VOLUME XXXVIII, NO. 27-36
SEPTEMBER 4, 1985

THE MATTER OF READING

AN ancient saying, *Vox populi, vox dei,* applies today as much as in Roman times. The voice of the people is the voice of God. We are thinking, here, of how much is made of the reports of the pollsters in today's newspapers. The fortunes of political figures in terms of popular acclaim often seem to be given more importance than consideration of the actual issues with which politicians are supposed to deal. For example, in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for February 24—a paper we read carefully as one of the best available—a front-page story is entirely devoted to the decline in recent months of Mrs. Thatcher's personal popularity. Drawing on two well known polls, the writer lists the reports:

> Conservative support is down 9.5 points since November, and Mrs. Thatcher's rating has plunged 11 points. . . . It is, of course, much too soon to say that the Thatcher bubble has burst. Nevertheless, in polling terms, there have been long-term areas of vulnerability in both the Government's and the Prime Minister's own ratings. . . . Gallup provides another helping of gloom and doom. Only 6 per cent expect across the board tax cuts in the next six months; unemployment is expected to remain high; a third of the electorate expect no economic upturn in the next five years. . . .

The conclusion of this story (which goes on and on): "After two years in which loyalties have seemed strangely impervious to events, the voters are on the move once more." The matter of importance to notice here is the way in which such articles reflect the concerns and intentions of the publishers and editors of newspapers. The point of the story is the rumble of disapproval on the part of a tired, disillusioned, and increasingly anxious public. The polls measure the surface indications of mass human feeling—important in their narrow way to politicians dependent for their success or failure on the oscillations of "public opinion," but hardly significant in relation to either the wisdom or the folly of national decision.

These reports seldom bring up the question of how the readings of the barometer of political popularity relate to the actual issues before the country. The better papers—especially the *Manchester Guardian*—may sometimes publish such evaluations, but as a whole the commercial press is content to report "public opinion" more or less as its reporters recite the scores of a ball game. In short, the commodity of "news" is made for a passive audience out of the transient facts of popular emotion.

This mode of publishing for a mass audience seems characteristic of the entire spectrum of communication in the vast centralized societies of the present. The basic idea is to profit from the weakness and reflexes of the masses, seldom to attempt any sort of awakening influence.

Another example of this policy is provided by Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harper's,* in the March issue. He begins by recalling the New Yorker who, riding in the subway, was accosted and threatened by four black youths. The man, who had armed himself because of a similar incident in the past, drew his gun and shot all four of his assailants, then apologizing to the other passengers for disturbing their peace. Mr. Lapham notes the hailing of this man as some sort of "hero" by a variety of other citizens, then muses about the sources of such admiration.

> Despite our obligatory mumbling about "a government of laws," few of us take much pleasure in the tiresome chore of justice. Given a choice in the matter, how many of us wouldn't prefer the romance of crime? The villainous heroes and heroic villains celebrated in the tabloid press and on prime-time television—whether cast in the personae of J. R. Ewing, Richard Nixon, Alexis Carrington Colby Dexter, or the A-Team—stand in the long and glorious history of criminal prowess that begins with the fur traders of the early nineteenth century and descends, with mounting degrees of subtlety and

> firepower, through the chronicles of the cattle and railroad barons, the wildcat oil-well operators the Harding Administration and Teapot Dome, Al Capone and the Chicago syndicate, Joseph Kennedy and Huey Long, the Kefauver committee hearings, Lyndon Johnson, Charles Manson, George Steinbrenner, and a host of others too numerous to mention. The fiction on the best-seller lists like the soap operas awarded the highest Nielson ratings, continues the telling of the hunter's tale. The wandering hero finds solace in violence, and his story always ends with a killing. It's the only plot he knows.

Now comes a paragraph that is a gem of the biting rhetoric at which Mr. Lapham is better than anyone else:

> Were Capone still alive he probably could count on more or less steady employment as a guest on the Carson or Griffith show. The society admires the successful criminal and Capone could play the part of an elder statesman—talking about the old days in Chicago, remarking on the ways in which the rackets have changed over the last sixty years, offering his opinion on the most sensational crime of the week. Imagine a garrulous old man, comfortably smoking a cigar and astonishing the audience with his cynicism and depravity. Soon he would be on the lecture circuit, commanding fees of $15,000 to address the Young Republicans at Princeton and Yale.

Charged with exaggeration, Mr. Lapham might appropriately call Henry David Thoreau as a witness. In his essay on Thomas Carlyle, Thoreau wrote:

> Exaggeration! was ever any virtue attributed to a man without exaggeration? Do we not exaggerate ourselves to ourselves, or do we recognize ourselves for the actual men we are? . . . He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other. Moreover, you must speak loud to those who are hard of hearing, and so you acquire a habit of shouting to those who are not. . . . As the sort of justice which concerns us in our daily intercourse is not that administered by the judge, so the historical justice which we prize is not arrived at by nicely balancing the evidence. In order to appreciate any, even the humblest man, you must first, by some good fortune, have acquired a sentiment of admiration, even of reverence, for him, and there never were such exaggerators as these.

Nor is it, then, an intolerable exaggeration for Mr. Lapham to propose that some other "heroic" citizen, following the example of the Subway Shane, might decide to eliminate Caspar Weinberger, on the ground that his warlike intentions had put the entire country in hazard. In self-justification he might argue "that he acted in self-defense, that Weinberger's militaristic policies were frightening and offensive. . . ." And then—

> Hugs and kisses presumably would arrive by telegram from California, if not from Joan Rivers [who sent "best wishes" to the subway vigilante] then possibly from Jane Fonda; a committee in favor of disarmament undoubtedly would post the hero's bail and nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mr. Lapham's conclusion:

> That's the trouble with dreams of power. The dreamers come to imagine that the laws of men should embody the law of God. By their delight in bloodletting they confess their own anemia, and they forget that terrorism is a proof not of virility but of impotence.

What sustains the illusion that terror may be made the tool of order? Fear is the means by which terrorism obtains its apparent power. Machiavelli understood this, and his attentive students, Hitler and Stalin, used unrestricted power, from which there could be no rational appeal, as the means of enslaving whole populations. In *Zero: The Story of Terrorism* (John Day, 1950), Robert Payne remarks:

> The theory of terror was based upon incredible simplifications. Lenin outlined the procedure, "We'll ask the man, 'Where do you stand on the question of the Revolution? Are you for it or against it?' If he is against it, we'll stand him up against the wall. If he is for it, we'll welcome him into our midst to work with us." He declared that there had never been a single revolution in history when people did not manifest salutary firmness by shooting thieves on the spot. "A dictatorship is an iron power, possessing revolutionary daring and swiftness of action, ruthless in crushing exploiters as well as hooligans." To him, all enemies had become thieves and hooligans; there was no difference between them; all must be shot.

> In the first year of the revolution the death-penalty was introduced for 240 crimes, toughly the same number that were listed in the English criminal laws of the eighteenth century. People were shot for distributing pamphlets, for drunkenness, for congregating in the streets, for being out after curfew, for being an hour late in joining the revolutionary colors, for concealing food, for carrying weapons without a permit, for whispering against any facet of the regime, for actively assisting the counter-revolutionaries, and for doing nothing, or insufficient to aid the revolutionaries. Women and children were killed for being distantly related to counter-revolutionaries, or distantly related to the nobility.

The rule of compulsion enforced by fear goes back in history at least to Machiavelli and has confirmation from Nietzsche in the authority of the Superman. Payne traces the line of influence:

> Nietzsche wrote in *The Will to Power:* "Workmen should learn to regard their duties as *soldiers* do, they should receive emoluments, support, but no pay." Nietzsche very carefully underlines the word "soldiers," and goes on to explain that there is no relation whatever between work performed and money received. The simplicity of the doctrine delighted the Bolsheviks. Similarly, Trotsky makes no efforts to defend terrorism in *The Defense of Terrorism:* he simply states its existence, and enlarges on this only to the extent of saying that anyone who does not see the relevance of terror is a fool:
>
> "The State terror of a revolutionary class can be condemned morally only by a man who, as a principle, rejects (in words) every form of violence whatsoever—consequently every war and every rising. For this one has to be merely and simply a hypocritical Quaker." . . .
>
> Trotsky did not invent the Russian terror, but he was its prime apologist, and he seems hardly to have been conscious that the Ogpu was no more than the Okhrana, or that "militarized labor" was no more than the slavery from which the Russian peasants had been freed only sixty years before.

It may seem a far cry from Trotsky's defense of organized violence by the "revolutionary class" to the one-man vigilante in the New York subway, yet the basis of action for both is the same. Both made themselves prosecutor, judge, and executioner. The man who shot the four young blacks—who had demanded that he give them five dollars—won popular acclaim from other citizens who admire his *action:* he had not waited for the ineffectual process of "the law" but went straight to the solution in his own way, doing what needed to be done. He had, indeed, historical precedent, although not of a sort that would occur to him. As Robert Payne puts it:

> Hitler had destroyed the law, and put his own will in its place. One by one he stripped from the Germans their protective clothing, till at last they were naked and defenseless. From the moment when Goering, with Hitler's approval, gave the Gestapo blank warrants for murder, the terror could only move in one direction; these naked and defenseless people were to be thrown to the mercy of the terrorists. Old customary laws survived; people went through the motions of obedience to a law which no longer possessed any significance; the only Law was the law of terror. Law was an illusion, incarnated only in the lawless figures of Hitler and his terrorists; and when Frick put his signature to the Reich law which declared the events of June 30, 1934 legal, he was only approving a law to declare Law itself illegal. . . . It was not only that the secret police obeyed no laws, but there could be no laws; if there had been Law, they could not have continued their practice of lawlessness. They might arrest whom they would, punish whom they wished, hold secret trials, fake evidence, and torture; they were bound by no statutes, their excesses were pardoned as "over-zealousness in the cause of the state," and though every excess drew in its wake a new excess, they survived because there is no limit to man s desire to be lawless, once it is awakened. The highest honors of the state were showered on murderers, and simply by giving them the most magnificent uniforms and the most high-sounding titles, Hitler was able to destroy at the source any natural shame they might have had in carrying out the murderous reign of lawlessness.

What is the root of such behavior? What do these actors have in common, from the man who pulls a gun in what seems to him wholly legitimate self-defense to a Hitler who employs criminals to carry out his will? The answer seems clear. Both act from an overwhelming sense of personal righteousness. One regards the processes of law as either laggard or indifferent, the other finds them an irrelevant obstacle to what he has determined to do. It is necessary, at this point, to

acknowledge that, at least some of the time, the remedies provided by law for either injustice or criminal acts are simply not applied when they are needed, and that, again, the law is not an instrument through which we are able to attain the results that all or most humans desire. In the one case, moral lethargy and corruption may be the cause, in the other the objective may be one that statutes can not accomplish. The failure of the law to create responsible citizens, concerned with the common good and with the welfare of one another, is in no way a shortcoming of the legal system which has been adopted. The law, even at its best, is an instrument of compulsion, and the formation of good character is not a process in which compulsion is able to play a part. Character is shaped by independent acts of moral decision, and doing what we are compelled to do has no moral quality at all.

Both the one-man enforcer of his own conception of how people should behave and the dictator decide to abolish morality—that is, other people's ideas of what is right or good—and this can be done only by taking away their freedom. The one-man enforcer, whether in the subway or the street, or as a member of an Oxbow Incident posse, shoots or hangs the bad behaver; the dictator stands him "up against the wall." The logic of the dictator is no more than an extension of the enforcer's, giving it a "social" application. And the popular approval of the enforcer's act accounts for the massive support obtained by Hitler from the German people. (There are other parallels closer to home.)

What can we do about such a situation? At this stage, not much of anything. Only a rival dictator can seem to do something, and nothing he accomplishes can last. Change can only come from within the people themselves, and after what may have been centuries of compliance and servitude, the leadership must be extraordinary and willing to endure disappointment after disappointment. Indeed, a Gandhi is required.

What did Gandhi do? He went to an extreme. He sought to transform the impotence of the Indian people into the moral strength of non-violence, maintaining at the same time that non-violence could have true strength only as the stance of the brave. He sought to set this strength against the impotence of military power—the power that was effective only against physical weakness, never against moral determination. He told the Indian people (in *Hind Swaraj*, 1909) that it has been their weakness—their self-interest—that brought the English to India. "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them."

> Many problems can be solved by remembering that money is their God. Then it follows that we keep the English in India for our base self-interest. We like their commerce, they please us by their subtle methods, and get what they want from us. To blame them for this is to perpetuate their power. We further strengthen their hold by quarrelling amongst ourselves. If you accept the above statements, it is proved that the English entered India for the purpose of trade. They remain in it for the same purposes, and we help them to do so. Their arms and ammunition are perfectly useless.

There is a sense in which Gandhi proved them so, but in the less than a year in which Gandhi survived the liberation of his country, he was far from optimistic about the future. India, he said, had been freed by the nonviolence of the weak, not of the strong; the true liberation, he believed, had yet to be accomplished. History, however, is now accomplishing the vindication of his claim that weapons and ammunition are powerless. The more powerful the weapons, the less use they are, as the almost measureless nuclear armament of the United States has already demonstrated. These weapons have increased our insecurity while impoverishing the country. They have made the United States into a terrorist nation affrighting the whole world. Lewis Lapham needs no further confirmation "that terrorism is a proof not of virility but of impotence."

So, we come back to the daily papers, where we began. The papers are not organs of education, although they often pretend to be. They exist to stimulate the movement of goods. Only subsidized "cause" papers can survive without advertising. MANAS could not survive without substantial help from readers who want it to go on. It could survive in a healthy society without this help, but in a sick society a paper or magazine devoted to the things MANAS stands for (see the box on page 4) has to pick up the tab and would soon run out of money without the gifts which keep it going.

As we recall, it was Mark Twain who said that he usually waited six months before answering his mail, and was then surprised to find how few letters really needed replies. So with the newspapers. If you didn't see one for six months, how much would you really miss? And think of all the time-wasting verbiage that would happily pass you by!

But the MANAS editors do read some newspapers—often reluctantly, sometimes almost resentfully—since they give the MANAS writers something to talk about that is of interest because "in the air." The best paper we read is undoubtedly the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, which seems to have writers of integrity and a splendid "letters to the editor" department. The editors also read a number of "exchanges"—weeklies and monthlies and quarterlies which carry material for useful discussion and which deserves repetition. This material is the paper's lifeblood, along with the books we quote from.

Maybe, some day, we'll have a press able to survive on news worth reporting, and stories about movements and trends that need strength and support. But that will be possible only when we have a population willing to pay for reading matter of this sort.

REVIEW
SCIENTISTS ON SCIENCE

WHILE the modes of protest and the reasons given for them are various, an underlying spirit uniting them seems to say: this is not the way human beings ought to behave. The present is a time when no area of human undertakings is without more or less articulate protectors. The practice of science affords examples. In *The Psychology of Science* (Harper & Row, 1966), Abraham H. Maslow tells why he decided to give up the career in medicine that he had begun and became a psychologist. He couldn't stand the irreverence for both life and death shown by the teachers of medicine. He explained:

> Briefly put, it appears to me that science and everything scientific can be and often is used as a tool in the service of a distorted, narrowed, humorless, de-eroticized, de-emotionalized, desacralized and desanctified *Weltanschauung.* This desacralization can be used as a defense against being flooded by emotion, especially the emotions of humility, reverence, mystery, wonder, and awe.
>
> I think I can best make my meaning clear by an example from my experiences thirty years ago in medical school. I didn't consciously realize it then, but in retrospect it seems clear that our professors were almost deliberately trying to harden us, to teach us to confront death, pain, disease in a "cool," unemotional manner. The first operation I ever saw was almost a representative example of the effort to desacralize, i.e., to remove the sense of awe, privacy, fear, and shyness before the sacred and of humility before the tremendous. A woman's breast was to be amputated with an electrical scalpel that cut by burning through. As a delicious aroma of grilling steak filled the air, the surgeon made carelessly "cool" and casual remarks about the pattern of his cutting, paying no attention to freshmen rushing out in distress, and finally tossing this object through the air onto the counter where it landed with a plop. It had changed from a sacred object to a discarded lump of fat. There were, of course, no tears, prayers, rituals, or ceremonies of any kind, as there would certainly have been in most preliterate societies. This was all handled in a purely technological fashion—emotionless, calm, even with a slight tinge of swagger.

Maslow goes on for several pages, providing other illustrations of how we coarsen one another by dehumanizing actions, then asks:

> Is it in the intrinsic nature of science or knowledge that it must desacralize? Or is it possible to include in the realm of reality the mysterious, the awe-inspiring, . . . the emotionally shaking, the beautiful, the sacred? And if they be conceded to exist, how can we get to know them?

It may be noted that Maslow offers no closely argued justification for admitting and admiring these qualities, he simply affirms them, assuming that they need no advocacy or defense. They, he seems to be saying, are among the good things we start with, that we do not define, but evaluate other things with. They are axioms of a sort. In Maslow's psychology, those who live by such principles are healthy human beings, while those who ignore them are ill with a great sickness of the age.

We have lately acquired another book by a scientist filled with similar contentions, *Voices in the Labyrinth* by the biochemist, Erwin Chargaff (Seabury Press, 1977), a man who began the practice of science before the moral indifference described by Maslow set in, and who now resists it as one at the top of his profession. (Readers will perhaps recall the attention given in these pages to his later book, *The Heraclitean Fire.)* While born in Vienna in 1905, Chargaff, after a classical education, came to the United States, to Yale, and practiced his science in this country, meanwhile acquiring an impressive command of our language. He now seems largely depressed by what has happened to the world as well as to the modes of work of scientists. He says in the first chapter of *Voices:*

> There is no question in my mind that we live in one of the truly bestial centuries in human history. There are plenty of signposts for the future historian, and what do they say? They say "Auschwitz" and "Dresden" and "Hiroshima" and "Vietnam" and "Napalm." For many years we all woke up to the daily body count on the radio. And if there were a way to kill people with the B Minor Mass, the Pentagon-Madison Avenue axis would have found it.

> Just as the streets of our cities are full of filth and crime, our scientific imagination has become brutalized, torn as it is by equally unattainable ideals, none of which is really worth attaining. The modern version of Buridan's ass has a Ph.D., but no time to grow up as he is undecided between making a Leonardo da Vinci in the test tube or planting a Coca Cola sign on Mars. Because the world is becoming uninhabitable, we reach for the stars; but shall we not succeed in making them equally uninhabitable? No doubt, we are the first generation that could think of building an atomic fire under mankind. We can incinerate them all; but no radioactive phoenix will rise from these ashes. You may suspect that I believe Prometheus got what was coming to him. Did he bring fire to the world? That was nice. But did he perhaps immediately afterwards proceed to set the whole world afire? Were not the gods right in cutting off his research grants? Greek mythology may, of course, not tell us the entire story. Perhaps, the gods got so embroiled in trying to wipe out a disobedient little people that their National Institute of Cosmogony ran out of money for basic research.

From this book the reader will learn something about the practice of biochemistry—more, perhaps, than the layman is able to absorb—and about the things which engaged the attention of the author's laboratory, including what he found out about nucleic acids that was critical for the later work of Watson and Crick and the discovery of the "double helix." But most of all one learns how an active scientific conscience reacts in a man who believes that science, being a human activity, ought to be humane. One more quotation will serve as invitation to the reader:

> Our biology, no less than our technology, is a product of capitalism, governed by unwritten rules of supply and demand. Just as the ones poke around the moon, the others ransack life. The slogan always is: *Eritis sicut diaboli, scientes bonum, facientes malum* ("Ye shall be as devils, knowing good, doing evil") . I believe, we have not reflected sufficiently on the real goals of these new sciences. When I began my studies the battle cry was "knowledge"; now it is "power." It was much later that I discovered that in 1597 Francis Bacon had already announced the identity of these goals. But what is "power" in biology? The type of answer I get promises, for instance, the production of heaps of thoroughly healthy Einsteins. But is this desirable? Who will sew the pants for these Einsteins and still more important, who will write the newspaper articles about them? But, really, these are only jokes. Since not even the most primitive of the smallest bacteriophages has been unraveled, this type of debased creation will still require much time and warners and offenders will have been buried long before in one and the same Nirvana of oblivion. Perhaps—but I have little hope—humanity will in the meantime have become more intelligent.
>
> Faced with this enormous throng of sorcerer's apprentices, I should like to add only one remark. It seems to me that man cannot live without mysteries. One could say, the great biologists worked in the very light of darkness. We have been deprived of this fertile night. The moon to which as a child I used to look up on a clear night, really is no more; never again will it fill grove and glen with its soft and misty gleam! What will have to go next? I am afraid I shall be misunderstood when I say that through each of these great scientific-technological exploits the points of contact between humanity and reality are diminished irreversibly.

* * *

Readers who may have enjoyed the earlier books of Ross Parmenter, reviewed here in years past—*The Plant in My Window*, *The Awakened Eye*, *School of the Soldier*, and *Stages in a Journey*—may be interested to know that he has produced a different sort of book, *Lawrence in Oaxaca* (Peregrine Smith Books, 1984, $2.95), a detailed study of the months spent by D. H. Lawrence in the Mexican capital of the state of Oaxaca in 1924. The other books contain mainly the writer's personal reflections, which we have always found enjoyable. This book, devoted to his literary idol—and what youth of a past generation, in adolescence and after, did not have Lawrence for an idol!—has little of Parmenter in it, something we very much miss. But for the sake of those who are still Lawrence admirers, we take notice of this writer's careful compilation of Lawrence's productive life in Mexico. He found that the novelist "wrote so much more in Oaxaca than is commonly supposed."

> He was in the city only 106 days, but he rewrote the whole of one of his longest novels, he wrote nine

> essays of high quality, the beginning of an ambitious poetic drama, and the start of a novel so fine that it can stand independently as one of his most beautiful short stories. His numerous letters, more than sixty, were another surprise. When coordinated with the barely known Oaxaca writings and with the events of his life in the city, the letters provided insight into his inward life in Oaxaca.

Parmenter found in the library of the University of Texas a brief unpublished essay by Lawrence which summarizes "many of Lawrence's chief ideas about man's nature." It begins:

> Man is essentially a soul. The soul is neither the body nor the spirit, but the central flame that burns between the two, as the flame of a lamp between the oil of the lamp and the oxygen of the air.
>
> The soul is to be obeyed, by the body, by the spirit, by the mind.
>
> The soul is instinctive. Real education is the learning to recognize and obey the instincts of the soul.

It is good to have such passages from a writer who has been "typed" by rather different materials. Many other such passages are quoted in this book.

COMMENTARY
THE NUCLEAR SUBSIDY

THE best use we can think of for this space is to print portions of the summary of a report by Richard Heede of the Rocky Mountain Institute, made on June 20, concerning federal subsidies during the fiscal year of 1984, to the House Subcommittee on Energy and Agricultural Taxation. The prime mover in the Rocky Mountain Institute is Amory Lovins. Richard Heede is a Research Associate. His work shows that "about a quarter of the federal bud get deficit arises from subsidies which make energy look cheaper than it really is—energy partly paid for through taxes rather than its market price." Subsidies, in this study, include all federal expenditures made in support of the various energy forms, regardless of whether they are production or consumption incentives, program outlays made to ameliorate market failures or externalities, or of some other sort, since some of the "real social cost is paid not through its price but through taxes."

By far the largest subsidy was to nuclear energy, which totalled $15.84 billion. The total of all subsidies came to more than $46 billion, although, needless to say, the subsidies—to crude oil, natural gas, coal, synthetic fuels, fossil electricity, nuclear energy, fusion, hydro-electricity, renewables, end-use efficiency—were very uneven. The lion's share of this assistance went to nuclear energy.

Commenting on the result of all this subsidy, Richard Heede points out that "a dollar of subsidy to energy efficiency and renewables yielded about 80 times as much energy as a dollar of subsidy to nuclear power." He also remarks: "Under the present law, most subsidies to renewable sources (solar, wind, biomass, etc.) will end this year, while the larger subsidies to nonrenewables will continue." His most important comment seems to be:

> Federal subsidies favor dwindling resources over cheaper ones which don't run out. Subsidies conceal true costs from the consumer while raising taxes by $46+ billion a year. Renewables and efficiency get less investment than they deserve because they look less competitive than they would if subsidized as much as non-renewable fuels (or better, if *neither* were subsidized).

For a copy of this preliminary report write to the Rocky Mountain Institute, Drawer 248, Snowmass, Colo. 81654.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

CHILDREN . . . AND POLITICS

THE criticisms of present child education in America and elsewhere, made at a conference at the University of Southern California (co-sponsored by a UN agency) in February, seem important enough to be repeated here. A UN official told the conference that "education in most developed countries" is perpetuating a false view of world history through "cultural brainwashing." As reported in the *Los Angeles Times* for Feb. 27, according to Kenneth Tye, one of the participants, American schools have become "training grounds for isolationism through ignorance."

> Even in such ethnically diverse places as Los Angeles U.S. schools are doing little "to give children a sense of the globalism of the world," Tye told one of the conference seminars at USC. . . . Tye, chairman of the education department at Chapman College in Orange, added, "There is no doubt that American kids are ethnocentric."
>
> Tye also charged that the education American children are getting breeds passivity. One study he participated in Tye said, found that students tend to "sit and listen, then they write on worksheets and then they take tests. The process does not produce people who can think and create."
>
> Erskine Childers, director of information for the UN Development Program, delivered a more sweeping indictment. Childers, a Canadian who is based in New York, maintained that education in the Western, or Northern, developed countries has fostered "a fit of cultural amnesia" about the role of emerging nations in world history. Most Westerners are brought up to believe that progress stems solely from the European Renaissance, he said. "This is simply not true," he added. "Most of the ideas for progress were drawn from what today is considered the Third World. . . . We were not taught that town planning was at an advanced stage in the Indus Valley when Europe was unrecognizable. "
>
> Even worse, Childers argued, was that the "cultural amnesia was transmitted to the few people in occupied (colonial) countries who were allowed to have an education. . . .I can remember as a boy growing up in Ireland being surrounded by the view that nothing made in Ireland could be worth anything." Potential gifts such as farm terracing techniques and native medicines in use as much as 2,000 to 3,000 years "were derided by colonial authorities and educated elites," he said. As a result, Childers said, peoples freed from colonialism "did not liberate themselves intellectually." And, he concluded, "it is vital in the mid-1980s, that we have the courage to address the legacies of colonialism."

Some useful comment came from Stephen Viederman, who works for the UN in New York City. He said that "many Westerners criticize population growth in developing countries because they don't understand local conditions. High birth rates are often due to high mortality rates or because a family needs many hands to support itself." Moreover, he said, "Third World countries are being asked to control their birth rates in a period of twenty or thirty years while Western countries have taken 150 years to achieve birth rates at or near replacement levels."

> Sometimes, Viederman said, population problems are more a matter of population distribution than absolute numbers. He cited the Bhopal disaster in which 2,000 Indians were killed when a Union Carbide plant released a pesticide concentrate into the air. Because it offered jobs, the plant was almost immediately surrounded by shanty towns a phenomenon in most Third World countries. If buses or other means of commuting had been available to the workers, the death toll would have been much lower.

* * *

According to an editorial note in the Fall/Winter 1984 *Katallagete,* Jacques Ellul, on the editorial board of this journal and a contributor, has written five or six books since the epoch-making *Technological Society* (reviewed in MANAS for March 17, 1965), but we have not seen any of them. However, his article on Politics, "The Realm of the Demonic," again shows the power of his analysis and the strength of his prose (in the above named issue of *Katallagete*). To the claim that his attack on politics *is* one-sided, the reply would be that this hardly matters because consideration of his criticism is of such great importance. The

present-day preoccupation with politics is so intense that other issues are made to seem trivial, which removes attention from where it is most needed. Farly in his discussion he says:

> And when I say politics, I am not pointing at the state—that's another problem again. The point I want to make concerns those who would conquer and use the state for their own purposes. Nor am I accusing a specific kind of politics, rightist or leftist.
>
> No, the issue is politics itself, whatever form it may take whatever its objectives, doctrines, methods, social roots, intentions, or rationales. I am talking about politics in the concrete, as put into practice by the political world. I shall not bother with those sententious allusions to the Greek *polis,* which has nothing to do with the United Nations we are all familiar with; I shall not bother with those pious definitions of politics as the quest for the common good or the public interest, as the art of living together, as the blissful key to harmonious construction of the ideal city.
>
> All such nonsense is worse than the worst religious trickery designed to cast a veil of modesty over naked reality. Politics is the acquisition of power: the means necessary for getting it, and once you have it the means for defending yourself against the enemy and so holding on to it. But what does one use it for—for goodness and virtue? No, one uses it for *power,* it's an end in itself. And that's all there is to politics. All the fine talk about politics as a means of establishing justice, so forth and so forth, is nothing but a smokescreen that on the one hand conceals harsh, vulgar reality and on the other justifies the universal passion for politics, the universal conviction that everything is political, that politics is the most noble human activity, whereas it is really the most ignoble. It is, strictly speaking, the source of all the evils that plague our time. And when I say that it is diabolical and satanic, I mean these adjectives literally.

Americans in particular need to reflect on what this man says. The United States is the most powerful nation in the world, so you could say that in a way our politics has been a success, but if there is anything in which the twentieth century should instruct us, it is the uselessness and impotence of power. We are continually harrassed by the absence in our hands of *absolute* control. Nowhere will decent men submit to naked power; they would rather die resisting, and killing them off makes monsters of the powerful. Power is the greatest delusion of all. Ellul spells out this lesson:

> Now speaking concretely of society today, what is the father of lies? It is politics, and I would go so far as to say politics alone. France is divided into two blocs, which fact is absurd enough, because we know very well that both are largely interchangeable, that it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. But France is divided nonetheless. There are the victors and the vanquished, labeled as such by politics—and the terms are nothing but labels. There is White imperialism and Red imperialism, ready to go to war against each other. And what is it that drives nations straight to war, even though in general and on their own they have no such thought in mind? Politics.
>
> What makes boys from Texas go off and kill Vietnamese and boys from Estonia go off and kill Afghans? Only politics, which claims to represent the common good, collective interests, the homeland, and all that. Obviously, there are groups and clans who don't agree with each other tribes, families, and corporations that are hostile to one another. But this does not have any terrible consequences—it leads at most to vendettas. But when these local interests are taken in hand by politics, then they come to stand for the general good. And then we find ourselves in collective tragedies where the innocent pay for the guilty.

Well, this article goes on for six full pages, all worth reading. Is there *nothing* important to be said in behalf of politics? We suggest a thoughtful investigation of the involvement in politics of the greatest man of this century,

Mohandas K. Gandhi. He said in 1920:

> If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake.

Gandhi wrestled with politics in order to get rid of it. He knew that so long as the British remained the rulers of India, there was little hope of the Indian people developing self-reliance and a sense of responsibility, qualities which he prized above all. But when India achieved her freedom,

he completely rejected any aspect of power and broke connection with political activity, except for his attempt to bring peace between Islam and Hinduism. He knew that the political freedom of India marked the true beginning of India's real emancipation. Liberation meant that freedom might now be sought, not that it had been achieved.

Katallagete, a quarterly, is available from Box 2307, College Station, Berea, Kentucky, at $10 for four issues. Wendell Berry is a contributor to this journal.

FRONTIERS

Farming in Canada

WE have some reading to suggest. First, *Farm Gate Defense* by Allen Wilford, a book about what has been happening to Canadian (and U.S.) farmers during the past four or five years—on how they are having to go out of business, and what they have been doing in an effort to survive. One of the things they did was form the Canadian Farmers Survival Association, the members of which, when the farm and equipment of a failing farmer is about to be auctioned off, gather around in force and sabotage the sale—in various ways, such as bidding pennies for the farmer's equipment, so that in one case tractors and other expensive items worth a total of $100,000 were carried off by friendly neighbors (and held for a while), for a total of $19.81. Not knowing what else to do, the bank which had instituted the sale made a sensible agreement and the farmer is still farming.

One learns from this book that the big numbers which are applied to farm economics are virtually without meaning. For example, "In 1981 the average Canadian farmer's investment was $440,000, and the average farm income was only $9,000." Wilford, himself a farmer, begins by telling his own story. A fairly young fellow, he bought his first farm in Grey County, Ontario, in 1971. It was 100 acres and he paid $4,000 down, with a mortgage of $15,000. In the year he brought his first cattle, the market on beef dropped from 74 to 40 cents a pound, so, like other farmers, he acquired more land in order to make enough money to keep going. It didn't work, because the interest rates went up, and he had borrowed to expand. Meanwhile the market got worse. Calves he had bought at $1.26 a pound sold at 75 cents. While they weighed more, he couldn't break even. As he tells it:

> Then the double whammy of the interest rate and price hit us. Our financing was on floating rates which hit a high of 24.75%. Just as interest rates on my loans went wild, beef prices collapsed, since the consumer had to spend more on his mortgage and couldn't afford to eat steak. . . . If I had rented the land out and not farmed I wouldn't have had all these problems. The more one farmed the more one lost.

Inflation, one consequence of high interest rates, was now on the way. Wilford goes on:

> Why did the fight start in Ontario, in Bruce County? [We couldn't find Bruce County on our atlas map of Canada, but Grey County is there—it's probably the same place.] The simple truth is that Bruce is the most highly concentrated beef county in Canada. . . . It is a cattle area, so much so that when the cattle industry is hurting there aren't any other profits to turn to. So much of our farm land is tied up in beef that when we started to get squeezed, our only recourse was to put our land on the market. This very rapidly decreased land values. . . . That's why now I can tell farmers exactly when they will go bankrupt. The moment the bank calls their notes—these are demand notes so the moment the banker demands payment they are due and payable and something must be sold—the greatest investment the farmer has is his land and he cannot sell the land. When you realize that your land has suddenly become worthless, you realize you're bankrupt and the fight begins.

Well, that, in essentials, is what is in this book, case by case, farm by farm, sometimes suicide by suicide. The fight is to make the banks recognize that wiping out farmers is good for nobody. No long-term solution is proposed in the book, although there are sensible palliative measures the banks could adopt, and possible help from government. This gets complicated and for an account of what might be done you need to read Wilford's book. But the book is largely the drama of the farmers' struggle to stay and work their farms, whether or not it makes economic sense.

There is long-term economic sense in Wilford's chapter on soil conservation. He speaks of the trend toward monoculture in present-day farming, saying:

> It is difficult to tell a man whose family can barely live off the failing production of his small acreage that he must rotate some of his land to an unknown new crop. Monoculture is a result of desperation on the part of the farmer or, in the case of

a tenant, no concern for the future ability of that particular farm as he will soon be gone anyway.

This is the strong argument for the family farm. A family whose livelihood for future generations depends on the soil, moves to ensure the well-being of that soil which is a part of them through their mutual interdependence. As farm size expands for economic reasons, this personal relationship is destroyed. It is perhaps impossible for a city person to understand the ties which a farmer has to his farm but it can best be illustrated by the Survival Association members and their devotion and dedication to keep that piece of land called a farm, no matter how humble the dwelling or how rocky the soil. . . .

The personal involvement found only in the family farm is the best way that we as a civilization can ensure the care of our most important resource, the land itself, and thus our ultimate survival. For conservation is a grim synonym for survival.

The other reading we suggest is Wes Jackson's paper, "Falsehoods of Farming," perhaps available from him at the Land Institute in Salina, Kans. Here we quote from the last "falsehood" he examines:

We need to support the family farm. What I object to about this statement is that nearly all of the agricultural legislation written over the past few decades has purported to support the family farm. In spite of the stated intent, most of the legislation has had the opposite effect. As a policy matter, I believe that to focus on the family farm is a bad idea. What we need to do is save and restore rural community so that the family farm is a product of rural community. As it now stands, the farmer launders the money, called subsidy, on the way to suppliers of inputs and equipment. For starters, maybe we should subsidize groceries and gasoline in small communities so that they cost no more there than in the larger towns. However we do it, the subsidy should cause the money to roll over and over in the community several times before it finds its way to Kansas City and Chicago, Tokyo and Geneva.

As it stands now, it is not the farmer who is being subsidized so much as the Lords of Corporate Agribusiness. The farmer just launders the money. Why shouldn't the profits be plowed back into the rural community instead of allowing the farmer and the farm to be a quarry to be mined?

It would be nice if Wes Jackson's paper could be included as a last chapter or at least an appendix to Wilford's book.

Wilford's book is published by NC Press Ltd., in Toronto and available in the U.S.A. from the League of Rural Voters, Box 8445, Minneapolis, Minn. 55408, at $10.00, plus postage.