brief report on the current history of some two and a half million people in Central America by quoting the authors:

Nicaragua is a country the size of Pennsylvania, located between Honduras and Costa Rica. Despite the fact that five acres of land were under cultivation for each person—twice what we have in the United States—almost 60 per cent of all children under the age of four were underfed. And, by the 1970s, 60 per cent of rural people had been deprived of the land they needed to feed themselves while 1.4 per cent monopolized over 40 per cent.

The U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua for almost 21 straight years from 1912 to 1933, leaving only after they had installed one of the most corrupt and brutal regimes in the Americas, the Somozas, who allied themselves more closely with the U.S. government than with the Nicaraguan people. (So dominated was Nicaragua that, as late as the 1940s, its national treasury was housed in Hartford, Connecticut!)

By the mid-1970s, practically everyone in the country declared "Baste!"—we've had enough. The workers in the few cities and the farmers and landless workers in the countryside, organized by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), were joined by shopkeepers, businessmen, professionals—even the sons and daughters of Somocista families—to fight the dictatorship.

Finally, on July 17, 1979, with 50,000 dead and the economy in ruins, Anastasio Somoza Debayle fled to Miami and the Sandinistas marched triumphantly into the capital city.

The book is about what the Nicaraguans are doing to see that everyone has enough to eat. They are glad to talk about this, since during the days and the years of the Somoza dictatorship they found that "to speak out is to risk your life." There is no ideology in *Now We Can Speak*, but a lot of sympathy for the Nicaraguans. The writers

quote both friends and critics of the Sandinista regime.

What else should we know about Nicaragua, for background? Well, the region was discovered by Columbus in 1502. The Spanish ruled there for three centuries, and the government officials, according to the *Britannica* (11th ed.), "almost invariably devoted their whole energy to enriching themselves and the home authorities." Moreover, during the Spanish tenure, of the first five rulers, "the first had been a murderer, the second a murderer and a rebel, the third murdered the second, the fourth was a forger, the fifth a murderer and a rebel."

The Nicaraguans, it seems, have quite a past to overcome. That, if left alone, they may be able to do it is suggested by the present government's policy in dealing with Somoza's *Guardia*, "people who in most countries would have been executed without a trial."

One of the first acts of the new government was the abolition of capital punishment. Each of the 8,000 members of Somoza's National Guard who were captured was tried. More than half were released, which outraged many of the Nicaraguans who lost loved ones to the Guard's boundless brutality. The others were imprisoned, though in 1982 the case of each prisoner was being individually reviewed for possible mistrials.

At the Center for Agrarian Reform, Frances Lappé and Joe Collins talked to a member of the Food System Study Team who told how they gather information:

First, we ask the neighborhood organizations, the CDSs, to call a general neighborhood meeting for everyone to talk about their problems. In these meetings we can get a pretty good sense of people's experience—what they eat, where they buy their food, why they buy it where they do, how they think food distribution should be organized. . . .

Most of the people say that for them, the situation is more or less the same as before the start of the revolution. We're not surprised. Some say it is worse.

Why, the visitors asked, do you say you're not surprised?

Because the country's still recovering. Food production was wiped out during the insurrection and it's taking time to rebuild. Last year the government increased the credit to small farmers who produce most of the country's beans and corn. It was almost five times what they ever got under Somoza. Production did go up, but transportation to get the food from the countryside into the city was inadequate. A lot of the food rotted. And we had to import food. This year it will be better, definitely. For the first time in many years, we shouldn't need to import.

An interesting change brought by the revolution resulted from the Law of Agrarian Reform passed in 1981. Property rights were not interfered with unless the land was left idle. An exception was land held by Somoza & Co., which was nationalized and then turned over to farming co-ops. After this was done 64 per cent of the land remained in the hands of small and large farmers. But absentee land-holders who refused to use or lease the land would lose it. The director of Land Reform said:

"One of the areas of debate over the Agrarian Reform Law was compensation to owners when idle land is taken. In our original proposal they would have received compensation. But the Council said owners of idle land should not get compensation. On reviewing this the Junta said no—we must give compensation. We sent the law back to the Council who came up with a compromise, the plan to compensate owners of idle land with a type of bond that is less valuable than the bonds offered to owners who are just under-utilizing their land. But we all agreed on no compensation for abandoned farms."

Asked about the "big producers," he said:

"They were never radically against the law. In off-the-record conversations they admitted that the law was very realistic. It is much more moderate than they expected. . . Since the law was passed the big growers have been scrambling not to come under the terms of the law. They've quickly tried to protect their abandoned land. They rushed to the bank to get credit to plant the most visible part or put some cattle on it. But it hasn't all been just for appearance.

Generally there has been a positive reaction. Although, of course, some are anxious.

Nicaraguans now think of their country as a "school." The authors of *Now We Can Speak* agree. It's difficult not to.