

## THE VOCABULARY OF TECHNICS

IT'S a wonder we survive at all," said the young man, looking up from a newsletter that comes from the nation's capital, filled with terse analyses of the things the powers that be are doing wrong. Many people do that kind of reading; it is difficult to escape if you try to keep up with what is happening in the world, and to take some part, however modest, in bettering conditions. The humanistic journalists and area specialists who write this material are informed and conscientious. They tell us things we need to know.

But the fact is, the accumulated effect of their efforts is likely to be that the individual reader who tries to be responsible and responsive feels more and more helpless or powerless, the more he reads. Most commonly, he picks a cause or two within the compass of his capacities and does what he can, letting go other matters of admitted importance. At best the situation is a painful one.

In addition to the specialist critics—who write about, say, industrial pollution, the destruction of our forests, the poisoning of streams, rivers, and oceans, the monopoly of agribusiness, the folly, waste, and immorality of armament programs, the exhaustion of irreplaceable resources, the increase of violent crime and of corruption in government—there are others who take an over-all view, declaring in general terms that what we are doing won't work, can't last, and that collapse of the entire modern way of life is likely to take place about the year 2025.

Actually, the extrapolations on which such dark anticipations are based seem a bit optimistic, while the reasons given for gloom are hardly disputable. Consider, for example, a brief statement by Fred Hoyle in his latest book, *Ten Faces of the Universe* (Freeman):

When one contemplates the huge human populations that have grown with such startling suddenness during the last century or so, when one contemplates the excessive pressure on natural resources, it is hard to summon much confidence in a future extending more than a few decades. Devastating crises, one feels, must overtake the human species within a hundred years at most. We are living today, not on the brink of social disaster, as we often tend to think, but actually *within* the disaster itself. This is exactly what the news media report to us every day.

It is difficult to fault Fred Hoyle for this more than melancholy outlook. He seems so right. And given his premises about the nature of man, what else can he conclude? He makes his position plain:

We have seen that the phenomenon of "intelligence" is an outcome of aggressiveness competition. Intelligence and aggressiveness are coupled together inevitably by the mechanisms of biological evolution. An intelligent animal anywhere in the galaxy must necessarily become faced at some stage by the same kind of social situation as that which now confronts the human species. Inevitably, then, "intelligence" contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Can any solution be found for this inherent difficulty?

There is nothing in Mr. Hoyle's last chapter, where he considers remedies, that will add to anyone's optimism. He seems a rather olympian pessimist who is nonetheless good reading because of his amiable temper and searching critical intelligence. He is also open-minded in the scientific sense, believing it quite reasonable to suppose that there are other intelligences like ourselves in other parts of the cosmos. Maybe it would be a good idea, he suggests, to try to communicate with them, to learn how *they* have been coping with our sort of problems. But alas, the most imposing proposal—*proposal*, not project—for interplanetary communication would involve waiting a few thousand years to receive

answers to our questions from the hypothetical dwellers in distant parts of the galaxy. Not much chance of organizing a reception station for such help, the astronomer concludes.

Only if results could be promised in the short term would I expect such a project to receive public support. This I take to be clear evidence of the ephemeral nature of our modern society. We have no faith in tomorrow. A species with real confidence in its future would not hesitate to give expression to such a magnificent concept.

But is this concept really so "magnificent," or is it a dramatic and wildly playful application of the "technological fix," as remote from adoption as the remedy he proposes for the population problem: to tax into penury the people who have more than two children?

So far as we can see, the common element in practically all the solutions for our multiplying evils is the idea that we can eliminate bad uses of our aggressive intelligence only by making them so painful, in one way or another, that people will be driven to behave differently. This suggests general assent to the idea that self-interest is the only motive in human life worth talking about. The self-interest is simply there, like original sin, and you control or manipulate it by passing a law. Moral intelligence, in other words, is a problem of astute administration. Successful reform means getting enough people to agree and act on what must be done. Then the stragglers and the stubborn ones can be forced into line.

This is indeed the common view. Take the problem of land, very much in the forefront of present-day discussion. Dozens of carefully researched and well-written articles have exposed the bad effects of industrial farming monopolies, from the breakdown and loss of community at home to the impoverishment of rural populations abroad. The dependence of agribusiness on petroleum is only one item in an elaborate bill of particulars. First comes the wearing away of the economic and social autonomy of the country town—called by Arthur Morgan the seedbed of society. *Mother Jones* for February-March

provides this summary (based on Richard Goldschmidt's *As You Sow*):

The concentration of land holdings deeply affects life in farm towns. A classic sociologic study was done on this just after World War II, comparing two agricultural cities with roughly equal populations—one surrounded mainly by family farms, the other by factory farms. The small town farm supported twice the number of businesses as the other, had three times as much park space and five times as many schools, more and more varied community organizations and more newspaper coverage—in general, the social effects that might be expected from wealth spread through a community, instead of wealth concentrated in the hands of a relatively few rich agribusinessmen.

Actually, the law required to make agricultural monopoly not just expensive but virtually impossible has been on the U.S. books for seventy-five years. The trouble is with enforcing it. The *Mother Jones* story gives the gist of the Reclamation Act of 1902:

The law unambiguously says that to receive water from federal irrigation projects, you cannot have more than 160 acres of land. It also specifies that to receive this water, you must live on that land. The law was designed to prevent large, monopolistic land ownerships in the West. The idea was that government would supply the capital—in the form of dams and canals—needed to get cultivation started, but only small farmers would benefit. The vision was to seed the dry lands of the Western states with family farms Thomas Jefferson's "seedbed of civic virtue."

Periodically, heroic attempts to enforce this basic Reclamation law have utterly failed. In 1948—the first year of publication of *MANAS*—several articles were devoted to the then current attempt to make the beneficiaries of the Central Valley Project (hundreds of miles of canals bringing northern water for irrigation to the lands of central California) conform to the 160-acre limitation. The result was that the federal officials of the Bureau of Reclamation (Department of Interior) who tried to enforce the law were fired. The whole thing seemed ridiculous to the large farmers. Joseph Di Giorgio, owner and efficient farmer of some twenty-five thousand acres of rich

California farmland, said—"Sure, divide me up—but divide up R. H. Macy, too."

Today another effort is being made to get the 160-acre limitation enforced, this time by a private physician, Ben Yellen, who practices in Brawley, Calif. Dr. Yellen has seen at first hand the effects on people of vast farming operations. Living near the Mexican border, he watched the legal importation of Mexicans—*braceros*—to work on the big farms:

Our domestic farmworkers . . . were squeezed out of the Imperial Valley. Many of the domestic farm workers were my patients, and I lost them.

The merchants were also badly affected, and many stores closed. . . . I began to fight for our domestic farm workers. Then I found out that under the imported Public Law #78, Mexicans were being swindled in various ways. Most of them earned only \$14 per week. They had to pay \$12.25 for food, which consisted of beans three times a day. Then they paid 10 cents a week for medical insurance. . . . When this is subtracted from \$14, it leaves the . . . Mexican 85 cents after a week's work. I used to make photocopies of these paychecks for 85 cents and send them all over the United States to inform people.

For these and other equally urgent reasons Dr. Yellen began a one-man campaign to enforce the 160-acre limitation in order to bring back the family farm. He is at present suing the Department of Interior. Eric Mankin, the *Mother Jones* writer, says:

In the meantime, the water continues to flow as usual. What can be the effect of this case? The most likely, immediate outcome is more litigation—and new techniques of evasion.

Three hundred miles north of the Imperial Valley, for example, is the Westlands Water District. Reclamation law enforcement is comparatively advanced here: the Westlands Water District now admits that the law applies to them.

To obey the law, the big factory farms there (which average more than 16,000 acres each) have been selling off property in 160-acre parcels to foremen, corporate officers and relatives, keeping the combined, huge-scale farming operations intact.

(*Elements* for September 1976 has a story describing these operations in detail.)

This sort of report on problems which endlessly repeat themselves, over the years, could go on and on. There is for example the story of the Food and Drug Administration, as told in *The Chemical Feast* by James Turner. There is the story of the Army Engineers and their pointless and ineffectual dams told by Arthur Morgan in *Dams and Other Disasters*. There is the comparative hopelessness of trying to assess technology in terms of future effects, as indicated by scientists who have carefully studied such projects (*Scientific American*, February, 1970). And there is the desperation expressed by some biologists who are convinced that recently begun experiments with recombinant DNA (determinants of heredity) involve "many unknown factors beyond the control of the scientist," and that new self-reproducing living forms "may well be irreversible." "How," asks Robert Sinsheimer of the California Institute of Technology, "do we prevent grievous missteps, inherently untraceable?" Meanwhile, National Institutes of Health and FDA officials say that they do not know what DNA experiments major pharmaceutical concerns are carrying on. Critics are warning that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is just around the corner.

Well, we need these analyses and warnings, along with accounts of the determined and self-sacrificing individuals and small groups who attempt to turn the tide in the opposite direction. We need to know about all these things, if only as provocatives to questioning the assumptions on which so much of our thinking is based. Are pain and punishment the only means of controlling or regulating human behavior? Are selfishness and aggression the mainsprings of "intelligent" action? Is the managerial, political approach to excesses the only one available? Are there no effective forms of self-persuasion and self-regulation? Policing one another certainly hasn't worked well, and offers even less promise for the future.

There are other ways of considering the issues of human life. There are higher levels of

generalization which do not ignore the need of the individual human being to be able to decide that he has a life worth living, even if he can't persuade a political majority of his fellows to agree with him. Can there, then, be a philosophy of action, equally valid for both individuals and groups?

Reflecting on such questions after the first year of the second World War, Simone Weil set down her meditations on the *Iliad*. She called her essay "The Poem of Force," and found the essence of the Greek epic in the line, "Ares is just, and kills those who kill."

The *Iliad*, for Simone Weil, was a study in the overtaking of the aggressive by aggression:

Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates. The truth is, nobody really possesses it. . . . The strong are, as a matter of fact, never absolutely strong. . . . But at the time their own destruction seems impossible to them. For they do not see that the force in their possession is only a limited quantity; nor do they see their relations with other human beings as a kind of balance between unequal amounts of force. Since other people do not impose on their movements that halt, that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity, they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them. . . . And at this point they exceed the measure of the force that is actually at their disposal. Inevitably they exceed it, since they are not aware that it is limited. . . . suddenly things cease to obey them. . . .

This retribution, which has a geometric rigor, which operates automatically to penalize the abuse of force, was the main subject of Greek thought. Under the name of Nemesis, it functions as the mainspring of Aeschylus's tragedies. To the Pythagoreans, to Socrates and Plato, it was the jumping-off point of speculation on the nature of man and the universe. Wherever Hellenism has penetrated, we find the idea of it familiar. In Oriental countries which are steeped in Buddhism, it is perhaps this Greek idea that has lived on under the name of Karma. The Occident, however, has lost it, and no longer even has a word to express it in any of its languages: conceptions of limit, measure, equilibrium, which ought to determine the conduct of life are, in the West, restricted to a servile function in the vocabulary of technics. We are only geometricians of matter; the

Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue.

It is hardly remarkable that the thinkers who appeal strongly to individuals looking for a better way of life, to those *really* to abandon the motives and break with the habits of aggression, are almost always repeaters of this theme. E.F. Schumacher, for example, asked by a *Mother Earth News* (November, 1976) interviewer what might happen if nuclear energy from a fusion process becomes available, had this to say:

Well, just as the moth perishes in the candle flame, we shall perish if we succeed in developing such a source of energy. Thirty years of unlimited growth have left us in such bad psychological shape that our society could never stand another 100. And it has damaged the living environment so badly that the earth could never stand it either. . . . You cannot cure the disease by intensifying the cause. . . .

We are justifiably proud of what we call "know-how." We "know" a great deal about "how" things work. We have devised very effective sciences and technologies. And within their proper limit, every science and all our technology can be beneficial. *But these things become evil and destructive when they are allowed to transgress their proper boundaries. . . .*

There are some questions—metaphysical questions—which science cannot answer. . . . Science can tell us how to do almost anything—grow two grains where one grew before or build a nuclear reactor—but it cannot tell us the ultimate *purpose* of such an act.

Science cannot produce ideas by which we can live. Even the greatest concepts of science are nothing but working hypotheses which are useful for purposes of research but entirely inapplicable to the conduct of our lives or the interpretation of the world. Science can tell us nothing about the meaning of life.

Learning something of the meaning of life needs to come out of whatever we do, and the objective approach—the inventory of problems—the legislative method of control—while, like science, useful and necessary, is invariably silent when it comes to meanings.

In the second book of Plato's *Republic*, after he had described the craftsman's simplicities practiced in the ideal community, Socrates had to

meet the objections of Glaucon, who was already feeling "deprived." Socrates, Glaucon suggested, was picturing a city suitable only for pigs.

What would you have, Glaucon, said I.

What is customary, he replied. They must recline on couches, I presume, if they are not to be uncomfortable, and dine from tables and have dishes and sweetmeats such as are now in use.

Good, said I. I understand. It is not merely the origin of a city, it seems, that we are considering but the origin of a luxurious city. Perhaps that isn't a bad suggestion, either. For by observation of such a city it may be we could discern the origin of justice and injustice in states. The true state I believe to be the one we have described—the healthy state, as it were. But if it is your pleasure that we contemplate also a fevered state, there is nothing to hinder.

After some cataloguing of the luxuries of the "fevered state," Socrates asks his companion:

Then shall we not have to enlarge the city again? For that healthy state is no longer sufficient, but we must proceed to swell out its bulk and fill it up with a multitude of things that exceed the requirement of necessity in states. . . . And the territory, I presume, that was then sufficient to feed the then population, from being adequate will become too small. . . . Then we shall have to cut out a cantele of our neighbor's land if we are to have enough for pasture and plowing, and they in turn of ours if they too abandon themselves to the unlimited acquisition of wealth, disregarding the limit set by our necessary wants.

Inevitably, Socrates.

We shall go to war as the next step, Glaucon—or what will happen?

What you say, he said.

And we are not yet to speak, said I, of any evil or good effect of war, but only to affirm that we have further discovered the origin of war, namely, from those things from which the greatest disasters, public and private, come to states when they come.

Certainly.

Then, my friend, we must still further enlarge our city by no small increment, but by a whole army, that will march forth and fight it out with assailants in defense of all our wealth and the luxuries we have just described.

Plato needed no computer for his account of the future. He knew how things would go, given certain values and intentions. He had found reason to believe that values and intentions are the only reliable determinants of the course of human life.

## *REVIEW*

### STIRNER'S SINGLE VIRTUE

AFTER turning for a while the pages of Max Stirner's *Egoism* (Freedom Press, 1976, \$3.00) by John Clark, we recalled Coleridge's melancholy conclusion that the philosophic faculty remains undeveloped in some people. Stirner was apparently a man to whom it never occurred to ask whether human beings—himself, for example—are in the world to do something worthwhile, that needs doing. He never had this feeling, and regarded those who did as deluded or unbalanced. He was an aggressive advocate of deliberate selfishness—egoism, he called it—and he achieved some fame by a systematic identification of the idea of pleasing oneself with the ideal of freedom. To such a man, of course, ethics becomes the theory of self-service. Obligations to others do not exist, although contracts with others, when in one's interest, seemed to him the best arrangement. It is perhaps not remarkable that Stirner was the translator into German of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

Stirner, Mr. Clark shows, is at his weakest when he undertakes to show the social advantages of egoism. The fact is that there are no social advantages to be gained from unqualified self-interest, but only endless adversary proceedings generating the wasteful frictions with which we are all too familiar. The idea that freedom is the other face of responsibility is totally unexamined by Stirner. Why, then, does anyone bother to read or pay attention to him?

Mainly because in the modern world freedom seems increasingly difficult to come by, and Stirner has been regarded by some as freedom's all-out champion. It may be argued, not unreasonably, that to be one hundred per cent *for* something is likely to produce insights not available to prudent qualifiers. But Mr. Clark has no difficulty in showing the weakness of Stirner's arguments, whether in behalf of the individual or society. The fact that people may enjoy satisfaction or pleasure as the result of altruistic acts by no means demonstrates that altruism is only a special case of selfishness, in which the altruist hides from himself his true motive.

It is quite possible to act generously without the motive of pleasing oneself. Sometimes the result may be enjoyable, sometimes not.

Concerning Stirner's simplifications in connection with society, Mr. Clark writes:

The objection which Stirner raises against both the state and society is that they are not products of the free creative choice of the individual ego, but are forced on one without the conscious accord of one's will. "Our societies and States are without our making them, are united without our uniting are predestined and established, or have an independent standing of their own, are indissolubly established against us egoists. Because of the nature of society as a non-voluntary association, it has a number of objectionable characteristics. One does not use society for one's own benefit, but rather is employed by it for its welfare. It demands that one exist not as a single ego, but as part of an organic whole larger than oneself, and that one act not according to an unfettered will, but out of a sense of duty to that whole. The ego is not looked upon as the end but as a mere means, while society becomes the end, and is made into something sacred." There are two parts to Stirner's criticism of society. The first is that it contradicts reality—that it posits the totality as the ultimate reality, while the individual is fundamental. This criticism rests on a weak foundation since, as has been shown, Stirner is not very convincing in his defence of the ontological priority of the individual ego. His second point of criticism is that a society in which the individual can preserve his or her freedom and individuality is not possible. He is not very persuasive on this point either. He does not bother to cope with the evidence that a great part of what has been included under the name "society" has been independent of the coercive power exercised through the state, and that individuals have participated in many social activities of free choice and without a loss of individuality. It is not true that all interaction between human beings which preserves individual autonomy must be guided by conscious egoism. Kropotkin has shown that maximum individual freedom and maximum social cooperation are not only compatible but, when united, create the most productive condition for both the individual and the society.

Stirner's idea of the way society ought to be organized is of interest:

The purpose of the union of egoists is, then, to enable the egoists to develop their ownness (the

quality of being in complete control of oneself and one's property), and to extend the sphere of ownership, or increase the number of things over which they have control. Since the type of the union envisioned is based on the model of the contract Stirner's relation to Adam Smith and classical capitalist economics comes to the surface. He wishes to apply the assumptions underlying the economics of that tradition to all spheres of human existence. The result is that a standpoint of rational self-interest is, in his view, to govern not only the market-place, but society as a whole.

What need is there, today, to refute a man like that! One has only to think of Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* to realize how completely wrong Max Stirner was in his model for a human society. It is the model we have been using, more or less, for the past two hundred years, and which is now proving almost totally unmanageable.

Why, we might ask, was Stirner so determined to celebrate the individual with such extreme partisanship? Mr. Clark says he was reacting to Hegelian idealism and Hegel's indifference to individuals. Hegel was devoted to the destiny of the nation. As John McTaggart pointed out in his *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, Hegel was simply not interested in individuals. And as Dwight Macdonald shows in *The Root Is Man*, Hegel's "Organic State" becomes totalitarian tyranny when practically realized. So there was reason enough for restoring emphasis on the individual. But Stirner's idea of the individual was a caricature of a normal human being. The verbal gloss of "complete freedom" cannot conceal the ugliness of the conception.

We may have illustrated here the effect of intellectual theorizing and system-building divorced from the testing and proofs that come from practice. As Sim van der Ryn put it recently, "The experiential is self-enforcing; the intellectual is not." Total self-interest does not work in practice. All nature is a network of reciprocities and interdependencies, and what we call altruism is, as Henryk Skolimowski has said, "stark realism in evolution's terms."

But the human devotion to freedom is not intellectual theory. It may be our most deeply rooted motive, and recognizing this seems fundamental to

any understanding of human nature. Yet theorizing about it can obviously lead to disastrous errors. Our sense of the importance of the whole—of the good of mankind or of society—is also fundamental. It grows from no theory, yet theories about the common good involve us in equally terrible mistakes. Do we then misconceive both the meaning of freedom and the meaning of the common good?

In *Between Man and Man* (a title which would not have been understood by Stirner) Martin Buber puts his finger on what seems wholly missing in Stirner's thought—noting, at the same time, the value of his narrow integrity in a hypocritical age:

Responsibility presupposes one who addresses me primarily, that is, from a realm independent of myself, and to whom I am answerable. . . . Where no primary address and claim can touch me, for everything is my property, responsibility has become a phantom. At the same time life's character of mutuality is dissipated. He who ceases to make a response ceases to hear the Word.

But this reality of responsibility is not what is questioned by Stirner; it is unknown to him. He simply does not know what of elemental reality happens between life and life. . . . What Stirner with his destructive power successfully attacks is the substitute for a reality that is no longer believed: the fictitious responsibility in the face of reason, of an idea, a nature, an institution, of all manner of illustrious ghosts, . . . He wished to show the nothingness of the word which has decayed into a phrase, he has never known the living word he unveils what he knows. Ignorant of the reality whose appearance is appearance, he proves its nature to be appearance. Stirner dissolves the dissolution. "What you call responsibility is a lie!" he cries, and he is right. But there is a truth. And the way to it lies freer after the lie has been seen through.

Buber finds in Stirner's naïve candor, in his contempt for all theory, and his insistence on "the concrete human person," a salutary exposure of the emptiness of theory which has not been made into act. Stirner is for modern conduct what Machiavelli is for statecraft—he champions what people do, not what they say. What power he has grows from the simple fact that he is not a hypocrite.

## COMMENTARY

### ESSENTIALS OF CRITICISM

CRITICISM is commonly defined as telling what a writer sets out to do and giving an account of how well he does it. There is also the question of whether it is worth doing, since who wants to read even skillful comment on matters hardly worth inquiring into?

If this second question has major consideration, then the review becomes a review-essay. All good criticism has at least something of this quality, the fact of the review indicating that the book or article examined deserves attention.

Martin Buber's comment on Max Stirner (opposite) seems a particularly good illustration of criticism which not only grasps what a writer sets out to do, but puts his achievement in a frame of values which both measures the achievement and defines its shortcomings. Stirner, Buber says, is simply unaware of the reality behind the fraud he exposes and attacks. This blindness, he suggests, gives Stirner's egoistic *tour de force* a scavenging function.

Do we still need such services? That is not really the question. Stirner's role may be worth considering if we are still vulnerable to the negative appeal of such self-centered simplifiers. And if, as Mr. Clark shows, writers of the stature of Marx, Engels, and Nietzsche could be influenced by Stirner, scavengers will be able to obtain an audience in any period of cultural decline. It is this which needs to be understood.

Discussing the alliance between "the Mob and the Elite" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt shows what may happen when thinking obtains its strength from exposure of hypocrisy:

What the spokesmen of humanism and liberalism usually overlook . . . is that an atmosphere in which all traditional values and propositions had evaporated . . . made it easier to accept patently absurd propositions than the old truths which had become pious banalities, precisely because nobody

could be expected to take the absurdities seriously. Vulgarity with its cynical dismissal of respected standards and accepted theories carried with it a frank admission of the worst and a disregard for all pretenses which were easily mistaken for courage and a new style of life. In the growing prevalence of mob attitudes and convictions—which were actually the attitudes and convictions of the bourgeoisie cleansed of hypocrisy—those who traditionally hated the bourgeoisie and had voluntarily left respectable society saw only the lack of hypocrisy and respectability, not the content itself.

In short, there is no useful criticism without "content" of the sort both Buber and Hannah Arendt provide.



## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN SCOTLAND

THE UNBOWED HEAD, by R.F. MacKenzie, is the story of how a Scottish headmaster of a public school called Summerhill Academy (not A. S. Neill's Summerhill) in Aberdeen was fired, and what he was fired for trying to do. This paperback is published at 95 pence by the Edinburgh University Student Publications Board, and we have it for review through the kindness of an English reader. Why was MacKenzie fired? Because he believed in treating all children considerately, in encouraging their thinking and independence, and because he opposed flogging ("belting" is apparently the term used in Scotland). After it was all over Mr. MacKenzie wrote his book about what he and a minority of teachers attempted, telling why he was finally obliged to say:

I know now that the Summerhill experiment was never on. Somebody recently said that the great mistake we educationists make is to suppose that schools are about education. It is not so, he said, schools are about control.

Some [pupils] had grievous wounds and would have needed a long time of shelter and healing. One or two needed skilled psychiatric attention. But the majority of pupils who caused trouble in the classroom were neither wounded nor disturbed. They needed neither sanctuary nor a psychiatrist, only some ordinary care and affection and humour and support. That such care is not forthcoming is puzzling and disturbing. Most societies have a blind area (whether to burning witches or employing tiny children in coal mines, or using a strap or a cane against children who are inattentive in school) which is inexplicable to later generations. There is no insoluble problem of juvenile delinquency. It is just that our society has no wish to help these pupils. Its mentality is rigid, static; it wants to hang on to its gods of status and examination certificates and punishment at whatever cost.

The Summerhill story is the story of what happens to a group of teachers who try to help these pupils.

He tells about two teachers, a man and his wife, who applied themselves with vigor "to this question of how to educate the majority of the population in a time of transition and changing values":

With detachment they examined the received views, the class antagonisms of Aberdeen, the residual Calvinist attitudes, the faith in "intelligence quotients," the middle-class values. The 12- and 13-year-olds whom they taught were the new barbarians, who in a new Aberdeen situation (in which the influence of the Church had decayed, boys' brigade and scouts were decaying, parents were busy working overtime) had escaped the contagion of the values previously communicated by Church, scouts and parents. They were independent, undocctrinated. And these working class pupils met two middle-class teachers who had escaped from their own indoctrination, and there they all were in a state of liberation, together (teachers and pupils), investigating the present and the future. It was a heart-warming situation, and occasionally a heartbreak.

#### Another of MacKenzie's teachers:

There was a year-master, a Cambridge graduate whose Cambridge accent in no way prevented him from communicating with these children of Aberdeen trawl fishermen and mill workers. Children are gloriously unaware of bars—colour bars, class bars, accent bars, intelligence quotient bars—unless the discrimination is forced upon them. He would say, "I'm sorry I lost my temper with you this morning. I wasn't feeling too good. There were a few things that upset me." And with childlike magnanimity they forgave him. This is one of the things that rigid Scottish hierarchy doesn't begin to understand, the capacity for forgiveness that exists under the most sullen, forbidding exterior. He was a new phenomenon on the formal Scottish scene, a fallible adult. Scottish teachers, like the Pope, present the image of infallibility, a remote perfection in which the pupils feel they have no part. And then along comes somebody who seems to be as fallible, sinful, forgiving as they are themselves and they feel relieved, and relax.

Over and above this uncommon admission of common humanity he had an unusual skill in teaching. We invited the parents to spend evenings in the school as learners, so that they could realize what a lesson in art, science, physical education,

technical education or English was like. . . . It was this teacher who suggested that two senior boys, who had been making much trouble in the school, should spend the whole of their last term helping in a mental hospital for old men. I made the stipulation that they should come to see me every Friday morning to report on what they had done in the hospital during the week. I enjoyed listening to them. They became articulate, and I think that they may have gained from the experience of recalling and discussing the events of the week. The hospital staff said that they didn't expect them to take part in all the unpleasant duties of the ward but the boys insisted on doing their full share, cleaning soiled sheets and clearing up a mess. Previously, in school they had been suspicious and sullen, but now there was a geniality about them. They recounted the details of their work with a humorous realism.

It wasn't always easy. The distrust of "teachers" was deepseated:

There is the story about a class who were asked to write a composition about the police. One boy wrote, "The police is bastards" and left it at that; not another word on the page. The school and the police thereupon cooperated in an exercise in public relations. The boy was taken to police headquarters, shown the nature of their work, entertained in the canteen, and taken out in a car. Back in school he was given another chance to write his essay. He wrote, "The police is cunning bastards."

In Summerhill there were several pupils, perhaps more than we liked to imagine, who were proof against kindness and cups of coffee, and retained their suspicion of the year masters, regarding them as a more insidious type of prefect of the establishment.

I can't get away from the nagging thought that they were right. Was all that we were doing just the soft-sell, disarming their suspicions in order the more smoothly to help the present social and educational system to work? . . .

Some difficult decisions await to be made by us teachers. Those who follow . . . uncompromising honesty . . . will be sacked, and there's no future, no immediate future in that for the teacher and his wife and family. The best that most of us can do is to make our compromises where possible but never to deceive ourselves into thinking we are free agents acting on behalf of the pupils when in fact we are kept servants on behalf of our paymasters. Even within that limit there is still much that we can do to

alleviate suffering, to patch up and smooth over—activities not to be sneered at. I look back at a creditable list of achievements of Summerhill's year staff and other liberal-minded teachers along these lines.

That is what this book is about—that, and ~e obstacles they were up against, which finally defeated them.

But Mr. MacKenzie isn't giving up. Changes, he says, are on the way:

In the vacuum created in Scottish society by the decreasing credibility of politicians of the traditional parties, there is an opportunity for teachers to play a part in the community not envisaged in their old function of filling pupils with exam information. Perhaps the teachers are the best people to resume the dialogue on first and last things which our materialistic masters have neglected. The people of Scotland are coming of age, asking questions about how to use the heritage on which they are entering. . . . Like Zimbabwe, Scotland is an emergent nation. The educational controllers of Scotland have no more intention of giving children deep insights into human behaviour and preparing them to grow up to be capable of taking over and running their country than the white settlers in Rhodesia had of preparing black children for a future in which *they* would run their country. Suddenly it is all changed. The future of Zimbabwe is likely to be different from what the educators planned. The future of Scotland could also be different. In Scotland the forces resisting change are still powerful and, as at Summerhill, determined to maintain control wherever they are challenged. The battle at Summerhill is likely to be repeated in other schools. The result in Scotland could go either way.

## FRONTIERS

### Instead of Mega-Conferences

THERE are various ways of calling a turn in human affairs. In the Spring *American Scholar* Rene Dubos tells how the experts of the modern world are setting the stage for their own replacement as authorities and leaders. He begins by noting the numerous "huge, highly publicized international conferences" sponsored by the United Nations during the 1970s to deal with contemporary human problems. As one who was involved in the planning of several of these "talkfests," as he calls them, Dr. Dubos feels qualified to say:

Whatever the subject discussed, the mega-conferences were conducted according to much the same pattern, as if they had to follow a preordained universal ritual. They began with resounding statements of critical global problems and with a clarion call for international cooperation. As soon as the substantive deliberations began, however, they became platforms for political manifestos that generated intense political controversies. Any concern for concrete problems was hopelessly diluted in a flood of ideological verbiage. Then, in the last hours of the last day of the conferences, frantic efforts were made to set down a statement of consensus. The final stage of the ritual was a declaration so broadly and vaguely worded as to save face for all the participants and avoid committing them to a specific course of action.

These conferences were not, however, utterly useless. People learn things from them. For example, the Habitat conference in Vancouver last year presented so much irrelevant politicking that "many observers," Dr. Dubos says, felt that it may have been "the last of the megaconferences." And at Stockholm in 1972 (a conference on "the Human Environment") "the American environmental purists came to preach the academic ecological gospel, but soon discovered that abject poverty is perhaps the worst form of pollution and that poor countries have legitimate reasons to be more interested in economic development than in trying to maintain ecological equilibrium."

Are there signs that other people—neither academic experts nor politicians—are beginning to take the initiative for necessary change? Well, there are signs of two sorts. First, we have some rather wonderful Pied Pipers who are attracting the attention of hundreds of thousands of openminded and thoughtful people. E. F. Schumacher is among the most effective of the provocateurs to independent and imaginative action by individuals and small groups. Buckminster Fuller exercises influence of another sort. You don't have to admire the idea of hanging prefabricated homes on poles or to wish for a transparent climate-controlling bubble over New York City in order to see the extraordinary sense in much of what he says. According to a summary by a recent interviewer (*Los Angeles Times*, March 2):

Part of Fuller's technological solution to the planet's problems involves a switch from reliance on the fossil fuels that are running out anyway to such unlimited energy resources as the sun, the wind, and the ocean currents. . . . Many others share those views, however. Where Fuller parts company with them is in his belief that the way decisions are made is going to be changed dramatically. He predicts that the first step toward real solutions will be the dissolutions of the present governments of the world.

"Take all the governments in the United Nations today, 139 of them," he says. "That's 139 admirals running the same ship. We don't need politicians to tell people what to do. We've got to get to the point where all of humanity knows what's going on so well that we don't need any government."

Does Fuller really believe national politics on this planet has a short life expectancy? . . .

"There has already been incredible change," Fuller says. "For the first time in history an enormous percentage of the population questions national politics. The whole new young world doesn't think in terms of national politics any more. Just the fact that kids go round the world today means they're thinking world. . . ."

The Pied Pipers—we have named only two; others would include people like John Todd, Karl Hess, and groups like The Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Washington, D.C.—represent the kind

of leadership a grassroots movement needs. What about the "movement" itself?

Another *L.A. Times* article (Feb. 28) reports on the findings of a study conducted by Arnold Mitchell and Duane Elgin of the Stanford Research Institute, suggesting that "45 million Americans are living lives fully committed to the concept of voluntary simplicity, while perhaps twice that many more are partial adherents." This seems really extravagant, but the body of the *Times* story suggests that there is some basis for such conclusions. For thirty years, Mr. Mitchell says, people with these inclinations have been telling the pollsters they prefer a rural environment, but "in 1971 or '72, for the first time, people were actually moving to small towns, to a rural environment, presumably looking for a better quality of living."

More than forty years ago, Richard Gregg presented conclusive arguments for "voluntary simplicity" in a journal published in India (reprinted in *MANAS* for Sept. 4, 1974). Such ideas are now rapidly spreading throughout America, according to the Stanford study. Arnold Mitchell defines voluntary simplicity as "a way of living that reflects inner convictions: first, that it is better to have things on a human scale; second, that it is better to live frugally, to conserve, recycle, not to waste, and third, that the inner life, rather than externals, is central." The converts to this outlook, he says, are mainly educated people between eighteen and thirty-nine who recognize that "plenty on the material level" doesn't provide truly human satisfaction. The Stanford researchers think that such people are the fastest growing segment of the population, pointing out that in 1976 a Roper poll found that "51% of Americans believe the nation 'must cut way back on production and consumption to preserve resources'." Today, the researchers say, "People are being both pushed and pulled toward the new way of living."

These are statistical generalizations. Are there "on the spot" signs, too? In the *Mendocino*

*Grapevine* for March 17, Vicki Allen writes about the people in various parts of the country, particularly New England and California, where changes are very much in evidence:

The new pioneers who bring new interests and values to the country have a vision of life and of the future which may offer solutions to the complex problems created by runaway technology and large-scale development. They offer solutions, also, to the economic and human problems which have been allowed to grow, through neglect, in rural America. . . . The city dwellers who moved to the country during the past several years have less reliance on government and more belief in the potential of people helping themselves and each other.

This trend is noticeable in California in the large attendance at Ukiah (Mendocino County Seat) of the annual Simple Living Workshops held at the county fairgrounds. People living on the land (newcomers and oldtimers) attend and take part in nearly a hundred workshops transmitting the skills of rural life. Small-scale, simple ways are recognized as both beautiful and better. "It is this concept," Vicki Allen says, "which threatens to shake the roots of modern technology, to disprove all the tired old concepts that led us to where we are."