

## AFTER IDEOLOGIES

IT is not so many years since discussion could proceed and be intelligible on a wide variety of subjects, without a great deal of explaining of personal views or position-stating. No doubt much writing still goes on as if these areas of common agreement had continued into the present, but it hardly makes for interesting reading. There was a time, for example, when a man who subscribed to the *Scientific American*, who maintained contact with the liberal press, read *Harper's* and the *Atlantic*, and turned to the *National Geographic* for the kind of background that was acquired as mild entertainment, could feel that he was keeping up with the world. A characteristic of this period was that, for by far the great majority of readers, no big (identity-threatening) issues were at stake. All this is now changed. That is, while this sort of material is still available, it cannot give the reader that secure sense of being *informed*, which it once supplied.

Easy-to-understand certainties are all pretty shallow, these days. And the men who write with deep intensity are usually specialists whose clarity is a result of concentration in their particular fields, and whose "universality," while undeniably real, is on only one plane of awareness. Something of the thought we are attempting to convey may be gained from considering the kind of frustration which ensues when even the people you think you ought to disagree with are ambiguous about what they maintain, and you find, in trying to formulate your own position, that the framework of "reality" with which you try to integrate your values and opinions has become a very slippery affair.

This is a way of saying that a general dialogue about meaning no longer goes on. Or of saying that the familiar stipulations concerning "reality" and "value" which make general dialogue possible no longer carry much weight. Or of saying that

the "issues" have moved from arguments about cosmology (which on the surface is a fairly calm area of debate) into the realm of crucially felt moral questions—such as the problems of war, the nationalist and social revolutions which keep breaking out, and the struggle the world over for justice and equality among the races.

The science-versus-religion controversy is practically a dead issue, and while meetings between theologians and scientists are now frequent, they produce little beyond a vague and somewhat sentimental agreement that both have ways of "knowing" which must be taken into account. There is no clear issue to be debated in terms of the structure of thought or philosophy, since no one is willing to declare a significant philosophic position that has consequences with which the mind can grapple. (Billy Graham is hardly useful for this purpose, and there are no tough-minded materialists among the scientists who are writing books for the general reader.) Nor is there any ideological argument or dialogue that can be seriously regarded from the viewpoint of political philosophy. While new issues exist, these have not yet been defined in terms that serve the purposes of popular debate. One has only to read carefully the expressions of indigenous American radicalism in such books as *The New Student Left* (Cohen and Hale, Beacon, 1966) to see how unwilling the new radicals are to let their thought become captive to any ideological formula. Actually, the lack of any long-term program on the part of the student-radicals may be a result of genuine strength—of intellectual integrity—rather than some kind of "utopian" indecision. This movement needs time and a serious effort on the part of its critics to understand what it is about.

To see how emptied of meaning is the area of ideological controversy, one has only to read the

Symposium titled "Thirty Years Later—Memories of the First American Writers' Congress," in the *American Scholar* for the summer of 1966. The text transcribes the present recollections of Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, Granville Hicks, William Phillips, and Daniel Aaron, all of whom were participants in the impressive get-together of American writers that was organized by the Communist Party in 1935. A question asked by Daniel Aaron conveys the thirty-years-after mood of the Symposium (held in December, 1965):

. . . don't you feel that the young intellectuals, those who came to the first Congress, and those who affiliated with the League of American Writers afterward, differed from the young radicals of today in that they did feel that there was a focus to their radicalism? It was centered, after all, on two or three important positions or concepts, whereas today there doesn't seem to be this focus. And this is one of the reasons why today's radicals have a difficult time identifying with the period of the thirties.

Kenneth Burke comments:

Isn't the lack of focus due precisely to the lack of an enemy in common? Isn't it always the same situation? Is there anything else to it? If we had a clear enemy in common today wouldn't you get exactly the same kind of focus?

William Phillips, editor of *Partisan Review*, speaks of the changed scene—the presence of the atomic bomb, the more settled outlook of the Soviet Union, the emergence of China, and the unwillingness of the new radicals to become involved in the ideological arguments which characterized the 1930's. He added:

It's a very complicated and difficult and new world, and what the more conscious students are trying to do—and partly succeeding and partly failing—is to move into this new world without ideological preconceptions. But without having ideological preconceptions, at the same time they have an enormous ideological innocence which makes us feel terribly sophisticated compared to them. And yet they're willing to face this world in a way that I'm not sure we're able to do. . . .

At this point Malcolm Cowley spoke generally of "the tremendous failure of the

intellectuals in the twentieth century"—lacking a "single thinker . . . who has acquired the stature of Marx or Darwin or Freud." Granville Hicks commented:

I think that's the fault of the twentieth century, not of the thinkers. It's all grown too big, too complicated; nobody can, no one person can begin to take it all in. I think that's the fault of the times we live in.

A further explanation—although not, perhaps, an extenuation—might be the fact that the intellectuals of the twentieth century have been far better at criticism than affirmation, with the result that, under the impact of recent historical experience and institutional failure, there is available no *strong* positive doctrine about the nature of things, of man, and of social good. There is nothing to create the intellectual and moral tensions, for and against some positive thesis, that provide the field for dialogue. This means that the "enemies" are all, intellectually speaking, straw men. Naturally enough, a great many people take refuge from feelings of confusion in the status quo, but without knowing, in theoretical terms, what the status quo is. They get their support, not from an appeal to reason, but from "community" with the confirming anxieties of others. The failure of dialogue is therefore a natural consequence of a vast conspiracy of silence concerning the theoretical foundations of human life. Political argument, today, is seldom an appeal to principle, but almost entirely rationalizations of the maneuvers of military power. And those who try to think about the future do not invoke theories of high social vision, but offer technical predictions of what the compulsive necessities of evolving technology and electronic mass communication may compel us to do.

Kenneth Burke speaks of the loss of a sense of form in intellectual inquiry, continuing:

I wonder whether we might have a form in a certain sense at least as educators. Can't we have a form in the sense that we can try to train people in the kind of temptations to which we are naturally prone,

like this damn business of always blaming it on the other fellow, and so on? And there's the fact that we confront somehow or other the needs of a world order, whether we want it or not, because technology is forcing that kind of a conclusion upon us. Isn't that a form? And a fact? I think that the avoidance of revolution in a society like ours is "wholesome" in the sense that a highly complex industrial state can't stand anything but a palace revolution. You get your revolutions, ironically enough, in places unlike those prophesied by Marx, places with economic systems that you can't destroy by cutting a spinal column. Each section can survive locally, without need of a center. It was the kind of a situation that existed in Russia before the high development of industry—and you can see it in many parts of Asia.

There is something almost pathetic in the fact that these enormously sophisticated men—distinguished intellectual leaders of the thirties and after—are now reduced to the simple insights of moralists (don't blame the other fellow), and to hoping that the young radicals of the present will not refuse to learn from the mistakes of their elders. (William Phillips remarks: "The one thing students keep repeating is that the people who had anything to do with the thirties, the Old Left, as they call it, have nothing to say to them. I think it would be sad if nobody learned from our mistakes.") Yet the pathos is only apparent since primary ethical truths are often expressed very simply, and the idea of not blaming the other fellow is in fact the psychological Gibraltar on which the Reality Therapy of William Glasser is founded.

This casual—even after-thoughtish—statement by Burke may be a frail reed on which to base a far-reaching conclusion, but it must nonetheless be done. The conclusion is that during the decline of ideological "morality" which began, say, in the thirties with the Moscow Trials, and is today just about complete, there has been a slow, quiet return to classical humanist principles by perceptive individuals—people who find themselves unable to bear the moral vacuum which pervades every phase of the politics of power. About the only disciplined account of this trend—a response to deep human need—is

provided by Dwight Macdonald in his essay, *The Root Is Man*, soon to be restored to print by Richard Grossman. The failure of ideological morality is exposed by Macdonald in a passage written in 1946:

How deeply does modern man experience the moral code he expresses in public? One recalls the encounter of two liblab American journalists with a Labor member of the British cabinet during the war. They asked him for "some sort of idea about what Britain was fighting for." The Laborite was puzzled. "Then he smiled and said that Britain, of course, could state the sort of aims we seemed to demand, of course Britain could get out a list of points. But he asked us what they would mean—they would be mere platitudes. He was intensely sincere and he could not understand why we should be shocked. . . ." (*PM*, Jan. 30, 1941.)

The fact that "everybody" agrees that war, torture and the massacre of helpless people are Evil is not reassuring to me. It seems to show that our ethical code is no longer *experienced*, but is simply *assumed*, so that it becomes a collection of "mere platitudes." One does not take any risks for a platitude. Ask a dozen passersby, picked at random, whether they believe it is right to kill helpless people; they will reply of course not (the "of course" is ominous) and will probably denounce the inquirer as a monster for even suggesting there could be two answers to the question. But they will "go along" with their government in World War III and kill as many helpless people as possible.

Ideology is a system of "thought" which makes "going along" seem the right thing to do.

The amorphous, *ad hoc* character of the new radicalism is to be attributed directly to this disenchantment with ideology. The humanist mandate for the rejection of ideology was clearly stated, years ago, by Andrea Caffi, and printed as the final paper by Macdonald in his *Root Is Man*. Caffi says in his final paragraphs:

. . . we must conclude that the first thing to do, in order to get to the point where "politics of the people" will be more than a phrase, is to begin from the beginning, that is: with the rescue of individuals from the mass that mechanizes and dehumanizes them. We must find again the direct language, the genuine feelings, the clear notions, the limpid images

through which we can establish a true communication with the "people." . . .

Rather than solidarity, we should promote friendship among the individuals who struggle to emerge from the "mass." Those friendships should then be strengthened through some constructive enterprise carried out in common. The aim remains the rebirth of true "popular" communities. The humblest aims, from an association for mutual help to a club where people meet and spend time together, can eventually lead to an association whose unwritten norms will actually inspire both the private and the public life of its components. Two conditions are obviously indispensable: the first is that the number of people so associated be limited, so as to permit each individual to get to know *well* all his companions, the second is that such an association be not made dependent on an authority endowed with means of coercion.

We must wake again in the individual the courage to frankly assert his need for *happiness*, and no longer resign himself to substitutes, conformism, and "ideological" imbecility. In Europe, we haven't got space to escape from the suffocation of mass regimes. The only escape open to us is a bold and uncompromising recourse to reason (which, among other things, would mercilessly ridicule any form of authoritarianism, theocracy, "ideocracy," or what Sartre calls *l'esprit de serieux*) and to a sociability so refined, so vigilant, and so tolerant, as to give the individual, together with a sense of common purpose and solidarity, a feeling of full personal independence.

Only through the reawakening and cultivation of such qualities can we slowly build a "civilization of the people" in opposition to the "civilization" of the masses, where everything tends to be measured in terms of sheer utilitarianism, stability is again and again sought on the lowest possible level, and a coarse pragmatism is supposed to be the measure of all truth and all justice.

These ideas, you could say, are profound intuitions of the psycho-social needs of mankind, and the extent to which they permeate the reviving anarchist movement and the new radicalism is a measure of their universal pertinence. There is no point, today, in demanding an elaboration of "structure." This would mean no more than a covert borrowing from the old ideologies. It is clear that viable structures, if they follow Caffii's

principles, will have to be *grown*, not planned and blueprinted. The health and the integrity of the *polis* are at stake.

Meanwhile, it is useful to ask, what, if anything, is good about ideologies and how do they go wrong? Ideology, quite obviously, is a practical extension into politics of primary ideas concerning the nature of man. If the term is used prejudicially, as an epithet, it means that its ambitions exceed its authority and that various related dogmas result, the rejection of which becomes politically punishable. Such offenses are openly and legally penalized in authoritarian (either materialistic or theological monistic) systems, and are deviously punished in supposedly non-authoritarian systems which find it necessary to become authoritarian in practice.

The fundamental error in all ideological systems, however constructed, seems to be the assumption by some men (rulers) of the responsibility for the ultimate good (not just the political good) of others (the ruled). This leads to the suppression of rival, unorthodox, heretical, or subversive doctrines of ultimate good which are in conflict with ideological doctrine, or which lead to conflict with ideological practice. The really terrible problem presented by ideology lies in the reluctance—amounting to inability—of self-righteous leaders to give up their claim of being responsible for the *ultimate* good of other men. As long as they insist on this responsibility, they can justify everything they do in the name of the "control" they require to do what *must* be done. Corruption and the crimes of self-interest are comparatively easy to overcome, in contrast to the determination of self-righteous men to do what they "know" to be right for all.

What then is ideology? It is coarsened, vulgarized, oversimplified metaphysics. Its originally metaphysical character is hidden behind monistic claims of "self-evident" truth, or is so embedded in religious *mores* that it cannot be examined impartially or critically without public scandal. The sophisticated (Machiavellian)

ideologists know this perfectly well, but never speak of it, while the naïve ideologists cannot even bear the thought of this kind of self-examination, so that for all practical purposes the secret remains well kept.

The return of human freedom to the individual—the only focus where it has any meaning or reality—seems practically impossible, today, because freedom has been speciously identified with ideologies for so long, and because our institutions have developed so extensively in terms of monistic theory, that we can imagine truly free situations as being possible only under the most primitive circumstances. And it is for this reason that men who are determined to be free seem to treat complex and highly rationalized arrangements as though they were mindless brute facts about which a free human being cannot "reason" but must simply *reject*. He must treat his environment with this extreme simplicity because he cannot be free without reducing it to humanly manageable terms. No one has put this necessity more clearly than Thoreau.

How shall we make society fit for Thoreaus, or for men who would like to be Thoreau, but lack the necessary strength of mind? Well, we cannot do it. Not now, at any rate. Thoreau was obviously persuaded of some intuitive metaphysic which taught him that the individual is *real*, and his decisions as an individual the most important thing in the world. Who else knows this? Well, the educators know it, so long as they have not been enslaved by some ideology and fallen into the habit of training children for "citizenship" (conformity to ideology) instead of helping them to grow into full humanity. We need, then, a metaphysic which is in harmony with the experience of the best educators. With it, we may be able to plan and give structure to institutions which cherish the free growth of human beings as the highest value there is. What could be higher?

What about the people who ridicule metaphysics and say that science has put an end to all such nonsense? You have to ignore them.

They are still captive of the scientific ideology and its deadly monist influence. They are still polemical "reactors" to the equally deadly monism of an earlier, theological ideology. The whole of human history declares the necessity of metaphysics. We have let the controversies about ideologized metaphysics, recognized only in its competing and collectivist forms, blind us to the fundamental nature and needs of all human beings.

## *REVIEW*

### A PSYCHOLOGY FOR FREE MEN

THE undoing of what Julien Benda called the "treason of the clerks" is no easy undertaking. It is on a par with restoring the governance of reason and the goal of individual human excellence, after what Ortega named the "revolt of the masses." It is, further, to make a general rule of what, in Czeslaw Milosz' words, "has been in every age the writer's essential task—to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint, to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole."

Involved is a weighing of the order and precedence of the various kinds of "certainties" in human life. It is of the utmost importance to the human community to apply its certainties so that, on the one hand, public hazards are reduced to a minimum; yet also to restrict them so that, on the other, ranges of crucial discovery remain open to original and daring minds.

For example, in behalf of public safety we have the uniform building code which embodies the knowledge and experience of various branches of the engineering profession. A vast network of licensing procedures has grown up to assure the public that men who pilot ships, erect bridges, practice medicine, teach in schools and otherwise perform services founded upon known and tested disciplines know what they are doing. At the same time, we offer constitutional assurance that matters which lack such generally accepted means of verification will remain open and undecided, so far as authoritative or coercive power is concerned.

These arrangements, embodying the general theory of the eighteenth-century idea of man and his social and individual good, are more or less acceptable. There is great common sense in expecting and requiring an electrician to know enough about circuitry and load to wire your home; and ample justification for outrage at the thought of a political authority that might deny

you a driver's license because you do not attend the correct or any religious services on Sunday. Such middle-of-the-road statements of issues give little cause for concern. It is mainly at the fringes of these great areas of public and private decision that our troubles occur, or begin to be seen.

There are many ways to speak of how these troubles spread. One would be to say that they corrupt the intellectual atmosphere whenever the bureaucratic and administrative temper is allowed certainty-defining functions. This may happen at various levels in human affairs. The enterprises of a Frank Lloyd Wright are likely to be frustrated by the narrow capacities of a building department official who got his engineering degree only because he had a good memory—not because he could think. A modern Paracelsus would surely encounter opposition from the Food and Drug Administration. And while it is illegal to offer to perform a religious sort of "miracle" for money, in a mail-order campaign, an astutely planned advertising program finds it easy enough to profit by selling the sizzle of scientific miracles under another name. In short, habituating people to the codification of "certainties" is a culturally hazardous affair, since human trust in authority then makes possible a code-in-hand sort of manipulation of the symbols of certainty in areas where none in fact exists. The bureaucratic authorities don't do the manipulating, of course, for they are "honorable men," placed in charge of the Reliable Definitions which are known to be guides to the Public Good. And the institutions staffed by such men come to be known as Reliable Institutions.

A culture secure in the grip of institutional definitions of certainty is commonly bewildered by the far-reaching ranges in the work of a free intelligence. His sanctions are different from the institutional sanctions. What he says will often seem "unreal" to those who have never questioned the institutionalized assumptions of the day. He may start on what seems the solid floor of safe and comfortably established categories of

knowledge, but then take off into a space that is for them dimensionless, or not supposed to be there at all. Yet, in such a culture, if the time is right, there will be others who know what he means. How do they know? That is the great question.

At issue is the meaning and scope of scientific knowledge. At issue *may* be the sources and credentials of religion. How ought such issues to be considered? Well, there is only one valid way of considering them, and that is by finding a ground of certainty, or a criterion of truth, which is prior to, outside of, and with higher authority than any and all institutional definitions of meaning and truth. If such an investigation were to proceed in the name of science, it would have to define science such that it includes this higher ground. The same would apply for religious inquiry. Both science and religion would thus become part of the Humanities, in the best and most inclusive meaning of the term.

A book which takes a long stride in this direction is *The Psychology of Science—A Reconnaissance* (Harper & Row, 1966, \$4.50) by Abraham Maslow. It is a book which, as the author says, is "primarily an effort to enlarge the conception of science so as to make it more capable of dealing with persons, especially fully developed and fully human persons." The initial and all-important distinction is made in the first chapter, between "Mechanistic and Humanistic Science." Following is a characteristic passage in a later chapter:

The picture of truth and reality that we have inherited from the classical science of the impersonal is that it is "out there," perfect, complete, hidden but uncoverable. In the earlier versions the observer simply observed. In later versions it was understood that the observer had spectacles that distorted but which could never be removed. Most recently physicists and psychologists have learned that the act of observation is itself a shaper, a changer, an intruder into the phenomenon of being observed. In a word, the observer partly creates the reality, *i.e.*, the truth. Reality seems to be a kind of alloy of the perceiver and the perceived.

This view has far-reaching purport and consequence. It says in effect that the quality of the observer affects the content of his observation and may even affect what is observed. The laws of a loved universe may be different or will certainly appear different from those of a universe that is hated or feared. The theories of a crusader for good will be different from those of a man in flight. A lover sees things that are lovable and can love in return. The timeless, indefinable substances of Being have a taste and savor for the man aware of their continuous presence, in the midst of all his abstracting, organizing, manipulating and relating activities. How conclusions of this sort gain the status of scientific observations is part of the alchemy of this volume, which has remarkably persuasive power for those who demand of science that it illuminate and enrich the essential meaning of human life.

The method disclosed in this book is best conveyed, perhaps, by an analogy. In last week's MANAS, the leading article called scientists "map-makers." Now in order to *see* the configuration of the land, you have to get elevation. The most faithful maps are probably constructed from photographs taken in the air. If, then, you are trying to map the critical areas of human experience, and all the spaces between, you need a similar elevation—as high as you can get. At some point, as you rise in the scale of human experience, you leave the "objective" world behind. But the experience goes on; you could argue—and Maslow does argue—that this experience changes from level to level and the differences among orders of experience can and must be subjected to observation and descriptive report. Why should areas in which originate the most crucial forms of human behavior be ignored by science? Living things behave differently from inert materials; and thinking and feeling things—or selves—have their own unique fields and forms of action. Since we are thinking and feeling beings, we can look at ourselves and make reports to one another letting the richness of subjective variety and the intense impact of subjective

experience compensate for the absence of "objectivity." The important thing about this book is that it makes generalizations about subjects in an impartial but vivid language which is understood by subjects—they find that the communications are about realities which they can grasp as selves, and as pertaining to themselves. The cumulative effect of this communication is to suggest the substantiality of the "science" thus in birth. Obviously, scientific information about beings who are capable of acts of the imagination is not marred by being imparted through acts of the imagination. Such facts are authentically communicated in no other way.

*The Psychology of Science* is filled with rich "vector analysis" of the inner life, directly applying to how subjects confine themselves and others, and how they may begin to set themselves and others free. The book is also useful in offering tentative rules concerning what it is lawful to define in some familiar way, and what is killed, stultified, or hidden by limiting definition. The only difficulty one experiences with this book—a difficulty not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what we expect it to be—is its requirement that the reader do a stint of the same kind of exploration and verification that the writer has done. Naturally. His subject is subjects. To understand him, the reader needs to think about subjects and to reflect on the gamut of subjective possibility. On the whole, it is a somewhat scary and unfamiliar task, yet one promising satisfactions, and even delights, if the pleasure Dr. Maslow takes in his work is an indication.



**COMMENTARY**  
**NATURAL PARADISE—SOCIAL HELL-  
 HOLE**

THE facts in this week's *Frontiers* about the Negro sharecroppers of Mississippi were supplied by Donald Newton, with help from Robert Swann and Paul Salstrom, of Voluntown, Conn. Some general observations by Mr. Newton fill out the picture:

The most alarming aspect of the over-all problem is the lack of comprehension on the part of poor Negroes that there will be no work in cotton for them this year, and probably never again. While welfare assisted many of them through last winter, few more welfare checks can be expected. Operation Help a federal program, is blocked on the county level, with little of this aid seeping through to those for whom it was intended. Living from week to week, in declining hope that the labor situation will re-establish itself, the Negroes of Mississippi face a future at least as bleak as that of the miners of Appalachia. To dramatize the extreme need of these people, a film called *Refugees* is being planned. It will begin with known trouble areas, showing the homeless farmers of South Vietnam, similar unfortunates in the Middle East and in Africa—then spotlight the plight of the Mississippi Delta farm workers and their families.

Robert Swann has called attention to another phase of the problem—what he terms the "energy-decline" of the Civil Rights movement of Mississippi—in the people who struggled through the Greenville demonstration and are now confronted with the onset of so large a flood of refugees that it is bound to swamp *any* facilities they may be able to set up. Spreading desperation in the South, hot-weather tensions in the crowded northern ghettos, lack of money, exhaustion of enthusiasm and no programs for dealing realistically with the economic root-cause of all this misery—these are the unnerving prospects faced by workers for racial equality.

For vivid personal impressions of the plight of the Delta Negro, there is no better reading than a chapter in Erskine Caldwell's recent (non-fiction) *In Search of Bisco* (Pocket Book). In it he says:

It was nature's unquestioned right to skim the richness of soil from a wide expanse of America and deposit it in the Delta. However, it was a

questionable privilege that permitted plantation owners to acquire extraordinary wealth from the land by ruthlessly impoverishing the people who labored on it. Ownership of the land changed from generation to generation, but the feudal system went unchanged. The agricultural paradise also remains, as likewise does the family of man which has labored without equitable reward in a sociological and economic hell-hole since the days of slavery.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### ADULTS LOOK AT THE YOUNG

So much of the popular material printed about children, these days, is flat and uninteresting that one is constrained to wonder why.

One answer comes soon. These writers *sound* as if they knew what they were talking about—as if they really understood children and their problems. They don't, of course. The largest part of understanding children comes from not making unwarranted assumptions about them. One suspects that the apparent confidence of some writers about children is often a front for getting what they write accepted by the editors of magazines which are sold to parents who think they need help in bringing up their families. Nearly all are semi-innocent participants in a glib cover-up of confusion—a confusion which begins to clear only when it is candidly confessed.

We don't know much about children for the simple reason that we don't know much about ourselves. If we refuse to admit this, then the problems of children become problems of *management*, of getting them to accept the confusion and ambivalence of adult life as if it were quite "normal." It is not hard to become an expert in this sort of management, since the world is full of material on how children behave under the pressures of the times, and it is easy enough to learn to do tricky things with all these "data."

The enormous influence of A.S. Neill is largely due to the fact that he refuses to do tricky things. In a world of pompous pretensions an honest man who loves children is bound to cut back to primary simplicities. He won't play any of the self-deceiving games, and he will absolutely refuse to practice education as a means of bringing up children to play them. This becomes plain from a dialogue between Mario Montessori and A.S. Neill that was printed in *Redbook* for December, 1964. Neill's approach is like that of

Silone's hero, Spina, in *The Seed Beneath the Snow*—*he will play no games!* Even if this means no "education"!

At one point in the interchange, Montessori had been telling how small children who learned to read and write from Madame Montessori caused their illiterate mothers to want to learn how to read and write. Neill's reaction declares the drive behind all his work. Montessori's story about the four- and five-year-old children who learned to write makes Neill explode: "This is beyond me. It's beyond me." Montessori asks why, and Neill explains:

It's beyond me because you're talking about education, the three R's and science, and I'm thinking about the dynamics of life, the dynamic in a child, how we're going to prevent the child from becoming a Gestapo, or becoming a color hater and all these things. The sickness of the world. I'm interested in what we're going to do *for* children to stop them from becoming haters, to stop them from being anti-life.

A remark by Montessori about teaching arithmetic brought a further exclamation:

*Neill:* To hell with arithmetic. . . .

*Montessori:* Why do you say to hell with arithmetic?

*Neill:* That's partly personal. You see, I spent four years at Edinburgh University taking an Honours English degree and then I went to found a school in Germany in 1921, and suddenly I found I had to sit silent and listen to people talking about art and philosophy and music. I didn't learn a thing about them, and it struck me then what a miserably narrow thing any university education is. And it's true, I think, all that stuff you learn at school, most of it flies away. I once read Homer in Greek; I can't now. I once could read Latin. I can't read Latin today. So much of that has gone, so that I discounted it as being relatively unimportant. . . . I've often had critics say to me, "Is it fair to keep a child away from music? It's not that they have to know music, but look at the joy they get." But look at the millions of good, happy people who don't learn music. Look at the millions who don't know anything about astronomy and things like that. So many things to know. But I find that children simply follow what they can. One boy with not much gray matter has just left our school. He's a carpenter, quite a good one, and quite happy. Four

other boys are university professors—or at least lecturers. I had a boy of seventeen who left Summerhill unable to read or write. He's now a very successful engineer.

*Montessori:* He couldn't read or write at the age of seventeen?

*Neill:* No, he couldn't. He learned because he found that without reading he couldn't read engineering plans. That was a complicated case because he had a grandmother who tried to make him read the Bible at three, I think. My daughter learned to read and write without any teaching at all, really, at five or six.

Well, what shall we say about A.S. Neill? One thing you have to say about him is that he is one of the few Christians left in the world. He is a man who understands and lives by the rule behind the question: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain [learn] the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Neill will have no truck with "education" that slides past this question as though it were some kind of campaign oratory.

Another thing that might be said is that unless one is able to share in Neill's deep conviction about rearing children to be on *the side of life*, his methods—which are hardly methods at all, but immediate expressions of an underlying philosophy of value—will seem empty of content. How could anyone imitate a man like that? One would have to feel as Neill feels to give to the daily life experiences of children the content Neill is able to give them. Toward the end of the dialogue, Neill seems to speak to this point:

Look at those American Summerhill schools. I sent a letter to the *Greenwich Village Voice*, in New York, disclaiming any affiliation with any American School that calls itself a Summerhill school. It's one thing to use freedom. Quite another to use license. I haven't visited regular American schools, but more than half the young people now in my school are Americans. There is a difference between American children and English children. The Americans are accustomed more to license than freedom, I think. In America I visited the home of a psychologist, or someone like that, hoping to have a chat with him. But his wife and two kids were in the room. The children monopolized the conversation. In another

case visitors came with a new Cadillac. They had a boy of thirteen. The boy was bored with talking, and he said, "Dad, give me the car keys; I'm going for a ride." Dad says, "Okay, Son." A boy of thirteen with a Cadillac! I don't know if that's usual in America, but that's the impression I got. At Summerhill we've had difficulties with American children coming over. They've read my book, you see. They say, "This is a free school; we'll do what we like." And when they find they're up against self-government and they can't do what they like they object.

Apparently, about all one can learn from Neill is how single-minded, uncompromising devotion to an ideal of human life affects a man who is devoted to children. You don't find out any "educational secrets." Neill has no "educational secrets" apart from his attitude toward life.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **A Plea for Delta Refugees**

PEOPLE in northern parts of the United States have a hard time realizing the continuous pain suffered by Negroes living in economically depressed areas in the South—such as the Delta region of Mississippi. It was bad enough in the days of white paternalism, when there could be at least occasional ties of affection and trust between the races, although at the price of Negro self-respect; but today, while the civil rights movement has brought a surging dignity to the Negro cause, the day-to-day conditions under which Negroes must try to survive—conditions which make victimization by ruthlessly discriminatory economic and political power the rule rather than the exception—have become practically unbearable.

Irony upon irony compounds the practical disasters already overwhelming the Negro sharecroppers of the Delta. In Sunflower County, according to one report, the man who was appointed head of the local anti-poverty program, financed by a federal grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity, is also the county's chief of police, who testified in a deposition that he had broken up voter registration meetings of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and arrested civil rights workers for distributing leaflets. Meanwhile the government's cotton subsidy to farmers (to support the price of cotton) has enabled the owners to buy weed-killers and mechanical cotton pickers, accomplishing permanent reduction in the available jobs. Nonetheless, the cut-back by one third of the cotton subsidy, this year, has had a further depressing effect on the economy of the area.

The broader picture of Delta cotton-growing is disclosed by this comparison: While the 1960 census reported 64,000 people working in the Delta counties, estimates for this year anticipated that only about 26,000 would be needed. This is a

reduction of almost 40,000 men in six years, with the most drastic cut occurring this year.

According to the Delta Ministry (a group of seventeen ministers working on civil rights problems), some 75,000 people, including women and children, are expected to be jobless and homeless throughout the state. It is estimated that 64 per cent of the total cotton labor force in Mississippi will this year have no work at all. The work season began late in March and it is now quite plain to many of these people that they are without hope of being hired. (As a rule, there is no employment in cotton for anyone from November to March, and during this period the Negro workers subsist for the most part on welfare money and on loans from employers, the latter being the traditional method of holding the Negroes in slave-like economic subjection.)

The problem takes on national proportions when it is realized that while the Southern states have one third of the (statistical) poor in the United States, only one tenth of the funds of the federal poverty program is spent in the South. The brute fact is that Negro labor is less and less needed by the Southern economy as presently developed, and many Southern Negroes are migrating to the already overcrowded ghettos of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, in quest of jobs that do not exist. White southerners delight in this exodus, since the northern cities, whence comes so much criticism of the South, are being flooded with desperate Negro immigrants. Many southerners believe that the "final solution" of the civil rights problem will be for the unemployed, uneducated, disfranchised Negro to *go away*. Tensions and violence in Watts and Harlem have only the meaning of "vindication" to such people.

But these migrations—which are no remedy at all for the jobless Negroes—do not reduce significantly the multiplying problems of the rural South. Early this year the Delta Ministry reported that more than two thousand Negro families had been evicted from Delta plantations during

preceding months and declared that the homeless Negroes in the area might reach a total of ten to twelve thousand *families* before the end of the year.

To give evidence of their acute need, dozens of dispossessed Negro refugee families last January took possession of the vacant Greenville (Miss.) Air Force Base. This demonstration, called a "live-in," was soon ended through forcible eviction of the families from the base by Air Police. The Greenville demonstration, however, was but one dramatic symptom of a widespread and growing desperation. Hundreds of Negro families are now living in improvised tent cities in Mississippi and Alabama.

A shocking aspect of this emergency is its almost total neglect by the federal government. After a visit to Mississippi late last year, New York Congressman Joseph Resnick wrote to Attorney General Katzenbach, declaring that Mississippi is the scene of a calculated effort to drive Negroes from the state. Of the refugee problem generally, he said:

In spite of the fact that this potential human disaster is well known in Mississippi, not one single state or federal employee or agency has made plans to cope with the extremely unfortunate situation.

These people will need temporary housing immediately to withstand a cold winter, with agricultural surplus foods delivered by federal authorities—as state authorities will not distribute them through the normal welfare department procedures or permit other agencies to do it for them.

The events at the Greenville Air Base brought comment in the House (Feb. 19) from Don Edwards, a California Congressman, who said: "I am wholeheartedly in favor of the plans now being made in Hawaii for dealing with the plight of the farmer in Vietnam; I would suggest, however, that the plight of the Negroes in the Delta Counties of Mississippi is equally tragic." And Jonathan Bingham (Rep., N.Y.) said of the eviction:

. . . it would have been wiser and more compassionate for the Government to have furnished food and medicine to the Greenville people while, at

the same time, undertaking a comprehensive, rapid program designed to alleviate the conditions which made the protest so poignant. If the demonstrators were hungry and homeless when they engaged in the trespass, does dispossessing them answer their need for shelter and food? I find it hard to accept a situation where those who have no home are thrown out of unused housing. I find it difficult to accept a situation where surplus food is withheld from starving people while intergovernmental problems are being debated.

In a survey of the refugee situation in Mississippi, Robert Swann of the New England Committee for Non-Violent Action condemned the action against the Greenville "live-in" families as gross indifference to human need. He said:

Not only did it expose the refugee problem, and the lack of any real economic change (except for the worse), in spite of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964-65, but it also revealed the callousness of the federal government in its unwillingness to turn over the now deserted air base, with its many unused buildings and barracks, to the Negro refugees who so desperately need it.

This situation symbolizes, perhaps better than any other the morally bankrupt condition of a government which is willing to spend billions of dollars to hold back a revolution in a far-away country, but cannot even let its own citizens use its military facilities.

Mr. Swann, who recently visited Mississippi to investigate possible solutions for prolonged rural poverty in the South, is now working on an agricultural project which can be undertaken by the jobless Negroes themselves, with financial investment help from others, but without outside control. The Delta Ministry (a body formed within the National Council of Churches) has been able to purchase four hundred acres of land near Greenville, and plans to develop a pilot program that would house and support from sixty to a hundred families. The land-use would combine truck farming of vegetables and fruit with small, cooperative industry on the same scale as the Poor People's Corporation Co-ops. The growing scarcity of good truck farming land in California

and Florida makes truck farming produce in Mississippi a sound marketing possibility.

While the Office of Economic Opportunity has been asked to finance this pilot project, funds for building homes may not become available because of a technical obstacle—as a Washington official put it: "We can't give them help unless they own their own land." Bob Swann and others are now working on a plan for a new kind of funding, called the Freedom Development Fund, which will seek investors (instead of contributors) whose risk is covered by the value of the land, and who would be able if necessary to regain their money through a liquidity feature in the underwriting of the Fund.

The vision which engages Bob Swann's hopes and energies is the prospect of a civil rights movement which gradually becomes a community-based economic movement able to attract the financial support of northerners, along with moral and legislative backing. People interested in giving this project help should write to Robert Swann, CNVA, Voluntown, Conn.