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WHAT COMES FIRST?

WE, like many thousands of other U.S. citizens, received recently from Common Cause an appeal to sign a petition to Congress to reform the way congressional campaigns are funded—by money given to candidates by Political Action Committees which have special interests in mind. The letter from Common Cause speaks of a major effort now under way "to restrict the torrents of special interest campaign money being offered up to our Representatives and Senators by the PACs of corporations, labor unions, trade associations and other special interest groups, and to establish limits on the total amount candidates for Congress can spend." The argument proceeds:

> The 1986 election was an election of excess: excessive campaign spending, excessive TV advertising and excessive negative campaigning—*all fueled by record special interest PAC* giving. Over 4,000 PACs contributed *$130 million* to 1986 congressional candidates—an all-time high.
>
> As a result, the 100th Congress—the Bicentennial Congress—comes into office more indebted to special interest political money than any other Congress in the nation's history, ...
>
> *If we are to preserve our representative government, we must curb the influence of special interest PACs in Congress.*

This is the substance of the appeal, although there is a lot more of explanation. For example, it is said that "In just twelve years, PAC contributions to congressional candidates have skyrocketed from $12 million to $130 million. Today the need for PAC money and the dependence upon the flow of PAC dollars is corrupting the congressional process."

It would be difficult to charge the formulators of this appeal with anything but good intentions. What are they asking for.' They want the congressmen and senators to institute legal means which will prevent lobbyists who represent "special interests" from trying to bribe the members of our legislature to vote in ways that will benefit those interests. Giving bribes is neither legal nor admirable. Accepting bribes and being influenced by them is corrupt. Common Cause holds, and is almost certainly right, in saying that "the flow of PAC dollars is corrupting the congressional process." And Common Cause maintains that it is possible to greatly reduce, if not to eliminate, the corruption by appropriate legislation.

But then the question arises: Is this the appropriate way to eliminate corruption? One could argue, for example, that making laws against dishonesty is really a futile way to try to stop dishonesty. Our law books are filled with measures intended to make dishonesty difficult or painful, but every year the country finds it necessary to pass more laws intended to prevent dishonesty, but which, given a little time, clever men find ways to get around. What we are saying is that in a society such as we have, with a considerable quota of dishonest people, honesty cannot be compelled. We attempt to compel it, but not successfully. Yet it is urged that we must nonetheless try to compel it, and we are called upon, as lovers of our country and believers in honesty, to help. A lot of people will agree and will give their help, making Common Cause a powerful lobbying organization in behalf of good principles in government. Surely no one can object to this! We, certainly, do not object, yet find it a good idea to think about as well as we can.

One may start, for example, with the consideration that moral responsibility in life—personal life and public life—cannot be compelled. Immorality, when proven, may be punished, but virtue cannot be compelled. According to Plato and some others, it may even be impossible to

teach, although trying to teach it may be worth while.

There is, however, another approach to this difficult question. The kind of dishonesty involved in the appeal we have been considering is fairly easy to conceal. There are men, highly skilled men in the use of language—who are usually lawyers—who are able to dress up pure self-interest in fancy language in ways which seem to make it respectable and in accord with law. A situation of this sort makes the maintenance of decency in public life more and more difficult, and, be it added, expensive. There are decent men engaged in opposing this development, men of the sort, we might say, who start and support efforts such as Common Cause.

But the other approach we have in mind is to arrange our affairs in ways in which dishonesty becomes much more difficult to conceal. This calls for intelligence in social design. The most recent advocate of this sort of intelligence was E.F. Schumacher, who compacted his wisdom in the now familiar saying, "Small Is Beautiful." One way of pointing out the advantage of smallness in government is to recall the days in American history when government meant going to and taking part in a town meeting. That was a time when the force called "social pressure" exerted a powerful influence in public affairs. Everyone in the town meeting knew everyone else—the kind of person each one was and what could be expected of him. Dishonesty was very difficult to conceal. All decisions of the meeting were out in the open. The issues were simple; everyone could understand them, argue about them. It was Thomas Jefferson, alone among the Founding Fathers, who seemed to have wholly understood the importance of the town meetings.

A passage by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution* makes this clear. Here she is pointing out that Jefferson "knew, however dimly, that the Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised."

> Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of "expressing, discussing and deciding" which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom. And since the state and federal governments, the proudest results of revolution, through sheer weight of their proper business were bound to overshadow in political importance the townships and their meeting halls—until what Emerson still considered to be "the unit of the Republic" and "the school of the people" in political matters had withered away—one might even come to the conclusion that there was less opportunity for the exercise of public freedom and the enjoyment of public happiness in the republic of the United States than there had existed in the colonies of British America. Lewis Mumford recently pointed out how the political importance of the township was never grasped by the founders, and that the failure to incorporate it into either the federal or the state constitutions was "one of the tragic oversights of post-revolutionary political development." Only Jefferson among the founders had a clear premonition of this tragedy, for his greatest fear was indeed lest "the abstract political system of democracy lacked concrete organs."

This classic passage by Hannah Arendt pinpoints the weakness of our democracy in the present. The complexity of our government not only provides a cover for all sorts of scurrilous goings-on—of the sort noted by Common Cause—but has also obscured for most people the actual issues of political decision, so that the people are literally in the hands of hardly responsible politicians who have little sense of the dignity of office, while our elections are largely in the hands of professional image-makers who work for money, not for the welfare of the country.

What is the remedy for this? Only a new beginning, genuinely undertaken by responsible individuals, people who will create for the present and the future some practical equivalent of the town meeting for government, and who eventually will remove power from the hands of the manipulators who are now running the country. How will they go about it?

In *Raise the Stakes—The Planet Drum Review* for the summer of 1986, Peter Berg, a

pioneer bioregionalist, gives a general idea in telling about where he now lives:

> It's probably best to begin by looking at the actual conditions that exist where some people live. Doing this may run the risk of over-particularizing, but at least it won't deliver the kind of over-generalization and abstraction that can turn political thinking sour with ideology.
>
> Right now I'm in a clearly defined sixty-mile long watershed that empties into the Pacific Ocean on a fairly remote stretch of the northern California coast. I've been teaching Shakespeare's Sonnets ("When I consider everything that grows . . .") at the small high school my daughter attends here, work-learning about fruit trees from a local pruner, and helping with some community projects. A borrowed cabin provides heat by woodstove and light by kerosene lamps. Water comes from the same creek that later flows through salmon-rearing tanks tended by self-taught homesteaders who are trying to bring native fish back up to their historical levels of population in the river.
>
> Living here has never been especially prosperous. Fifth-generation families still cut and haul firewood, maintain excellent gardens and home-can everything from cherries to salmon. Much of the work that requires more than one person's labor is carried out on an informal exchange or volunteer basis that is held together with good-willed neighborliness. (People's skills and the services they can make available are wide-ranging and sometimes astonishing.) A fire department garage is the most visible municipal institution in the nearest town, a small post office is the only sign of a distant national government. If police are ever called, they will come from the county sheriff's office two mountain ridges and a hour and a half away. "Folk anarchism" wouldn't be a bad term for the social ethos that guides generally respectful relations between this valley's residents. Most of them are here because they like it that way.

While there are good resources for the future in this region—an ample supply of clean water, natural building materials, and food from fish, something more than a century of misuse must be overcome. The white inhabitants began by removing or killing all the Indians, then came overgrazing by cattle and sheep, and then forest burning to get more land and brutal logging, which brought erosion.

> A sustainable future would first of all have to be based on a local commitment to restore and maintain the river, soil, forests, and wildlife that ultimately support inhabitation here.
>
> Next would come developing the means for meeting human needs in ways that are both sustainable and self-reliant. Current food production, although more evident than in some other places, is really only minimal. Even hay for animals often comes from outside the valley. Energy needs, now partially met with local wood, could be completely filled by using alternative techniques and other renewable resources such as solar and micro-hydro power. Gasoline is presently one fifth more expensive here than it is just outside the valley. Nearly all manufactured goods are carried or shipped in from outside. There are few health practitioners, but complicated cases (or even ones requiring eyeglasses or dentistry) have to travel outside the watershed limits for care. And public transportation is nonexistent. . . .

Lots of things used to be done to make the bioregion self-subsistent, but they are not impossible and can be accomplished by people who have both imagination and determination. Berg lists many of them. He then says:

> It goes without saying that creating a new political framework is difficult and that it will inevitably be seen at first as too radical. . . . The only reason to bother is to gain something that is absolutely necessary but can't be achieved through existing means. The question becomes: Is there any other way to preserve life places? Aside from immediately local ones, governments and dominant political parties aren't open to accepting sustainability as a serious goal. They seem barely able to hear outcries against obvious large-scale destruction of the planetary biosphere from merely reform-minded environmentalists now, and aren't likely to take bioregionalists seriously until the District of Columbia itself becomes totally uninhabitable.

Toward the end of this important article, Peter Berg gets to what seems to us his key point. We don't need more "environmental agencies" which are inevitably linked with the institutions of industrial civilization. The people in these agencies haven't learned to think as bioregionalists.

> We need a core based on the design of Nature instead from watershed to bioregion and continent to planetary biosphere. Is it self-defeating to avoid established governments other than immediately local ones? Not if we want to anticipate a society whose direction already lies outside those institutions.

We've quoted this passage before and will almost certainly quote it again since it is so filled with common sense. The time will come—must come—when many more people will recognize this common sense, if only to find a way of staying alive.

So there is indeed reason in letting go evils which are absolutely inevitable in a society which is not only unable to govern itself, but also a society already impoverished by costly military undertakings which are likely to diminish only by some vast disaster. That may be an unpleasant way of thinking of the future, but if you read the books by honest experts intent upon changing the policies of the nation, then it seems that there is hardly any other way to think about our present policies. The only real alternative is to work toward small communities in which self-government is wholly possible and also the only way to survive.

For readers who want to read Peter Berg's article in its entirety, the publisher is the Planet Drum Foundation, P.O. Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131.

The implication of our discussion thus far is that we live in a time of far-reaching transition, which is to say that it is a time of confusion. The evidence is overwhelming. We have lived through two World Wars, apparently learned little or nothing from these terrible experiences, since the policies of the nations—the large and powerful nations especially—seem deliberately aimed at producing another great war, to be fought with weapons the effects of which no one has had any experience save the Japanese people. Other dooms of a sort are on the way, the ecologists tell us, the direct result of the chemical and other technologies we have developed, which have poisoned our streams, polluted the air, and now are killing our forests. In another way agriculture has been a victim of industrial techniques and methods, applied without recognition that both the soil and the plants grown in it are not mere resources to be exploited but a living envelope of the earth that deserves the same attentive regard for its health as we give, or try to give, to our own bodies. All parts of the planet, we are finding, are in a sickly condition, yet we are reluctant to change our ways and the earth's sickness worsens, day by day and year by year.

We have had, for more than a hundred years, warnings from thoughtful individuals that this fate would overtake us, but the nation as a whole had paid little attention. Who gave the warnings? They came mostly from poets and philosophers—most notably from that small group of thinkers known as the Transcendentalists. The transcendentalist outlook, according to a writer in the *Dial,* involved "the recognition in man of the capacity of knowing truth intuitively." This was in contrast to the view of John Locke, who held, as Emerson explained in 1842, "that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses." The Transcendentalists maintained that there was a very important class of ideas "which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired"; these, Emerson said, "were intuitions of the mind itself," called by Kant "Transcendental forms."

A reading of Emerson and Thoreau provides general instruction in transcendentalist thought. They are, you may say, but men scribbling books, but what they say sometimes seems an echo of another life, a higher life, of which only the scripture or poetry can report. Does such writing tell us anything about ourselves? Do great writers sometimes speak in an intermediate tongue which somehow links our world with another and higher existence? Is there any other explanation for the fact that the classics are continually reborn?

The transcendentalists, who were no more than human, seemed to catch a sense of destiny, of high obligation that makes visible a promethean quality in human beings. There are passages in books which seem to leave behind all mundane distractions and reach for the stars, as though this were not folly but the natural thing to do. And if we attend, this may become a deep current which runs through our lives, sometimes surfacing, sometimes dropping back, sometimes stirred to unceasing resolve in the unforgettable heroes of history.

We look at the world and its woes, we see the grinding on of destructive forces, the cries of sensitive men and women, hear the faint hopes of suffering multitudes, and, sitting in our privately, comfortable quarters, wonder how the will of a single individual can bring about any change at all. What we try to preserve here is the record of what such men and women attempted, how they could not lose heart no matter how hard the world stomped on them, wounded them, placed barriers in their way. We know, somehow, that these people should not be forgotten, that if *they* are lost from view the world might as well stop turning. We tell ourselves that the simplicities of ancient days, the joys of primitive virtue, were the achievements of the untempted, while we belong to a race and age in which the emergence of unusual capacities became the guileful path to excess and the rationale of excessive consumption, to the point of creating a system in which the rules demand that we continue as we are.

Yet we know that we can turn around. We know that we can listen to the poets and understand the dreamers. We know that at root our lives are moral dramas and nothing else is needed save the insight which grows out of the practice of the good. We have this instruction from nobody but ourselves.

REVIEW
A CYCLE OF AWAKENING

THE reader who picks up *Speaking of Faith* (New Society Publishers, $9.95, paperback), edited by Diana L. Eck and Devaki Jain, will likely wonder what the book is about—about the power of faith, in contrast with inherited belief, which is a useful comparison—or a consideration of women in religion and social change, as the sub-title suggests. But as you get into the book, you see that it is mainly about women and their efforts to live free lives in a rapidly changing world. They tell about their struggles, as women, to deal with the cultural and traditional barriers in custom and belief which they are overcoming; and some of them relate the horrors they endure in military-dominated societies. For this latter subject alone, the book is worth reading. One finishes the book with the realization that the present is a time of true heroism by women, whatever the occasional excesses of the Women's Movement. The book grew out of a conference held at Harvard in 1983 on Women, Religion and Social Change. Seventeen of the contributors came from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and Latin America, and nine from North America and Europe. All are highly literate and articulate.

The first contribution is by Julia Esquivel, a Guatemalan. She says at the beginning:

> We ask women from the developed nations, for whom it must be extremely difficult to understand our experience, to try to understand our experience, to try to understand and to identify with our people's suffering. For it is the *people*—women, children and men—who have been condemned to oppression, humiliation, servitude, and now to torture and genocide. It is the people who have demanded that we all change our ways and change our lives to bring about the liberation of the oppressed and oppressor alike.

It is hard to tell, she says, who suffers the most—women, children, or men—but it is clear to her that "women who are poor, and particularly Indian women, are enduring a double quota of pain to achieve their own liberation and that of an entire people."

As an example of what can happen in Guatemala, she tells about an incident in the village of Parraxtut, in Sacapulas, on Dec. 22 and 23, 1982.

> On Wednesday December 22, the captain the military base located in Chiul ordered his secretary to transmit the order to the auxiliary mayors to round up all the civil patrolmen in the village. It was a big village, with close to 400 houses. In two hours about 350 men congregated, ranging from 16 to 65 years of age. Chiul is on the highway which goes up to the Cuchamatan mountains, at the crossing to the highway to Alta Verapaz. Because it is located at a strategic point, the army has a large base there, with a thousand soldiers. They were in special training at the time, and that is why this "job" was turned over to the civil patrolmen.
>
> The captain ordered the men to go to the village of Parraxtut, which is about one and a half hours away on foot, while an equal number of soldiers rode ahead with the officers in a military truck. Parraxtut is a village with 350 houses. The soldiers ran around and forced the people to gather. When the patrolmen from Chiul arrived, they gathered the rest.
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> Once all the people had been congregated, the officer ordered three groups to form, men, women, and children. Then he ordered the civil patrolmen to begin to kill the men, and handed them weapons to do so. "You are going to kill all of these people because they are guerillas," he said. The officer then ordered them to shoot all the men who were in the plaza. The women were still alive. The officer ordered them to be separated into two groups, those who could "make it," and those who could not, in other words, the young from the old. The younger women were given to the soldiers to be raped that night, and the others were massacred by the civil defense patrolmen from Chiul. . . .
>
> The civil patrolmen walked back to their village. . . . When they arrived in their homes they broke down and wept. They wept for several hours. "We were filled with feeling," he said. They had killed their own brothers, and they felt impotent. They were ashamed to tell their own wives of what they had done. The women had been waiting for them through the night, and believed that the army had killed them.

Julia Esquivel concludes her report:

> In Guatemala, I know of a 17-year-old Indian woman, the mother of a month-old baby. As do many Indian women, she cared for her plants, crops, and herbs which gave her and her people sustenance; she respected her elders. I have seen her contemplating her child with tenderness and grief, an orphan whose father was murdered by the army. She was a combatant who knew what it was to take up arms to defend her life. When her time came, Oshe left her companions and walked for six days through the mountains to give birth to her child, a preserver of her race.
>
> This woman is a symbol of what we must be. We must combat the project of death which looms over humanity disguised as development, consumerism, anti-communism. We must defend the life of the Creation, because all of humanity is waiting in anguish for the day in which all men and women can really live as brothers and sisters, and administer the resources of the world for the common good.

We have quoted at length from this woman to convey to the reader the intensity of the reports by the women who took part in the conference at Harvard. In a way, the whole book has this quality, although not all is as bloody and as cruel as Julia Esquivel's report.

Another contributor is Sissela Bok, who teaches philosophy at Brandeis University. She tells about a Swedish writer of children's books and how early in life she took a stand against violence. Astrid Lindgren is her name. In her acceptance speech for the German Booksellers' Peace Prize in 1978 she spoke out against "the brutality that pervades so much of what children play with and read and see all around them," and the toys and games in which "mass killing is taken for granted." She ended her speech with a story about a mother and a son.

> The mother had never gone along with the saying "spare the rod and spoil the child." Such dictates, she believed merely offered parents false excuses for beating their children into submission.
>
> But one day this woman's son had done something that made her lose patience. Deciding that he deserved a spanking, she asked him to go out to find some branches with which she could whip him. The little boy left and was gone a long time. At last he came back, weeping, and said: "I could not find any good branches, Mother, but here is a stone you can throw at me."
>
> Then the mother saw herself with her child's eyes. The boy must have thought that since she actually wanted to injure him, she might as well do it with a stone. At that moment, she made a vow to herself: No more violence! And she put the stone on a shelf in the kitchen as a reminder.

Sissela Bok comments:

> We can all grasp the threat this boy felt, and share his mother's understanding of her own part in it. Indeed, we can grasp the danger to one child from the throwing of one stone much more easily than the infinitely greater threat of devastation to hundreds of millions of children, women and men in a nuclear war. We have all experienced the difficulty of facing such a threat—of thinking about it, reading about it, responding to it in any way—to the point that it has often blocked out, for many of us, all awareness of the danger.

Many children today, Sissela Bok says, will tell you that they expect a nuclear war during their lifetime but they hardly think about it because "there seems so little anyone can do about it."

> This is an extreme form of the defense mechanism known as denial. It is, as one doctor has said about patients who cannot confront the possibility of serious illness or death a "pulling down of the shades.". . . . Faced with intolerable anxiety, they have blocked out the information. For some, the blockage is but a temporary reflex allowing time to regroup their forces and then begin to take it all in. For others, the shades turn out to be permanently lowered.
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> We have witnessed a massive pulling down of the shades in the face of the danger of nuclear war and collective extinction. But there is nothing temporary about this process.

Yet, there is another way to look at the "pulling down the shades." Doing this from fear may have its therapeutic side in the sense that putting the possibility or even likelihood of nuclear war out of mind may enable one to go on living something like a normal life, as contrasted with a frantic desperation which makes it impossible. *Fear* is the real ill in this case, and

one might remember that an individual without fear has another way of pulling down the shades. Thoreau gave his reason for such indifference, saying, in "Life Without Principle," "Of what consequence, though our planet explode, if there is no character in the explosion?" From that point of view, the worst that can happen to us is death, and it comes sooner or later for us all. That it might come sooner, through the madness of our political managers, is not an ultimate ruin. The worst thing that can happen to us is loss of character, and this, after all, has been going on for years. We might remember, also, that many millions of people on earth do not regard death as final extinction but merely a natural completion of a cycle of life—life that will be continued in another cycle of birth.

What *is* of importance about this book is the widespread evidence of the manifestation of character in women, throughout the world, and the beneficent effect it is having on the cultural life of human communities.

COMMENTARY
THE POST-MODERN DIET?

IN the four-day conference held in Santa Barbara last January, "Toward a Post-Modern World," one of the opening addresses was by Frederick Ferré, who spoke on the transition from present-day science and technology to a post-modern technology, by which he meant a technology operating on ecological assumptions instead of the assumptions of the Newtonian and Cartesian cosmos—analytical and mechanistic. Let us suppose, he suggests, that astronomy and physics had not been the science which formed the foundation of the modern world-view. He says:

> In some ways the human race was profoundly fortunate that astronomy could lead the way. Would we have had any science at all if it had not been for those visible cosmic regularities that tempted us to theorize? If, by some small meteorological alteration in the earth's atmosphere, our skies at night had always been overcast, could the hurly-burly of terrestrial events ever have given us the idea that behind all the hubbub and complexity of events there might lie intelligible form? But, sadly, at the same time, the early triumph of astronomy and physics—the sciences of the simple and the dead—gave the "tilt" to the character of scientific theorizing that has fostered mechanistic, deterministic, reductionistic, alienating assumptions about the "really real"—assumptions that have come back to haunt us not only in the forging of our characteristic weapons, with their unprecedented capacity for omnicide, but also in the fashioning of our most "successful" technologies of economic exploitation, with their unsustainable rapacity against the earth.

"Is there," he asks, "another way?" Ecology, he proposes, which has the goal of understanding "whole living systems," presents a "vision of an alternative approach to 'doing' science—systematic, synthesizing, and radically inclusive, even of the investigator—not only continues to inspire many ecologists but also seems required in other sciences ranging from quantum mechanics to cybernetics." What types of technologies, what sort of civilization, might be incarnated by such post-modern sciences and values?

For example he speaks of changes in agriculture, remarking that "if optimization for the good of the whole is truly the aim, then low-till, decentralized food production could be paid for by deliberately relinquishing the aim of maintaining the largest possible head on the smallest possible stalk." With this sort of agriculture, we might no longer be able to produce a vast amount of grain for animals destined for our tables, but the postmodern world might be much more abstemious of meat-eating.

> Perhaps the post-modern world will not be wholly vegetarian—that would be a break with the symbolic as well as the real ecological cycles within which human life is lived—but surely the eating of flesh might be expected to become a rarer sacrament.

Finally, Mr. Ferré suggests that taking the ecological view will have far-reaching effects in time.

> Consider the difference between a mechanical system and an organic system. The parts of a mechanical system, like a watch, continue to be just what they are removed from the system; the parts of an organism, torn from their context, do not. The watch is dead; its value is always extrinsic; its function is supplied from outside itself. The organism is alive; its value to itself is intrinsic; its functions are internally directed for the sake of the living entity as a whole. . . . These seemingly small differences in attitude and starting place, once incarnated in technological artifacts and social practice, can make all the difference to the world of post-modernity.

This sort of thinking is now taking hold. From conferences like the one in Santa Barbara, it will filter down and reach the wider world.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
STIRRINGS OF CULTURE

THE Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture came into being in 1980 as the result of the meeting in a coffee house of a number of individuals who wanted to do something for the benefit of the city of Dallas without organizing another "institution." They wanted to offer for the people of the city "lectures, classes and seminars" to those who were interested "without regard for academic degrees." According to Gail Thomas, one of the founders, "The first series of six courses attracted more than two hundred people and the Wednesday night lecture series addressed over-capacity crowds. It was clear that Dallas wanted a center for imaginative study in the city."

Last year the Dallas Institute published *Stirrings of Culture—Essays from the Dallas Institute,* edited by Robert Sardello and Gail Thomas, a large book of 250 pages, which presents scores of brief essays by the Institute staff and other writers—there are two thoughtful contributions, for example, by Wendell Berry. There is a substantial section on education, which we draw on here. These discussions are introduced by Robert Sardello, co-director of the Dallas Institute, who says:

> It may no longer be possible to learn to live a fully human life by living the experience of life itself. At one time this was certainly the way one entered humanity—through the tribe or the folk, the family, community; through the handing down of tradition. Culture was seemingly natural then. Imagination was alive. People spoke to each other in stories, not logic. The towns were filled with characters, not blank-looking functionaries. Nature was close and kept people close to their own nature. Houses had porches, and people sat there watching other people walk. Children played well into the dark. Life was about birth life, love, and death. Simple things were exciting. Labor had the mark of craft. But we must be clear about the nostalgia produced by such memories. The longing centers, not on the return to the way things were, but on the need for value. And, where once, presumably, the forms within which life took place inculcated value, all this must now take place on another plane, education.

One might enter an objection here. As readers of John Holt's paper, *Growing Without Schooling,* we know that there are at least some parents who are not reduced to nostalgia for the ways in which character is formed directly from experiences in life. Parents are and can be teachers and they may see such things happen in their own children because they have reconstructed for these children what we may call a normal life by teaching them at home. But Mr. Sardello's observations do apply to children subjected to institutional learning. He goes on:

> Talk of educational reform abounds these days—and action too. Everyone knows there is something seriously wrong. Commissions have studied the problems and made the recommendations. Many good people are working to better education. This is the arena in which the life of culture is at stake. External solutions, however, address only one half of the situation. Strong images of democracy must be recalled as the form of life requiring a particular form of education the best for all. And it must be recalled that learning can never be imposed from the outside since it belongs to the nature of the human soul as its primary mode of transformation and joy. Anything occurring on the outside must conform to the basic necessities of the soul—and what the soul hungers for is an imagination of the world, an initiation into sensibility, the development of the capacity of reflection, and the ability to stand apart from what it knows, to look at it dispassionately with understanding and insight.
>
> The key, the bridge, the irreplaceable link between the institution of education and the desire of the soul to learn, is the teacher.

How true! Yet "the institution of education" as we know it and as our children experience it creates almost impassable barriers between the children and actual learning. The schools are too big, with too many children in the classes. And the children are *different.* Some are naturally inclined to academic learning, but others, as Paul Goodman has pointed out, are not. Parents who teach their own children learn this too. But the work of the children is measured according to academic standards, and so there naturally develop, in large classrooms, different "tracks" according to the children's natural inclinations. Tracks, of course, are antidemocratic. But they are more or less inevitable the way we do

things. If the classes were small, the teachers wise, they could be avoided, and the endless "testing," which demoralizes the children, could be stopped.

Another paper, "The Necessity of a Liberal Education," by Donald Cowan, discusses "tracking," saying:

> What I touch on here is basic to democratic principle, that throughout required schooling there be one track only for the curriculum. A multitrack system, with children grouped according to their assumed ability to learn, establishes a class structure defined in childhood, a slaughter of the innocent, so to say. So, too, does a vocational track in secondary schools. It seems to the privileged members of society a kind and concerned expedient to provide a ready path for sustenance and "a way up" to lesser abilities and limited ambitions, but such an attitude is an unwarranted condescension and an unrecognized intention of preserving the status quo. Vocationalism, however, is a preparation for obsolescence, a harbinger of frustration. The public is ill served, both economically and culturally, by such a separation, and democracy is thereby rendered a virtual impossibility.

Fortunately, we have A.S. Neill's Summerhill School in England to look back to—not that this would be a remedy for what is wrong with American schools, for where in America will you find a school board willing to run schools the way Neill ran Summerhill, providing examples of what is possible, given teachers who have a free hand? Neill got some very stubborn youngsters, kids who would not go to class at all, even for years, until, finally, the hatred of school classes at last died out in them. It was a matter of waiting for them to discover the *use* they could make of some course or other. Then they might do in a few weeks what normally took years. (The average period of recovery from aversion to enforced learning was calculated by the Summerhill staff to be about six months.)

There is this story recounted by Herb Snitzer in *Summerhill, A Loving World* (Macmillan, 1964). Sometimes Summerhill graduates go directly from school to a job, and the following conversation was reported to Neill by the manager of an engineering firm who called an ex-Summerhill employee into his office:

"You are the lad from Summerhill," he said. "I'm curious to know how such an education appears to you now that you are mixing with lads from the old schools. Suppose you had to choose again, would you go to Eton or Summerhill?

"Oh, Summerhill, of course," replied Jack.

"But what does it offer you that the other schools don't offer?"

Jack scratched his head, "I dunno" he said slowly. "I think it gives you a feeling of complete self-confidence."

"Yes," said the manager dryly. "I noticed it when you came into the room."

"Lord," laughed Jack. "I'm sorry if I gave that impression.

"I liked it," said the director. "Most men when I call them into the office fidget about and look uncomfortable. You came in as my equal."

This, surely, is what education should do for all children, and it is only the teachers who can do it, if we can be persuaded to let them and allow them conditions in which it is possible. Another light is thrown on this subject by an interview between Mario Montessori and A.S. Neill, which was published in *Redbook* for December, 1964. Montessori told how his mother had caused parents who were illiterate to want to learn to read and write by teaching their children. Neill thereupon exploded: "This is beyond me. It's beyond me!" Montessori asked why and Neill explained:

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

This recalls the fact that in the articles on education in *Stirrings of Culture*, the one idea that has the most emphasis is that " the teacher," as Louise Cowan says, "is the key to the remedies for the manifold ills ravaging our schools." But they can apply those remedies only if the people give them the support they need.

FRONTIERS

"Slightly Organized Heaps`'

IN the 1985-1986 *Structurist*, published at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, Alfred Caldwell, Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the University of Southern California. School of Architecture and Fine Arts, writes on "The Architect," but it is more of a funeral service than the celebration of a great artistic tradition. That, no doubt, is as it should be. Today's culture might well be called a blazoning of the submission of the cultural arts to technology and consumerism, and we have no hope of seeing anything but more of the same until the artists themselves revolt and declare they had rather be pedlars as Einstein did. Caldwell's first paragraph amounts to this. He says:

The word "Architect" was derived from Latin and Greek words (*arch* plus *tect*) and it meant chief craftsman. But today its meaning is far from that simple definition. Architecture has become a business, hardly distinguishable from any other kind of business.

The common assumption is, the bigger the firm, the better the architect. Caldwell comments:

> Of course, that notion is the *leit motif* of the building itself—the bigger the actual building, the better the architecture. That is the principal explanation for the enormous scale of the skyscrapers now being built in the American cities. These buildings are gigantic advertising signs for the corporations, which are the architect's clients. The exact term is simply stated: "The Corporate Image." . . .
>
> Of such stuff is the idiotic folklore, the drama and the allure of the skyscrapers in the American cities. It can be simply stated as the dream of wealth, ostentation and luxury, which is lodged in the sub-conscious portion of the public mind—a dream of accoutrements and fringe benefits—all totally hokum.
>
> In order to achieve that delusion—which apparently attacks everyone, the poor as well as the rich—the commercial drive is to fill every conceivable square foot of space with new skyscrapers, tearing down old buildings and building enormous new skyscrapers in their place. So finally all of the downtown space will be at last completely filled with skyscrapers, cheek to jowl. It will be like tombstones in a crowded cemetery.
>
> Meanwhile the automobile and pedestrian traffic will inevitably increase in direct proportion to the greatly increased cubic volumes of the new buildings. Already the traffic volume of the central commercial area—the downtown—always over-crowded—is now becoming over-crowded to the point of the impossible. . . .
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> The actual cost of this entirely useless back and forth haul daily is staggering. Thus a work force of 200,000 persons, at a daily excess time and money cost of $10 a working day, would come to one-half billion dollars a year of pure loss. In a period of a few years it would be accumulatively as much or more than the skyscrapers themselves have cost. In fact it would be cheaper to abandon them and rebuild genuine office buildings and department stores in the countryside, with residences nearby within walking distance.

It seems worth while to stop here for a moment and think—think how few of all those who submit to the ordeal of going to work everyday in the downtown area ever consider the manifest insanity of the arrangement of their lives. *Why* do they submit? Have they *no* imagination? Surely there are better ways to make a living; more rational ways to bring up their children. A few real estate people make millions, also a few big contractors, but who else gains? As Caldwell put it, the people generally

> They have the luxury and ostentation of the skyscrapers to look at, and on the weekly television dramas the same laced with ersatz sex which did not launch a thousand ships against the windy plains of hapless Troy. But the luxury and ostentation is the saddest thing of all for anyone. First, that it is not true; second, that it is not his; and last, and most terrible, that he should want it to be his—this preposterous rubbish.

We should remember that this article is by a man who is moved to rapture by fitting, beautiful buildings, one who also says:

> But let us consider the skyscrapers themselves. What do the buildings say? Buildings always say something.

> Thus if we knew nothing more about the ancient Greeks than the Doric Temple we could piece together what manner of men they were. Similarly, if we knew nothing of the medieval period, excepting the fact of one cathedral, we could derive the entire context of that religious age. . . .
>
> What this new, so-called, architecture really means is that the architects have handed over the great and ancient art of architecture to the hucksters and the money makers. But the money makes every man a fake. It turns architecture into show-biz, with every man his own mountebank. . . . In this way the big architectural firms behave exactly like their clients behave. Everything must be sparkling and new and perpetually kept that way. That's what the clients—the big corporations—believe.

How is all this to be made to change? For the answer we must consult ourselves, acknowledge the sickness that is upon us and begin to reject its claims. Fortunately, there are other ways of finding out what is wrong with our cities. Consider, for example, Roy Rappaport's diagnosis, made in the Summer 1986 *Raise the Stakes.* He begins by pointing out that cities are not "coherent systems," but "only slightly organized heaps." He goes on:

> The physical features, primarily buildings and their locations, of a city can largely be accounted for by activities that take place within them. But much of the activity that takes place in a modern city such as New York has little or nothing to do with the city as a social entity. The banks, insurance companies and oil companies that have their headquarters in New York are not subsystems of nationally or internationally dispersed systems. Local manufacturing and transportation facilities are centers of far-flung distributive networks. They are merely *in* the city. They are *of* the city only by geographical accident. The city, then, is hardly a system, let alone an adaptive system. It is, rather, the focus of innumerable systems all of which have purposes of their own. These purposes, which have considerable effect upon the shape of the city, may have little or nothing to do with the well-being, however defined, of the city as a whole. . . . The physical characteristics of contemporary cities are largely the outcome of decisions made by innumerable private individuals for reasons, usually narrowly defined, of their own. Needless to say, it is only fortuitous when these private short-run reasons coincide with long-term ecological requirements and the interests for society as a whole.

Raise the Stakes, in which this article appeared, is published by bioregionalists, people who believe in communities where people have the same general purposes and work together to create ecological regions for life and health. The publisher is the Planet Drum Foundation, P.O. Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131.