

## THE SPREAD OF COMMON SENSE

FORTY years ago—in his magazine, *Harijan*, during the year 1938—Gandhi began writing about Trusteeship—the idea that we don't any of us really own what we possess or have been able to acquire, but that we hold it in trust for the common good. People with skill in the use and development of material resources, Gandhi believed, are natural custodians by reason of their capacity. He affirmed this as a manifest moral obligation:

Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth—either by way of a legacy, or by means of trade and industry—I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honorable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community.

The socialists, he said, would dispossess the rich of their possessions, but he wanted people with more than they need "to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labor." To the objection that few would do this willingly, Gandhi replied:

The question how many can be real trustees according to this definition is beside the point. If the theory is true, it is immaterial whether many live up to it or only one man lives up to it. If you accept the principle of Ahimsa [Harmlessness], you have to strive to live up to it, no matter whether you succeed or fail. There is nothing in this theory which can be said to be beyond the grasp of intellect, though you may say it is difficult of practice.

Four years later, after he had completed a wartime prison-term, Gandhi (with some associates) proposed the " Practical Trusteeship Formula, " which began:

Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming

itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

The socialists argued that non-violence would not enable the people to "seize power." Gandhi agreed;

In a way they are right. By its very nature, non-violence cannot "seize" power, nor can that be its goal. *But non-violence can do more; it can effectively control and guide power without capturing the machinery of government. That is its beauty.*

At another time he said: "Non-violence does not seize power. It does not even seek it; power accrues to it."

While the trusteeship idea is by no means sweeping the world, it is gradually spreading. Time is required for such changes. How long did it take to sanctify ownership rights with the claim that *property* is the source of human freedom? Here we are able to put on record a few instances of change in the attitudes of people toward property—the kind of change Gandhi had in mind.

In 1951, three years after Gandhi's death, his chief disciple, Vinoba Bhave, visited a district in India where Communist guerillas were harassing the people. He wanted to bring the message of non-violence and love to the region. One day, after a meeting in a large village, an old Harijan (Untouchable) described the plight of the landless peasants. The rich, he said, have many acres of land, while we have none. We want some land for ourselves, he said. We are not against non-violence, but what shall we do? The Communists say they will give us land when they are in power.

Vinoba met this challenge by asking: How much land do you need? The old man consulted with his companions and replied: Eighty acres. Vinoba turned to his audience:

"Have you gentlemen heard what this old man has said? You have so much land, hundreds of acres,

perhaps some of you thousands of acres. Do you think that all this land is yours? It belongs to you today. Perhaps it belonged to your father and grandfather at one time. But do you think that for this reason this land belongs to you? Did you create it? Did your forefathers create it? Is it not God's creation? Have not all the children of God equal share in it?"

Vinoba asked if there were no one who would give the Harijans some land. To his astonishment, a man whose family had five hundred acres rose in the audience and offered to give a hundred. As Jayaprakash Narayan tells the story:

Vinoba was dumbfounded; he was completely speechless. Here were these untouchables demanding eighty acres of land, and here was a landlord coming forward to give a hundred acres—twenty acres more than was wanted. That night, Vinoba did not sleep. All night long his mind was working, and from within a voice came again and again and said, "This is the answer. You have been roaming about these villages for so many days, trying to find an answer to the Communist violence. Here is the answer. From tomorrow, you will go on throughout the length and breadth of this country: you will walk from village to village asking for land, and giving the land that is given to you to the landless." Vinoba had a programme of non-violence—and he didn't stop to picture whether it would succeed.

There were no miracles, yet the beginnings of change became apparent. In 1954 Vinoba was joined by Jayaprakash Narayan, who left the Socialist Party to become a colleague of the older Gandhian. In time, the Bhoodan Movement (which means Gift of Land) was renamed Gramdan. Instead of being given directly to the landless, the land was entrusted to the village elders, who would make the distribution according to their best judgment. There are some impressive figures on the progress of this movement for voluntary land reform, but they are often misleading. A book that is helpful in evaluating the movement is Erica Linton's *Fragments of a Vision* (1971). Mrs. Linton visited a large number of Gramdan villages in various states, seeing both failures and successes.

Explaining how this form of trusteeship works, she says:

Gramdan literally means "village gift." But in the sense in which Vinoba uses the term, it means the equitable distribution of the village's wealth. It implies that all the landowners in a village transfer the ownership of their land to the village community; and that all landowners donate one-twentieth of their land to the village community for distribution among the landless. It also implies the formation of a village fund to which the agriculturalist will contribute one fortieth of his produce, the businessman one thirtieth of his profits, and the wage-earner and the salaried one thirtieth of their earnings; and the setting up of the village council (Gram Sabha) consisting of all the adults in the village.

The prerequisites for a Gramdan declaration by a village are that at least 75% of the resident landowners of the village should express their willingness to join Gramdan by signing the declaration; at least 51 per cent of the total land in the village, owned by all the resident landowners, should come under Gramdan, and at least 75% of the adult population of the village should opt for Gramdan.

E. F. Schumacher, who wrote the introduction to Mrs. Linton's book, spoke of the Indian peasants' need for "a much more intense orientation toward improved technical knowledge—at the intermediate, self-help level—and greatly improved communication of such knowledge and experience, for the benefit of all." The growth of the Gramdan movement, he saw, would depend upon fulfilling these practical requirements.

India's long struggle for freedom, in unequal contest with Britain's imperial power, was finally brought to a successful conclusion in 1948, largely by Gandhi's inspiration. Meanwhile, through the years, the Gandhian press—first *Harijan*, which Gandhi edited, and later *Bhoodan* and *Sarvodaya*—had been spreading Gandhi's ideas of non-violence and cultural regeneration among a worldwide constituency. Vinoba's application of Gandhian thinking to land reform had natural appeal in the West, especially among those whose moral longings had been nourished by Tolstoyan thinking, the themes of communitarian socialism,

and the doctrines of Henry George. The horrors of two world wars had generated a strong activist peace movement in both Europe and the United States, and the news of Vinoba's measurable success in converting Indian landowners to the village land-trust idea found answering chords among Western advocates of land reform. At the same time, some of the West's most persuasive intellectuals had begun to see the point of Gandhi's rejection of the idea of "seizing power." The violence of political revolution, they recognized, is self-perpetuating; it is not even self-limiting, if the aftermath of the Russian Revolution be taken as an example. When, in 1954, Jayaprakash Narayan exchanged his Marxist-Leninist ideas of revolution for Gandhian non-violence and the land reform efforts of Vinoba, a basic reorientation in social thinking seemed on the way. Similar recognition of the moral importance of access to the land came in 1966 in England, when John Papworth with some associates founded *Resurgence* to give expression to the energies brought into focus by the Peace Pledge Union and the Committee of 100 (of "Ban the Bomb" and Peace March fame). The broadening of the base of Western pacifism to include decentralist and communitarian themes was at once evident in the content of *Resurgence*, to which both E. F. Schumacher and Leopold Kohr became frequent contributors.

That the evil of war will not be ended by moralistic exhortation, but only by far-reaching changes in the ways of everyday life, has been the keynote of the editorial policy of *Resurgence*. Summarizing the magazine's innovations (in *Best of Resurgence*—a "reader" drawing on ten years of publication), Michael North recalled Schumacher's observation, "Insane work cannot produce a sane society," and added:

*Resurgence* has also carried many articles about the Gramdan movement in India; firstly, because very little appears in the "established" press, and, secondly, because it is the only serious attempt in the world to replace central government with self-supporting and self-governing local units. Much of it

of course is only applicable to India with its specific customs and traditions, but the Gandhian ideal is something that has rooted itself in the awareness of many in the over-developed West.

The same sort of deepening recognition led the American pacifist, Robert Swann, to graduate from labors with the New England Committee for Non-Violent Action to exploration of the land-trust idea. He and some associates visited India to study the accomplishments of Vinoba and also went to Israel to profit by the experience of the Jewish National Fund, which administers about 60 per cent of the reclaimed and cultivated land in that country. After considerable experience in establishing land trusts in the United States, Bob Swann published *The Community Land Trust—A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America* (Center for Community Economic Development, Cambridge, Mass. 02140), a "manual" which begins by showing the primitive origins of the trust idea in ancient community practice throughout the world. With local modifications, the feelings and customs in relation to the land were everywhere the same—in China, Africa, Mexico, and even early New England. As Swann says in the Introduction: "The ideas behind the community land trust as formulated in this guide and practiced by experimental communities today have historic roots largely ignored in conventional histories, which is why we can say the goal is to 'restore' the land trust concept rather than initiate it." Indeed, the first Americans, the Indians, knew nothing of individual ownership and personal possession of land, as the following by Stewart Udall makes clear:

The Indian had a respect bordering on awe for everything he could see, hear, or touch: the earth was the mother of life, and each animal, each tree, and each living thing was locked into an interrelated web of spiritual existence of which the individual was a small part. In trying to attune his everyday life to these concepts, the Indian inevitably established a deep feeling of oneness with the world of nature. Implicit in this feeling was what we now call a stewardship approach to the use of the land. . . . It was incomprehensible to the Indian that one person should have exclusive possession of parts of the earth.

The warrior chief Tecumseh, reacted with astonishment to the demands of white buyers: "Sell the country? . . . Why not sell the air the clouds, the great sea?"

In the West, the initial response to this idea is likely to be emphatic rejection. The conception of private property as the foundation of individual freedom has for centuries been taken for granted by Americans. But today land is less and less a symbol of practical security—a place where you live safe from intrusion—and more and more a possession which has only money value. While the claim that freedom depends upon private ownership of land and wealth survives in conservative propaganda, the personal experience of individuals no longer gives much real support to this idea. Accordingly, Bob Swann presents the land trust as a *workable* alternative. He says:

The system of private ownership of land which once led to high productivity and personal independence has become a major source of economic and social inequity. Private ownership of land is increasingly translated into corporate ownership and, despite the increase in private home ownership, ever more land is being held in few hands. Middle-income families, as they attempt to purchase their homes, are forced to pay inflated prices and the poor, as always, are almost totally excluded.

The problems that have arisen as a result of our system of land tenure are amply documented by today's media. What is strange is that although the problems are widely recognized and discussed, very few people question the system of private land tenure which lies at their roots.

The selected bibliography at the end of *The Community Land Trust* provides access to the extensive research on this question, supplying the rational ground for a relation with the land that was once universally accepted. This sort of thinking is the key to a long list of related goals held by communitarians, intermediate technology reformers, organic agriculturalists, natural food nutritionists, and pacifists and decentralists generally.

Bob Swann provides some definitions:

The Community Land Trust is an attempt to overcome these problems by creating an alternative to existing practices of landholding, based on more ethical distribution and rational consumption of resources. The Community Land Trust is a legal entity, a quasi-public body, chartered to hold land in stewardship for all mankind, present and future, while protecting the legitimate use-rights of its residents. The Community Land Trust is not primarily concerned with common ownership. Rather, its concern is for ownership *for the common good*, which may or may not be combined with common ownership.

Both in concept and in practical operation, the Community Land Trust distinguishes between the land with its natural resources and the human improvements thereon. The land is held in trust, not the improvements. Homes, stores, and industrial enterprises created by the residents will be owned by them, either cooperatively or individually.

Land is held by the Community Land Trust in perpetuity—probably never to be sold. The trust leases the land to the users with the expectation of preserving or enhancing its long-range resource value. . . . The trustees will be chosen to represent various groups in the larger "community."

Several land trusts are now in operation, more or less successfully, in the United States, and a reading of *The Community Land Trust* would be a useful introduction to these efforts. Here we are concerned with the gradual infiltration of a new attitude toward the earth and its lands, its waters, and living things. The adoption of new attitudes is a mysterious process. It seldom results from preaching, although a little preaching may be unavoidable. New ideas dawn on some people almost spontaneously, while others are drawn to them because of a change in circumstances. Still others become impressed by the practice of a visible pioneer. Little by little, a good idea takes hold and people begin to change the patterns of their lives. This opens them up to other kinds of innovative thinking. Differing ways of living create wider horizons. Who, a hundred years ago, would have declared as their purpose—"To Restore the Lands, Protect the Seas, and Inform the Earth's Stewards"—the motto of the New Alchemists on Cape Cod?

This basic idea—that we hold the earth in trust, and need to learn to do right by it—has transforming power. If you take a half-hour or so and muse on what it leads to, you may have a more comprehensive view of what the future holds than dozens of expert "futurists." For example, the midsummer issue of *Not Man Apart* (organ of Friends of the Earth) has an article by Rick Applegate on "Trusteeship for the Environment." This writer asks: Why not have "Public Trusts," based on existing law, and modified to serve environmental protection? He goes on to show what might be done from an environmentalist point of view, dealing in some measure with the nuts and bolts of the problem, and showing how we can turn present institutional practice around. Take for example, energy:

Energy resources today are obviously not treated as the body of public trust. We unearth and consume them as if they were the sole property of this generation and there were no tomorrow. . . . In broad terms, the critical energy resources of this nation should be subject to the public trust—*regardless* of current ownership. It should be clearly stipulated that they are not the private property preserve of the energy monopolies of the present generation.

And so on, with close attention to detail. The common sense of this proposal is obvious enough. The indifference of the private owners of energy resources to the needs and welfare of the next generation is equally obvious. As a result, more and more people are opening up to new ideas about the earth and its resources. More and more people are beginning to see that self-reliant community control, with regional and comparatively small-scale economics, and an increase in *local* democracy, will make the practical foundation for any future worth talking about.

## *REVIEW*

### THE SOURCES OF STABILITY

THE disappointment one may feel after reading for a while in Edward Goldsmith's *The Stable Society* (Wadebridge Press, Cornwall, England, 1978, \$5.00)—because this talented editor of the *New Ecologist* doesn't attempt to tell us what a stable society in our time would be like—is soon dispelled by recognition of the critical effectiveness of the book. Mr. Goldsmith explains why we don't have a stable society, and he does it in reliably scientific terms. Actually, there is a formal resemblance between this book and Ivan Illich's method of criticism. Like good Aristotelians, they both pile up the evidence—evidence few will attempt to dispute—for a series of devastating conclusions. The book is an intellectual clean-up operation. Before we can begin to do effective thinking at a new level, it is necessary to get rid of the debris of failing assumptions and the shambles of the structures based upon them. The writer's inspiration comes from the fact that modern Western society is no longer holding together. He begins:

Our society is increasingly unstable. It is subject to increasing discontinuities which, if unchecked, must lead to its eventual collapse. More and more people are realising this. More and more, too, are aware of the necessity for creating a steady-state or a stable society, one whose activities do not lead to the systematic destruction of its natural environment.

Not surprisingly, many students of these matters have considered what must be some of the characteristics of such a society. Their interest, however, has been largely monopolised by its economic and demographic characteristics. Population growth and economic activities, however, are but two aspects of a society's total behavior pattern. What is more, their nature is influenced, indeed largely determined, by the other aspects that are often unknown to demographers and economists. Only a society with a particular structure and world view is likely to be capable of controlling its relationship with its environment so as to avoid the sort of discontinuities to which ours is increasingly subject.

Tribal societies are taken by the writer as an example of societies that hold together. They are based upon family or extended-family relationships and constitute living systems rather than social "organizations." Stable societies, in short, are organisms. There is a natural division of labor in hierarchical structures, and both the whole and all the parts benefit from the function of a single unit within the entire scheme. Mr. Goldsmith says:

The Hierarchical Cooperation Principle can in fact be stated thus: in an ordered system, that behaviour which satisfies the needs of the differentiated parts will also satisfy the needs of the whole. As we shall see, this is undoubtedly so in a traditional tribal society. It is no longer so, unfortunately, in a modern state—hence the need for institutions and external controls in order to force people to behave contrary to their natural inclinations.

The trouble with choosing a tribal society for an ideal is that we are not able to imagine ourselves living under such "primitive" conditions. We may admire the simplicities of tribal life but are appalled at the limitations. Jacquetta Hawkes put this ambivalence well in *Journey Down a Rainbow* (Harper, 1955). Speaking of the Indians of the American Southwest, she said:

I know that I should feel frustrated cut down, if I had to live in a pueblo with a few possessions such as these. I know, too, that a greater degree of social organization and technical skill has been needed to nurture the highest genius and human achievements. There could have been no Dante or Leonardo among the Indians. Nevertheless, I am truthful when I say I would rather share in the life of a pueblo than in that of any of the scurrying little robots I saw in my vision [of a New York store]. I believe it to be not only a happier life, but one more worthy of our kind.

But Mr. Goldsmith is not inviting us to "go primitive." He wants us to study with him the principles and forms of behavior which have sustained the lives of simple peoples, in order to see how those principles may serve as guides in our decisions about the present and the future. Nor is he interested in tinkering with public institutions. Institutions are not remedies for

social defects. Institutions serve best as visible reminders and legal validations of already existing structures and functions, brought into being by the cooperative meeting of needs. Goldsmith says: "The notion that effective democracy could be introduced into a society by the simple expedient of adopting the correct institutions is a sad illusion, and one, unfortunately, that we seem very reluctant to shed." There is no political substitute for general cultural intelligence:

Where public opinion is effective, there is correspondingly little need for governmental institutions for maintaining order. Conversely societies in which public opinion is weak require the most authoritarian government linked to an all-pervasive and coercive bureaucracy to maintain a semblance of public order, in the absence of which there can be but lawlessness and mob-rule.

This is precisely the explanation offered by Solzhenitsyn for the tyrannies of Stalinist Russia.

The main critical burden of *The Stable Society* results from the contrast between the delicate balances and interplay in both living organisms and traditional societies and the single-minded goals pursued by empirical science and its ruthless technological means. We do not ask if getting what we want will be good for the whole and for all its human members, but drive toward our ends with isolating intensity, endlessly interfering with natural processes, piling up great stores of refuse and releasing poisonous wastes.

In the stable society as in the healthy organism, delicate networks of restraining customs (amounting to social instincts) maintain the commonly beneficent processes of existence. In the place of this natural ordering we have put the method of empirical science. For the author, science has this definition:

Science appears to be an attempt to replace the cultural information embodied in traditional world-views, that is, information which is very different in the case of each traditional society, by means of a single organisation of information, which should theoretically serve *each of them* equally well. It is an attempt, in fact, to substitute objective for subjective information as a basis for control.

But our "objective information" is by no means adequate for the purposes we have in mind. When applied to living things, it becomes reductionist and fragmentary. The simple objectification of a fact distorts it by isolating it, cutting off its relationships and suppressing its hidden potencies as part of a living system. Mr. Goldsmith illustrates:

As Ross Hall, one of the few ecologically orientated nutritionists of today has pointed out, the function of a vitamin or of any other nutrient cannot be understood simply from its chemical components. Its action, like that of all other constituents of our food, is very different in different environments, i.e., when used in a different way. This means that when flour, for instance, is refined and nutrients are lost, their subsequent reintroduction [sometimes called "reinforcement"] provides no compensation for this loss. For *wholewheat is a system*, which means that it is much more than the sum of its component parts, and by enriching the devitalized flour, we do not restore its lost nutritive value.

This may be confirmed by the fact that, though in Canada, practically all the bread sold is enriched with thiamine and iron, a recent study by Nutrition Canada has revealed that a vast majority of Canadians *suffer from thiamine and iron deficiency*.

The point, of course, is that all natural processes—as all subjective conceptions—are expressive of multiple purposes, while intelligent purpose is not recognized as "real" by empirical science. Living things act in the perpetuation of life and human beings act for the realization of meaning. Organisms are constructions which embody purpose, and when purpose is ignored or lost sight of, what knowledge we obtain by scientific means is but odd bits of unrelated data, divorced from the vital schemes of which they were a natural part. Action based on such data, turned to the service of expanding appetites for "things," leads to breakdown and disintegration of both natural and human systems. Commenting, Mr. Goldsmith says:

Man, by means of science and technology, is capable of counteracting discontinuities, *but only very superficially and at great cost in terms of reduced stability*, and hence with the prospect of greater

discontinuities in the future which science and technology will eventually be unable to deal with.

The reason is that technological remedies do little more than mask the symptoms of the disease, thereby rendering it more tolerable and serving in this way to perpetuate it. Their effect will be to accommodate trends rather than to reverse them, and hence to permit yet further deviations from the optimum environment to which we have been adapted by our evolution, and to give rise to further maladjustments at all levels.

In the same way, we fight the growing crime wave by manufacturing more burglar alarms and armoured cars, and by engaging more policemen, whereas the real solution is to recreate a sound society in which crime does not occur. This, however, would mean transforming society so that it resembled that in which man lived for the first few million years of his tenancy of this planet, and hence largely reversing most of the trends that we have been taught to identify with progress, a policy, that is, at least at the present time, totally unacceptable.

Edward Goldsmith, incidentally, is himself a scientist, and he would like to bring to birth a sort of science that is based on life processes and immemorial human experience.

## COMMENTARY

### THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

TWO insistent themes emerge in the pages of this issue. One is a scientific idea, or rather a comprehensive demand for reform in scientific thinking. The proposition is that we exist in a *living* universe—that the world around us, all its inhabitants, all its processes, are phenomena of life and cannot be understood by the abstractions which enable us to make and operate machines. Life is not mechanical.

Our difficulty with this proposition is that life is *mysterious*. We do not know how to convert our feeling about a living universe into scientific knowledge. We have no reliable framework of assumption that enables us to work out a science of life. The old assumptions about machines keep intruding; we continue to use them because their implications can be tested by experiment and observation. But meanwhile there is the creeping realization that they can't really be made to work. Not any more. So, simultaneously, we are experiencing both breakdown and radical inspiration. But the inspiration often seems to involve unacceptable or dangerous extravagance. We need, we say, a philosophy of life that retains the admirable discipline of science, but eliminates its blinders of mechanical assumption. This is obviously a revolutionary need.

The other theme is an implicit demand for recognition that we also live in a *moral* universe—it is both living and moral. This was once an almost universal belief, as works about the distant past reveal. One such book is *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (1953) by Robert Redfield, a distinguished anthropologist. This is a book about the loss of the ancient view that man is both in nature and acting on it, and "as that nature is part of the same moral system in which man and the affairs between men also find themselves, man's actions with regard to nature are limited by notions of inherent, not expediential, rightness." His relations with both

the world and others are "moral or religious." With the advent of science, so vastly influential, Prof. Redfield says, there was a transformation of the human mind which overturned and abandoned the ancient world-view. By this means the universe lost its moral character.

Here, again, is the crucial question: Can we restore the feeling of "Immanent justice"—as Prof. Redfield terms it—without abandoning all the excellences won by the scientific revolution?

Can we be "moral" without becoming "primitive"? Commenting on such questions, Paulo Freire has said: "The answer does not lie in the rejection of the machine, but rather in the humanization of man." His answer is morally acceptable but practically obscure. How does one become a pantheist in both theory and practice, while holding on to the intellectual rigor—and its practical benefits—which gave materialism so much prestige during the past two or three hundred years?

What are the convictions which might make possible so far-reaching a change in both idea and act?

A lot of thinking is now going on about such questions. Almost daily we encounter proposals of a new "image of man" and a new "world-view." But inventing such conceptions is not good enough: No one with a grasp of human reality would imagine that anyone can tell other people what to believe. Such truths have to be *realized* by both inside and outside operations—both religion and science. This is Plato's point in the *Meno*. We both know and don't know what we need to know—the human predicament. Making peace with it is difficult for us.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### WE ARE IN THE DARK AGES

WE got as far as page xv in Roland Betts' book, *Acting Out* (Little, Brown, 1978, \$8.95), which means that we didn't get to Mr. Betts (until later), since the Introduction to this encyclopedia of anecdotes about city public schools is by John Holt. After reading Mr. Betts' report on his ten years in the New York City school system, Mr. Holt was moved to say:

Without any proof or possibility of proof, I assert that if all the adults *who now work* in the New York City (or in any other) public schools—administrators, secretaries, teachers, custodians, bus drivers, everyone—had their names put in a pool; and if names were drawn from that pool *at random* in groups of six; and if each of these groups of six randomly selected people were assigned a group of not more than one hundred children, of different ages, and were given some space to work in (preferably not in the present school buildings), and were told, "Okay, you're a school, work it out any way you can," 95 per cent of these schools, and maybe all of them, would be better than almost any of the schools that now exist. This would be true even in their first year of wild confusion, and much more so later; for in these small schools, where everyone would know everyone else, where people would come together as people and not as holders of jobs and players of roles and defenders of prerogatives, where everyone's work would have a purpose and all could see the purpose, where none could be shielded or hidden from the consequences of their acts, *people would learn from their experience and would get better at their work.*

There is a moderate qualification of this prediction—but only a moderate one:

Most such minischools would not be as good as the First Street School, nor obtain such astonishing results, because only a fairly small minority of the people now working in the public schools are as intelligent, perceptive, compassionate, resourceful, strong and patient as the people who worked at First Street. [George Dennison tells about the First Street School in *The Lives of Children*.] But the minischools would get steadily better. And those who could not learn to like or trust or deal with or teach

children would either quit or if they dared not quit, would get themselves (or be pushed) out of the way by the people doing the real teaching. More and more of the parents themselves would begin to enter a serious and fruitful partnership with the schools. They could see what the school was doing. If they didn't like it, they could argue for a while with the teachers responsible. If that didn't change anything, they could find another small school that suited them better—for there would surely be a wide variety.

What, with something like desperation, is John Holt doing here? Well, since he believes there are really no solutions for big city and inner city schools, he cuts the Gordian knot with a utopian solution that is statistically impossible to apply. Statistics rule out the exceptional case, so that the First Street School is ruled out. Mr. Holt tells what happened there:

To see more clearly what might be done, we must look to the experience of the First Street School, described by George Dennison in *The Lives of Children* [Random House 1969]. This was a very small, privately supported, free elementary school. Its twenty-three students were about evenly divided among white, Hispanic, and black. Most were poor. Many had come (from public schools) with long histories (considering their age) of learning problems, "acting out," trouble, and violence. At the First Street School they all got better, grew, and learned, most of them at a rate two or three times as fast as that of even good students in the public schools. And all this at a cost per pupil no greater than that spent by the public schools themselves. Why did this school work so much better? For many reasons, but this above all others: it was small.

This is a way of saying that George Dennison and his wife could not possibly have accomplished what they did with those twenty-three children if they had been part of a big school.

What is in *Acting Out*? No generalized account would be useful. It is a horror story—unbelievable even after you have read it. Yet there are enough exceptions—extraordinary teachers and magnificent children—to convince us that utopian dreams are worth writing about.

Why did Mr. Betts write this book? He gives a sort of reason in the first chapter, in which he says:

I have been around nothing but New York City school people for the past decade. I have been a teacher and I have trained teachers. I have been an administrator and I have trained administrators. I have been in and out of schools in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and North Carolina. . . . I have worked in the most ordinary schools and the most controversial ones. I have worked in all-black schools, all-white schools, integrated schools, open-classroom schools, traditional schools, free schools, and schools without walls. . . .

I sat in the Teachers' Room in I.S. 201 one afternoon in the spring of 1969. The teacher on the couch across from me was reading the last few pages of Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age*. As she finished the last page, she closed the book and brought it down easily in her lap. "That's a great book," she said. "Everybody says it's a great book and it is. But . . . when is somebody going to write a book about what life is *really* like in the public schools!"

Now, eight years later, I have tried to write such a book.

Quoting from the stories Mr. Betts tells would probably be misleading. No one story is typical enough. There are horrible principals, horrible teachers, and horrible children in the book, and lots of other people, but a bad time is had by all. No wonder John Holt is trying to get going another way of thinking about education, by campaigning against any kind of compulsory schooling. This is certainly a first step in any sort of new start—which must begin, not with institutions but with parents.

Can anything be quoted from *Acting Out*—anything which, by itself, won't distort the impressions of the reader? Perhaps the most revealing thing in the book is the report on a few children who just won't go to school, no matter what anybody says or does. If this shows how bad the schools are, it isn't half so significant as the evidence afforded of how good—how determined, and wise—*some* children can be. In a closing chapter Mr. Betts says:

Today's truants are the city's most misunderstood children. They are also perhaps the most enlightened, aware that neither the schools nor the streets have anything to offer them. . . . Most of them are intelligent, sensitive children, far more accomplished in the arts of reading and mathematics than their peers who either attend school or lurk outside of them. These truants rarely brush with the law. Their trademark is their solitude.

Randolph Tracey is one of them. He is now (1978) sixteen but he has not been to school since the last day of the fourth grade. He is poor and black. He lives with his mother and his sister Bernadette, who attends school regularly and constantly chides Randolph for his "hooky-playing." Randolph is a quiet, meek child, honest in his admission to his mother that he has not been to school in years. He was always a good student, but although he was able to read at a level several years above his grade, he had no tolerance for the continuous noise and confusion that characterized his school. Randolph is never with other children, or with other adults for that matter. He has spent the better part of the past four years in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Although he has patronized all of the city's museums, he prefers the Met, and humbly claims that he is now familiar with each piece in the museum's standing collection. . . . Randolph paints and draws on his own, but derives far more pleasure from seeing and studying art in the museums.

Randolph is one of seven gentle juvenile dissenters—there will never be enough of such youngsters to make a children's crusade—described by Mr. Betts.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Visions and Contradictions

PRACTICALLY all the books and articles about cultural and socio-economic reform reach the same conclusions: first, a basic change in "values" is required; second, the barriers are mostly institutional. Since nobody really knows how people are led to change their "values," it is difficult to write much more than a good-sized paragraph concerning this need. So, after you say something about how people are seriously troubled by the lack of meaning in their lives, and about the spur to such anxieties in the absurdities of the kind of work so many do—perhaps adding something about the greater absurdities pursued in the name of enjoyment and self-esteem—you enlarge on the second conclusion, beginning, probably, with the obstacles to change in the self-interest of large corporations and in the compliance of politicians with corporate aims.

There is however an important third area of things to write about—the changes that are already going on, how they are working and the effects they are having, some both unexpected and good. Happenings in this area have the distinctive virtue of being non-theoretical. If changes in values are the cause, they have taken place. If institutional barriers exist, the changes went over, under, around, or even through them. The writers who keep pointing to these changes believe that some sort of "take-off" point will eventually be reached, making further progress irresistible.

All three of these approaches have attention in *Appropriate Visions*, a collection of essays and studies edited by Richard Dorf and Yvonne Hunter, and published by Boyd and Fraser (\$8.95 paperbound) in San Francisco. The book has a variety of contributors who record discussions at the University of California at Davis on issues raised by Barry Commoner and E. F. Schumacher during 1976 and 1977. Besides these two the participants include Sim Van der Ryn, until recently California State Architect, Michael

Perelman, an agricultural economist, Garrett Hardin, a biologist, Tom Bender, an editor of *Rain*, Peter Gillingham, director of Intermediate Technology in Menlo Park, and others—about two dozen in all.

One contributor, Phillip LeVeen, of the U. of C. Agricultural Experiment Station in Berkeley, devotes most of his space to explaining why California farmers are not likely to embrace the vision of E. F. Schumacher. He says:

Dr. Schumacher continually argues throughout his book [*Small Is Beautiful*] that the primary obstacle to the implementation of intermediate technologies and the development of human-sized institutions is the lack of belief in appropriate values. He lays much of the blame on the discipline of economics, which has promoted the idea of economic growth and associated values of greed and avarice, all of which have created a materialistic and destructive life style. It will be argued in this paper that Mr. Schumacher gives too little attention to structural and institutional factors in his analysis of the reasons for our present predicament, and, because of this he does not have a clear understanding of the forces which give rise to growth. Without an understanding of such forces, it is impossible to describe the types of social, political, and economic changes which must occur if we are to achieve the noble goals he sets forth.

The large farmers of California supply Mr. LeVeen's illustration of why it will not be easy to establish a human-sized agriculture. Their economic power and mechanization have given them a measure of control over their markets, which are now national, and no prosperous agribusinessman wants to see this control disturbed.

However, there is one "opening" discerned by this writer:

One final point must be made concerning small farms in California. Because of changes in the requirements of the processing and food distribution system, farmers have increasingly sacrificed quality and flavor in their effort to produce with labor-saving technologies for a national and international market. This leaves a significant unfilled demand for high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables. For the energetic farmer who is willing to develop an alternative

market network with urban markets, the possibility of truck-farming vegetables and fresh fruits using organic and labor-intensive methods may be increasingly bright, especially in view of the importance of energy in the transportation of food to the market. Here is a niche in the present system which could well be filled with unorthodox farm organization and operation, and here is one possible source of immediate interest in intermediate technologies.

Mr. LeVeen speaks of the government regulations and political interests which "protect the large farmers" from attempts at change. Tom Bender, of *Rain*, describes the constraints that become evident in another area:

Changes in our dreams, technology, and way of life begin to make visible some of the linkages normally invisible in everyday life, and give us opportunity to reflect on them and change them to respond to new senses of reality. We are rediscovering that which should be obvious—that values form the framework for what we call economics. Again I return to building as an example. Almost any practicing architect very quickly realizes that there are very severe economic restraints on building and that a lot of the beautiful fantasies they would love to build are limited because of desires to make the buildings economically profitable or economically efficient. If we step back and take a slightly broader look at the picture, we realize that our choice of economics has already been framed in by other choices. . . .

What can we do? What is happening? Are things really changing? Are we dealing with these changes at all? . . . It seems that there is an incredible amount happening all over the country and all over the world in terms of developing good, satisfying, viable ways of doing things, and ways in which we can very readily join in. Our dreams *are* finding new ways of concretely transforming our lives.

A paragraph from Barry Commoner's address shows the muscle in this movement—the muscle of nature as well as Dr. Commoner. He says:

. . . the production system lies between the ecosystem and the economic system. The production system depends on the ecosystem, and on the resources out of which it generates the wealth that is manipulated by the economic system. Now, if you think about it for a moment, you can see that there

ought to be a logical set of relationships. For example, if production (the steel mill) is dependent on the ecosystem for its oxygen, then you ought to build a steel mill in such a way that it does not destroy the capability of the ecosystem to produce oxygen. . . . Now in fact it doesn't work that way because we build steel mills that kill plants, that produce pollution. . . . We build cars that produce smog and put chemicals into the air that are not good for people and plants. We build chemical factories that produce substances that are poisonous to animals, people, and plants. Sometimes we do it deliberately, sometimes accidentally. The production system is, in fact, operating in such a way as to be very heavily incompatible with the ecosystem on which it depends, and that, in essence, is the environmental crisis—that we have a production system which is destroying its own ecological base. It can't go on that way.

There is a sweep of intellectual and moral power in this book, which has balance and symmetry as well as strength. Its contributions constitute an Early Warning System for people who think as well as read.