

## RESTORING THE BALANCE

THE really important things have practically all been said, some of them hundreds of years ago. According to an ancient Persian maxim, "Truth is of two kinds—one manifest and self-evident; the other demanding incessantly new demonstrations and proofs." It is the latter kind that must be repeated over and over, in as many ways as possible, until finally it becomes a ruling principle. Much, for example, of what is now said about industrial society was briefly put two and a half centuries ago by Jonathan Swift (in *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726):

In these colleges, the professors contrive new rules and methods of agriculture and building, and new instruments and tools for all trades and manufactures; whereby as they undertake, one man shall do the work of ten, a palace may be built in a week, of material so durable, as to last forever without repairing. All the fruits of the earth shall come to maturity, at whatever season we think fit to chuse, and encrease an hundred fold more than they do at present, with innumerable other happy proposals. The only inconvenience is, that none of these projects are yet brought to perfection and, in the meantime, the whole country lies miserably waste. . . .

A hundred years later, Carlyle said it again, amplifying the comment. Examining for the *Edinburgh Review* (1829) what he called "the Mechanical Age"—"the Age of Machinery in every outward and inward sense of that word"—he wrote:

Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. . . . Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham Fire-king has visited the fabulous East. . . . There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet firehorse yoked in his stead. . . . For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for

casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.

But all this mechanical progress has the effect of "increasing the distance between the rich and the poor." The psychological effects of the machine age are worse. Carlyle rejects the assumption that machinery will put an end to human suffering and suggests that declaring it a panacea will dehumanize the race. In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx summarizes Carlyle on John Locke:

"His whole doctrine" says Carlyle "is mechanical, in its aim and origin, in its method and its results." When Locke makes the contents of the mind contingent upon images flowing in upon it from the outside, he reduces thought to what is ultimately a reflex of the world "out there." To account for a man's ideas and values only, or even chiefly, by the circumstances in which he lives is, according to Carlyle, to divest his thought of will, emotion, and creative power. If the mind is a reflex of what is, how can it possibly control circumstances? Control implies the power to compare what is with what may be. To Carlyle the empirical philosophy is negative and quietistic. "By arguing on the 'force of circumstances'," he says, "We have argued away all force from ourselves; and stand lashed together, uniform in dress and movement, like the rowers of some boundless galley." . . .

Used in this way the image of the machine connotes loss of inner freedom even as it provides outward power. "Practically considered," says Carlyle, "our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains." . . . The machine represents a change in our whole way of life, Carlyle argues, because "the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand."

Today, a hundred and fifty years later, the mechanistic outlook is almost wholly in charge of our everyday lives. Speaking of the effects of the expansion of industrial technology, Wendell Berry wrote in the Winter 1980-81 *Hudson Review*:

As industrial technology advances and enlarges, and in the process assumes greater and greater social, economic, and political force, it carries people away from where they belong by history, culture, deeds, association, and affection. And it destroys the landmarks by which they might return. . . . It thrives and burgeons upon the disintegration of homes, the subjugation of homelands. It requires that people cease to cooperate directly to fulfill local needs from local sources and begin instead to deal with each other always across the rift that divides producer and consumer, and always competitively. The idea of the independence of individual farms shops, communities, and households is anathema to industrial technologists. The rush to nuclear energy and the growth of the space colony idea are powered by the industrial will to cut off the possibility of a small-scale energy technology—which is to say the possibility of small-scale personal and community acts. The corporate producers and their sycophants in the universities and the government will do virtually anything (or so they have obliged us to assume) to keep people from acquiring necessities in any way except by *buying* them.

Like Carlyle, Berry turns to the underlying psychology:

People who are willing to follow technology wherever it leads are necessarily willing to follow it away from home, off the earth, and outside the sphere of human definition, meaning, and responsibility. One has to suppose that this would be all right if they did it only for themselves and if they accepted the terms of their technological romanticism absolutely—that is, if they would depart absolutely from all that they propose to supersede, never to return. But past a certain scale, as C. S. Lewis wrote, the person who makes a technological choice does not choose for himself alone, but for others; past a certain scale, he chooses for *all* others. Past a certain scale, if the break with the past is great enough, he chooses for the past, and if the effects are lasting enough he chooses for the future. He makes, then, a choice that can neither be chosen against nor unchosen. Past a certain scale, there is no dissent from a technological choice.

People speaking of this technological willingness cannot speak precisely, for what they are talking about does not yet exist. They cannot mean what they say because their words are avowedly speculative. They cannot stand by their words because they are talking about, if not in, the future, where they are not standing and cannot stand until long after they have spoken. All the grand and perfect dreams of the technologists are happening in the future, but nobody is there.

By what seems little more than coincidence, there were two publications in 1966 which throw a clear light on this futurist aspect of the doctrine of technological salvation, as it appears in the political credo of Soviet Russia. One was an article by Arthur P. Mendel, "The Rise and Fall of 'Scientific Socialism'," published in *Foreign Affairs* for October of that year. The other was publication (by Doubleday) of Michael Polanyi's *The Tacit Dimension*, in which this distinguished scientist related how the attitudes of Communist leaders caused him to give the rest of his life to the formulation of a non-mechanistic theory of knowledge and a humanized philosophy of science. We quote first from Mendel's discussion, since it seems directly related to "the grand and perfect dreams of the technologists":

Joseph Schumpeter gave us the perfect definition of Marx's scientific socialism when he called it "preaching in the garb of analysis." After observing this illusory fusion of science and ethics for more than a century, we are fully aware of its consequences: the concentration of absolute power in the hands of self-appointed executors of history's "laws," and their easy justification of deprivation and oppression as the "scientifically" necessary price to be paid for a future good society. . . .

The early history of Russian Marxism supports the view . . . that scientific socialism flourishes mainly in backward nations where conditions are least favorable to social progress. In the more advanced countries, where such progress is apparent and can reasonably be expected to continue, there is no need for the encouraging myth of scientific socialism. . . . Its record in developing economies makes clear, in fact, that the principal function of scientific socialism is precisely to support rapid industrialization. . . .

By becoming Marxists, the young radicals fully recognized what they themselves wanted and what they now knew was really best for the people. Social justice via socialism, of course. And Marx had proved for them that industrialization and urbanization were the indispensable requisites for this. How, for example, could anyone talk of just distribution before there was high productivity? How could production leap forward unless the abysmally stagnant rural economy was replaced by an economic system based on modern science and technology and overwhelmingly industrial? What about the high cost of industrialization, the immense burdens on the peasantry and even on the emerging proletariat, destined to suffer the bourgeois exploitation so luridly described by Marx? "Why blame us?" the Marxist could honestly retort. It was all inevitable. This was the way of History, and history proceeds dialectically. . . .

Here we see one of the sources of that fundamental paradox, by now so familiar, in the theory and practice of the "scientific socialist": the persistent sacrifice of precisely that segment of the population, the working classes, whose interests all socialists must claim to serve.

This analysis by Arthur Mendel is filled with accumulating evidence that intelligent Russians—scientists as well as writers and poets—are now thoroughly aware of the contradictions in the Marxist revolutionary credo. Whatever the hard-line policies of the present rulers in the Kremlin, far-reaching changes of attitude on the part of educated and perceptive Russians have now reached maturity, and are sometimes explicitly expressed, as Mr. Mendel's collection of citations makes clear. He summarizes the general realization in a brief paragraph:

Before socialists claimed to be scientists, or, as in the case of the Marxist revisionists, after they abandoned the claim, their behavior was ethically consistent with their goals and, in fact, differed little from that of their bourgeois opponents. But when they insisted that their goals were not only just, but also scientifically necessary and historically inevitable, they moved from this shared ethical code to one radically inconsistent with the moral foundations of socialism, one allowing the fullest scope to violence, cynicism and implacable conflict.

Marx, Mendel points out, spent long years of research in the British Museum in order to construct a myth founded on "scientific certainty," declaring that "History" would lead to the fulfillment of the revolutionary dream. This was the European version of "technological romanticism," to which was added the moral fanaticism of the Marxist-Leninist passion for social justice. Mendel makes it plain that only the shell of this belief now remains, verbally maintained by the leaders of the Soviet corporate state. The Russian intelligentsia and thinkers in other communist countries have wholly outgrown the Marxist-Leninist illusion. In America, this awakening seemed to come earlier, which is understandable. Writing in 1946 (in his magazine *Politics*, in a series later published as a book, *The Root Is Man*, by the Cunningham Press in 1953), Dwight Macdonald said:

. . . the British Marxist, John Strachey, is said to have once defined communism as "a movement for better plumbing." The Greeks were wise enough to treat scientific knowledge as a means, not an end, they never developed a concept of Progress. This wisdom may have been due to their flair for the human scale; better than any other people we know of: they were able to create an art and a politics scaled to human size. They could do this because they never forgot the tragic limitations of human existence, the Nemesis which turns victory into defeat overnight, the impossibility of perfect knowledge about anything. Contrast, for example, the *moderation* of Socrates, who constantly proclaimed his ignorance, with the pretensions of a 19th-century system-builder like Marx. The Greeks would have seen in Marx's assumption that existence can be reduced to scientifically knowable terms, and the bold and confident all-embracing system he evolved on the basis of this assumption—they would have set this down to "hubris," the pride that goeth before a fall. . . . this scientific "hubris" was dominant in the whole culture of that age of Progress. But it just won't do for us. . . .

Technological progress, the organization from the top of human life (what Max Weber calls "rationalization"), the overconfidence of the past two centuries in scientific method—these have led us, literally, into a dead end. Their trend is now clear: atomic warfare, bureaucratic collectivism, "the

crystallization of social action into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations . . . ." To try to fight this trend, as the Progressives of all shades do, with the same forces that have brought it about appears absurd to me. We must emphasize the emotions, the imagination, the moral feelings, the primacy of the individual human being, must restore the balance that has been broken by the hypertrophy of science in the last two centuries. The root is man, here and not there, now and not then.

This is the essential feeling reflected in the statements of thoughtful men in the Soviet bloc, quoted by Mendel:

The revisionist statements published in Poland and Hungary during the 1956 revolutions are still the most forceful of these expressions. "What right do I have," wrote the young Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, "in the name of that speculative dialectic of the future, to renounce at present the highest values of human existence? . . . I will not support any form of historical existence solely because someone persuades me that it is unavoidable—even if I believe in its unavoidability, for which at present there is no evidence. If crime is the law of history, is the realization of this law reason for me to become a criminal? Why should that be so?" . . . The Hungarian author Gyorgy Paloczi-Harvath expressed the same judgment still more poignantly:

"They fell in love so deeply with the generation of tomorrow, with the mankind to come, that there was hardly any love left for those who happened to live in today's world. They were brought up in a manner which only filled their hearts with cold and abstract feelings, and they thought that the generation of the day after tomorrow could be happy even if it was conceived in suspicion and fear."

Mendel also quotes at length from communist bloc scientists and historians, citing in summary something said by Leopold Infeld, Polish physicist and colleague of Einstein, to the effect that Soviet physicists "no longer read the Soviet philosophical journals and they don't care a damn what the philosophers have to say." Present-day physics has left far behind the assumptions of physical science from which Marx argued with such great confidence. Mendel says in his conclusion:

With this we come to what may be the fundamental reason for the withering away of

scientific socialism. The Soviet citizen can begin to relax. Russian society has come close enough to where it was really heading—and the direction has nothing to do with idyllic Communism—to give up, at least partially, the encouraging myths. . . . In sum, "preaching" and "analysis" can begin to go their own ways.

Wendell Berry's rejection of mechanistic and scientific futurism is on characterological and cultural grounds, without, we might say, the terrible urgency of the political crimes and wholesale liquidations which pressed Eastern thinkers to the conclusions repeated by Mendel. In the case of Michael Polanyi, both provocatives to reflection were present. As a result of a conversation in Moscow in 1935 with Bukharin, then the leading theoretician of the Communist party—who told the Hungarian scientist that Soviet science was wholly subordinate to Party doctrine and interests—Polanyi decided that such a conception of science was intolerable:

I was struck by the fact that this denial of the very existence of independent scientific thought came from a socialist theory which derived its tremendous persuasive power from its claim to scientific certainty. The scientific outlook appeared to have produced a mechanical conception of man and history in which there was no place for science itself. This conception denied altogether any intrinsic power to thought and thus denied also any grounds for claiming freedom of thought.

I saw also that this self-immolation of the mind was actuated by powerful moral motives. The mechanical course of history was to bring universal justice. Scientific skepticism would trust only material necessity for achieving universal brotherhood. Skepticism and utopianism had thus fused into a new skeptical fanaticism.

It seemed to me then that our whole civilization was pervaded by the dissonance of an extreme critical lucidity and an intense moral conscience, and that this combination had generated both our tight-lipped modern revolutions and the tormented self-doubt of modern man outside revolutionary movements. So I resolved to inquire into the roots of this condition.

While Polanyi's small book, *The Tacit Dimension*, from which we have been quoting, has only a few pages of analysis of Marxist doctrine—

the author is chiefly concerned with presenting a general theory of scientific knowledge—his psychological insight goes far beyond criticism of Marxism, which is only a single species of intellectual and moral excess. Polanyi says:

Scientific skepticism and moral perfectionism join forces in a movement denouncing any appeal to moral ideals as futile and dishonest. Its perfectionism demands a total transformation of society; but this utopian project is not allowed to declare itself. It conceals its moral motives by embodying them in a struggle for power, believed to bring about automatically the aims of utopia. It blindly accepts for this belief the scientific testimony of Marxism. Marxism embodies the boundless moral aspirations of modern man in a theory which protects his ideals from skeptical doubt by denying the reality of moral motives in public life. The power of Marxism lies in uniting the two contradictory forces of the modern mind into a single political doctrine. Thus originated a world-embracing idea, in which moral doubt is frenzied by moral fury and moral fury is armed by scientific nihilism.

If Arthur Mendel is to be believed, the intelligent of all the world have largely recovered from the infection of this doctrine. But have there been mutations of the virus, and are we able to recognize the onset of the ill in other terms? This is surely a question of current importance.

## *REVIEW*

### STORY OF AMERICAN FARMING

WE have been reading in Walter Ebeling's *The Fruited Plain* (University of California Press, 1979, \$27.50), which, regrettably, we were late in getting to. It is a big book of more than 400 pages, with lots of illustrations, diagrams, and tables. The content is "The Story of American Agriculture," and it wasn't long before we gained the strong impression that this book makes an interesting example of how geometry differs from algebra.

We have all read a lot about the ominous state of American agriculture—its decline or future inadequacy—based partly on the loss of prime farm land to urban development and other inroads of the industrial society. The shorthand for critical writers on this subject is always numbers—figures giving the acreage no longer available for the growing of food. This is the quantitative or algebraic version of what is happening. Such figures doubtless have their importance. Reformers and journalists and popularizers use them constantly. How else will they achieve impact on the general reader—the individual (by the million) who must somehow be reached?

And we—we too—want to know the figures, because figures denote relative importance on the basis of which people are supposed to make up their minds. Millions of acres lost every year sounds quite important. But this is only the algebra of the matter. It converts into numerical abstraction how many acres we now have for growing food, then how many we are losing year after year, and finally how little food will be available for the multiplying population, here and abroad, by the year 2000, or 2020. You wince or get an ache thinking about such predictions—but then it goes away, or would, except for the fact that such vague pains are renewed by whatever else is the current "serious" reading. Continuously disturbed passivity is the common result.

There are of course figures in Mr. Ebeling's book—a good many—but far more important is its geometry, the living landscape of spaces where things grow throughout America. You see these diversely occupied spaces in your mind's eye, in some of the photographs provided, and are helped to inhabit them by means of the author's vivid prose.

Choosing an early section to quote from, we find:

Even as late as the last quarter of the eighteenth century, 90 per cent of all Americans were still farmers. The frontier slowly moving westward through seemingly endless forest, was as wild and hazardous as ever. The self-sufficient trans-Appalachian settlers, with only their bare hands, the ax, the plow, and a yoke of oxen, drew their sustenance from the rich virgin soil. Although the frontier had its crooks and shysters, the settlers generally lived on a basis of true equality, where men and women rose to prominence in their community on the basis of merit alone. Democracy was being forged on the land. Even statesmen and other civic and intellectual leaders of the time—men like Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay—had strong ties to the land. Jefferson, in particular, considered himself to be a farmer by occupation during his entire life, believing agriculture to be "the first and most precious of all the arts." The founding fathers adapted the aristocratic and fashionable academic interest in agriculture, science, and commerce that existed in Europe in those days to the needs of Colonial and revolutionary America, forming societies for their promotion and developing experimental plots on their own lands. They laid the political and social basis in the New World for the flowering of the eighteenth-century ideas of progress, human perfectibility, rationality, and scientific improvements.

The author quotes approvingly a journalist who wrote in 1975:

The land made America. It wasn't so much what people took from it, but what they had to put into it. The land molded American character. It was the lure that drew settlers to America long after the dream of easy gold had been dashed. It was the motivation of the men and women who built this nation. The land sustained them and gave them hope. It also made them tough. It freed them from

the bonds of European class society and swallowed up the Old World traditions. . . . Those who found quick wealth took it and ran. Those who didn't stayed and looked for deeper value. It was the American farmer who found it, built a nation and made it free.

So, many years ago, nine out of ten Americans were farmers, while today only four out of a hundred grow what we and other countries that buy food from us need. What does this mean in human terms? Background for answering such questions is found in the author's personal experience, over the years. In a section headed "Future Shock" he says:

There are residents in California whose grandparents spent months of toil and suffering on harsh and dangerous trails to reach this state. Then, after the completion of transcontinental railways, the duration of the trip could be measured in terms of days. Today our trip [across the country—to see the land from the air] required five hours. Would there be an advantage in reducing the time to five minutes? When I was about five years old our family traveled from Los Angeles to our home in Beaumont in a wagon drawn by two horses, covering about ninety miles in three days. Today we flew an equivalent distance in nine minutes. Would there be an advantage in reducing the time to nine seconds? Obviously not, yet this degree of acceleration is in principle what is happening to all human activity involving technology. Technology feeds on itself, making more technology possible. But is the possibility necessarily desirable? . . .

So my wife and I will take the edge off today's phantasmagoric experience in our humble backyard garden in Westwood, seeking "continuity, order and regularity," as Toffler recommends. Located only five miles from the ocean, Westwood is relatively free of smog, particularly in the late afternoons and evenings. In our garden we have trees that bear avocados, figs, and citrus much like those of the mission padres and the Spanish dons, linking us with California's romantic past. Roses grow everywhere, filling the garden with a riot of color. . . . Soon the sun will again blaze forth on our land, first sending shafts of light through the canopies of eastern forests, then bringing life to the green and gold of prairies and plains and bathing the high peaks and deep canyons of the West with the warm glow of morning light, and finally calling forth the first burst of song from the birds and our garden as hibiscus petals unfurl to greet the new day. Tomorrow we can expect

the same, and a year hence, and for eons of time, linking past, present, and future in an ageless pattern.

The reader who mainly wants to know the "real facts" about American agriculture may skip passages such as the above, but that is one of the differences between a normal human being and one who is becoming a specialist. All our specialists should revert to normality and write more books like this one by Mr. Ebeling—which supplies the facts, or enough of them to give adequate abstract structure to his subject—but in which the living touch he has with the land comes through from page to page. This is a transformation needed by textbooks of every sort.

Here and there in this book there are passages which remind us that human beings are not only rude invaders of the primordial wilderness, but also civilizers and humanizers who are able to give "Nature" larger and more complex dimensions. The "man-made environment" is sometimes a wholly delightful place, as in the case of the Ile de France region near Paris which has been farmed since Neolithic times without exhaustion of the soil—as Rene Dubos, who grew up there, points out. Mr. Ebeling is a quiet champion of the family farm and notes with pleasure the country-wide revival of interest in agriculture and gardening, commenting that "the long exodus from the rural areas may have run its course." But there, as elsewhere throughout the book, the discussion is balanced, with careful attention to realities overlooked by crusaders of various sorts.

The story of the various crops is told in detail, starting with where the species of each widely used plant originated, tracing their migrations with farmers who move around, describing the developments in plant breeding and agricultural exploitation up to the present. Farming in the United States is historically examined, section by section—the East, the South, the Midwest, the Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, and, of course, California, which is virtually a "nation" by itself when it comes to food production. In this state all

the achievements as well as the problems of American agriculture seem dramatized and writ large. "California," as Mr. Ebeling says, "ranks first in the nation in such major vegetable crops as asparagus, lima beans, broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, celery, garlic, lettuce, canteloupe and honeydew melons, spinach, and tomatoes." It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that the livestock industry is now "the most important sector in the California agricultural economy." The development of animal products came as a result of the general advance in the production of field crops, providing increasing amounts of fodder, so that its consumption near where it is grown has manifest advantages.

No book on agriculture can neglect the question of water supply, and the story of irrigation in California is told in some detail, with attention to its controversial aspects. Mr. Ebeling has written a history book, but a lively one filled with "human interest." It has the same sort of appeal as the human geography of Carl Sauer, and the botanical wonderings of Edgar Anderson. Readers of Berry's *Unsettling of America* should also know the story of the *settling* and development of our land, as seen by one who is primarily a historian, but one who shares in the recognition that great changes are needed in both attitude and practice. A particular virtue of this book is that the reader begins to adopt this outlook without needing polemical stimulus.

This is the last paragraph of the *Fruited Plain*:

The human race has the knowledge, technology, and resources to develop a sane and humane world in which basic precepts for wholesome and sustainable life systems will not be violated. We can derive some hope from the fact that ever-increasing numbers of people, including many leading industrialists, are becoming aware that, once we discontinue our obsolete obsession with quantitative growth, we will be free to focus our efforts on a culturally more sophisticated and sustainable way of life. For good practical reasons, society is becoming more concerned with the "enduring things," formerly considered to be

exclusively the concern of the poet. Signs of the new spirit are increasingly apparent—restless stirrings at the grass-roots level—but, inured to a winter of discontent, we sometimes fail to recognize the first breath of spring.

**COMMENTARY**  
**BRITISH JOURNALISM**

A FRONT-PAGE editorial in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for Oct. 11 discusses the implications of the British Labor Party's virtual commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, which was made evident at a conference the week before. The writer begins saying: "The arguments for unilateral nuclear disarmament are strong, and should be recognized as strong even by those who in the last resort are not convinced by them." Such comment, typical of the best in British journalism, is one of the reasons for regular reading of the *Guardian*. Independence and candor are qualities that have full play in this newspaper. Since the *Guardian* reprints in its pages what seems the best of columnist opinion appearing in the *Washington Post*, we hesitate to say that this sort of writing seldom appears in American newspapers, but the reflectiveness of the British writers is a rarity here.

After a consideration of the pros and cons of nuclear disarmament for Britain, the *Guardian* writer concludes:

Yet more importantly, where does the threat of nuclear war come from? From British membership and participation in NATO or from the East-West confrontation writ large? Not, in our view, from anything Britain does or fails to do but from the stockpiles on both sides. Is it more or less likely that those stockpiles would be reduced if Britain threw its own away without compensation from the other side? We have argued before that multilateralism has not much to show for itself. Under its guise the over-kill potential has increased many times. That is the attraction of unilateralism: at least it will work. Yet the talks which the US and Soviet begin on theatre weapons next [this] month and on Salt in March come largely from prompting within the European alliance. Should that scope for influence be abandoned? Is it not desirable that the SS-20s should be looked at, along with the Pershings and Tomahawks? The United States is in a mood to let the alliance wither if that is what the alliance wants. It has reason enough to take that view—in Germany, Holland, and Belgium. A British relapse into unilateralism (mistaken for neutrality) would be on a

different scale entirely. It would be a grand impulsive gesture. We wish we could embrace it, a giant stride for world peace: we wish . . . but we cannot believe.

The editorial seems an attempt at hard-headed decency, but without hiding altogether the weaknesses of the position. The readers of the *Guardian* have at least a chance to think for themselves, and to decide for "a giant stride for world peace."

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### WHERE CHANGE BEGINS

A PROBLEM often not recognized as being a problem results from the fact that many reforms undertaken under the auspices of the national state are inevitably curtailed by the gap between the dreams of planners and the realities of the regions for which they plan. Perhaps there are some things which state planners can do well; it is questionable, however, that education is among them. Yet in the case of modern "revolutionary" governments, or the governments that have emerged as a result of "independence" movements around the world, the leaders have little choice. They have the initiative and the mandate to do what they can in terms of national goals. Sometimes the expression of those goals seems beyond criticism, admirable in every respect.

The recollections of Marjorie Sykes, in "Education for Self-Reliance," an article in the January 1981 *Gandhi Vigyan* (published in Hyderabad, India), apply here. She begins:

Not long after India attained her political independence the Nai Talim school and training center at Sevagram [the Gandhian center] were visited by three young Africans all of whom were destined a few years later to play leading parts in the history of their newly independent countries. What they saw in Sevagram made a deep impression on them, and they linked it up in their minds with the needs and aspirations of their own people.

One of these young men was the future President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. The essay he wrote in 1967, *Education for Self Reliance*, is a fine statement from the African standpoint of principles and policies which are important for any country, and which are relevant to the needs of India in particular. India, like Tanzania, took over at the time of independence a ready-made system of education which, in practice, in both countries was regarded, and in India still is as a passport to a highly-paid "white-collar" job for the lucky few.

The primary purpose of education is to prepare young people to take part in the maintenance and development of the society of which they are a part,

by transmitting to them its accumulated wisdom and knowledge. This is true in every kind of society, ancient or modern, and regardless of whether education is given through formal schooling or informally through the life and work of the family and community. The kind of society, and therefore the kind of education, which both Tanzania and India inherited from the colonial past was elitist, individualist, and as Nyerere says, geared to "subservient attitudes and white-collar skills." He then goes on to state unequivocally that "only when we are clear about the (new) kind of society we are trying to build can we design our educational service to serve our goals."

Nyerere wanted an education that would first serve the rural majority in Tanzania, not the urban elite; an education that would honor practical skills as more important than academic ability; and an education that would be recognized and adopted as in the service of many, not in behalf of privilege. The writer, Marjorie Sykes (translator of Vinoba's *Thoughts on Education*), wonders how this sensible as well as ideal program has worked out in Tanzania, since 1968, when it was first published. Meanwhile, she says of his plan:

Here is food for thought for us in India. Gandhiji was certainly clear about the kind of society he wanted to build—to put it in one pregnant word, a *Sarvodaya* society—and he saw the pattern of education which he laid before the nation as "the spearhead of a silent social revolution" which would bring this about. But what we in India have done, since he left us, is to try to adopt his pattern of education *without* being clear about whether we really wanted the kind of society he envisaged. Ever since independence we as a nation have been of two minds about this. Like Tanzania we proclaim a "socialist" ideal, but our values and attitudes continue to be individualistic, and individual wealth continues to be for many of us the criterion of worth and "success."

The editor of *Gandhi Vigyan*, K. S. Acharlu, adds this explanatory historical note:

In the years before and after Independence, hundreds of students and officers of education deputed by State Government and volunteer agencies spent a few months in the Nai Talim [Gandhi's "New Education"] community at Sevagram and went back to their institutions carrying the torch of Nai Talim with the intention of creating a new social order of

Gandhian conception. But they were disillusioned. Sad to relate, bureaucratization, administrative indifference, want of faith in the new ideas and the preponderating sweep of the cult of modern progress among the top and middle classes and the prevailing philosophy of education, hardly offered even the zealous few opportunities to implement the new deal in education. Whatever expert Commissions may have recommended and whatever the Father of the Nation may have said, our educationists today even now believe that a human being can be produced by putting together a few pieces of knowledge, *i.e.*, some facts from science and social studies, a few exercises in numbering, a miscellany of pieces of poetry and prose, bodily movements on the football field and gymnasium, manipulation with fingers on the work benches, and well-provided outings into cities, visiting factories and museums and zoos, finally rounded out by a regulated, invigilated, policed performance for obtaining a certificate. What results can never be a human individual but only a patchwork of isolated facts, theories and statements and behavior patterns, not a living, doing and learning whole full of the joy of life.

This, it seems just to assume, is a fair picture of the general situation of public education in India. Are the fully industrialized societies doing any better? The answer, *mitatis matandis*, has to be no. For evidence we call attention to a recent book by Jonathan Kozol (who wrote of the Boston public schools in *Death at an Early Age*), *On Being a Teacher* (Continuum, 1981, \$12.95). The mood of this book is given by the quotation with which it begins—from Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*. She tells what she thinks should be said, over and over again, to every child in school:

You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your

own judgment. Those that stay must remember, always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society.

This is a saddened and disenchanting way of reporting the fact that all human projects which require professional organization begin to lose their vision almost at the start. When we understand better how this works, and why, we may be able to explain it to the young less discouragingly.

Kozol begins his book:

Conscientious teachers who have studied the origins of public education are faced with a difficult and painful choice: If they are honest with themselves and with each other, they cannot help but look upon the public school today as an archaic and dehumanizing institution. This is true not only for the students, but for their teachers also. Students reside with this house of lies for only twelve years at a stretch. Their teachers often are condemned to a life sentence.

Many teachers live and work, as a result, in somewhat the same state of mind as intellectual guerrillas, determined somehow to awaken students, to spark their curiosity and to open up their minds, yet no less determined to *remain* as teachers in the schools. We live and work with a strong resolve to raise some basic, challenging and perhaps subversive questions in the consciousness of children. At the same time we have got to keep in mind the needs of our families, health care, food and mortgage and the rest.

How do we begin? How do we start to free ourselves from impotence and from inertia—in order to be able to fight back?

Teachers and parents are the only ones who can do what needs to be done. Kozol addresses his fellow teachers on the subject, and John Holt talks to the parents. It seems useless to look for the seeds of change in education anywhere else in our society.

## *FRONTIERS* A Timeless Council

RUSSELL MEANS is an American Indian of the Oglala Lakota tribe who lives in Lyle, South Dakota. He is a co founder of the American Indian Movement active in organizing Indians on reservations and in cities, and he helped to plan the occupation of Wounded Knee a few years ago. An editor of *Mother Jones* (in the December 1980 issue) says that Means "has been shot, injured and jailed during the state of near-war that has long existed between militant American Indians on one side and government forces on the other." This issue of *Mother Jones* presents the text of a speech given by Means in the summer of 1980 before several thousand people who attended the Black Hills Survival Gathering held in July on the Pine Ridge Reservation—in "protest against the rape of Indian lands throughout the West."

*Mother Jones* regards Means's speech as epoch-making, comparable to Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" address or Mario Savio's call to the students at Berkeley to interrupt the complacent conduct of the University of California. The speech may indeed have this importance. In any event, it is epoch-marking. What this Indian leader says and the attention it has received reveal a distinct change in the attitudes of Westerners—in particular American Westerners—toward their accustomed ways of living and acting. As children of the Enlightenment, Americans have habitually looked to the future, proud of their upward and onward course. Now they are beginning to question the present and turn to the past, to see what instruction the wisdom of other ages may hold for a difficult and ominously threatening period of history. They look to the past in many ways—back to the Greeks, to the Hindus and Buddhists, to the China of Confucius and Lao tse, to the mystics of Islam, and now, in the present case, to the traditional wisdom of American Indians.

Russell Means is an uncompromising and somewhat wrathful advocate of the Indian outlook. No one could say that he lacks provocation. The present concludes a second "century of dishonor," so far as the Indians of the Americas are concerned.

Two lines of contention in his speech deserve close attention, one critical, the other affirmative. The criticism is of the characteristic assumptions of modern civilization, clearly and forcefully put. Curiously, in one place, Means declares: "Rationality is a curse since it can cause humans to forget the natural order of things. A wolf never forgets his or her place in the natural order. Europeans do." He is speaking, of course, of the abuses or excesses of rationality. The "natural order of things," which he claims with justice that the Indians understand better than we do, is a *concept* that would not exist except for rational inquiry, and the effectiveness of Means' criticism is partly if not mainly due to its rational appeal. Early in his address he begins a masterful account of the reductionist rationality of the West, identifying it as a cultural (not racist) crime against natural (Indian and other) human beings. He says:

Newton, for example, "revolutionized" physics and the so-called natural sciences by reducing the physical universe to a linear mathematical equation. Descartes did the same thing with culture. John Locke did it with politics, and Adam Smith did it with economics. Each one of these "thinkers" took a piece of the spirituality of human existence and converted it into a code, an abstraction. They picked up where Christianity ended; they "secularized" Christian religion, as the "scholars" like to say—and in doing so they made Europe more able and ready to act as an expansionist culture. Each of these intellectual revolutions served to abstract the European mentality even further, to remove the wonderful complexity and spirituality from the universe and replace it with a logical sequence: one, two, three, Answer!

This is what has come to be termed "efficiency" in the European mind. Whatever is mechanical is perfect, whatever seems to work at the moment—that

is, proves the mechanical model be the right one—is considered correct, even when it is clearly untrue.

Hegel and Marx are recognized as heirs of Newton, Descartes, Locke and Smith:

Marx put Hegel's philosophy in terms of "materialism," which is to say that Marx despiritualized Hegel's work altogether. Again, this is in Marx's own terms. And this is now seen as the future revolutionary potential of Europe. Europeans may see this as revolutionary, but American Indians see it simply as still more of the same old European conflict between *being* and *gaining*. . . .

*Being* is a spiritual proposition. *Gaining* is a material act. Traditionally, American Indians have always attempted to *be* the best people they could. Part of that spiritual process was and is to give away wealth, to discard wealth in order *not* to gain. Material gain is an indicator of false status among traditional people, while it is "proof that the system works" to Europeans. . . .

European or "white" logic now dictates that Indian land be sacrificed to the needs of the "larger society," since below the surface of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota are rich uranium deposits. The metal is to be mined, the waste products left, and the water table reduced and polluted, making "the entire region uninhabited forever." There are similar "opportunities" in the lands of the Northern Cheyenne and Crow, and the Navajo and Hopi country. "Thirty per cent of the coal in the West," Means says, "and half the uranium deposits in the U.S. have been found to lie under reservation land."

We are resisting being turned into a National Sacrifice Area. We are resisting being turned into a national sacrifice people. The costs of this industrial process are not acceptable to us. It is genocide to dig uranium here and drain the water table—no more, no less.

Means blames, not Capitalism, but the European spirit, as he has defined it, and gives an alternative:

There is another way. There is the traditional Lakota way and the ways of the other American Indian peoples. It is the way that knows that humans do not have the right to degrade Mother Earth, that

there are forces beyond anything the European mind has conceived, that humans must be in harmony with *all* relations or the relations will eventually eliminate the disharmony. A lopsided emphasis on humans by humans . . . can only result in a total disharmony and a readjustment which cuts arrogant humans down to size, gives them a taste of that reality beyond their grasp and restores the harmony. There is no heed for a revolutionary theory to bring this about; it's beyond human control. The nature peoples of this planet know this and so they do not theorize about it. Theory is an abstract; our knowledge is real. . . . Mother Earth has been abused, the powers have been abused, and this cannot go on forever. No theory can alter that simple fact. Mother Earth will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated. Things come full circle, back to where they started. *That's* revolution. And that's a prophecy of my people, of the Hopi people and of other correct peoples.

The *Mother Jones* editor objects to the expression "correct peoples," comparing it to the "rigid Marxist's 'correct' line," and the point should be made. Yet justice is surely on the side of the Indians in their basic contentions. However, the question that seems important to raise is the universal value, for all human beings, of the power to abstract. Are there uses of this capacity that would avoid the consequences to which Means points? This seems a neglected aspect of the Frontier so well defined by this Indian champion of the "nature peoples."