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EQUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

IN the short term and the simple circumstance, it seems clear that persistent, intelligent efforts bring corresponding rewards. And, naturally enough, we say that hardworking, thoughtful people *deserve* the advantages which come as a result of their labors. There is also the belief, founded on both experience and observation, that those who are interested in their work enjoy doing it. The interest makes such persons want to improve their methods, and they often become able to teach others the best way to work. It follows that inexperienced people, if they want to learn the skills required by good work, are glad to have the supervision of those who know more than they do. Again, we conclude that it is not only right, but of general benefit, for the more knowledgeable to be in charge; and that, since they have greater responsibility, the supervisors be appropriately rewarded for their efforts, if only to free their minds and hands for the tasks of training and direction.

But then, if you impose the passage of time, add social and industrial complexity, and at the same time separate the fruits of work (in the form of wealth) from the work itself, and then isolate authority from intimate, first-hand knowledge of the job, the picture is no longer the same. For with these changes, the human meaning of the relationship is obscured. The excellence pursued by the craftsman gives way to other goals. The product is made to seem less important than its "image" and saleability. Its price loses connection with its value. Sellers and managers gain great rewards for their skill as manipulators, while craftsmen are replaced by machines. The old moral rules no longer seem applicable, even though they are repeated as slogans. In time even excellence itself may come to be hated as a symbol of injustice and oppression.

People begin to think of themselves differently. They classify persons according to their wealth and power instead of by their ability and natural authority; and often they seem justified in doing so. The disaster of what has happened pushes men's thinking toward what *ought* to be, until everything that used to be is identified with the ugly reality of what is. The high moral principle of the equality of all men is made antagonistic to the ideal or goal of excellence, manifest in distinguished people. So there are revolutions, and new alignments of power, with systems devised to restore equality in certain specific relationships, although it is usually found impossible to make men equal in *all* relationships. And through the years succeeding revolutions attempt further equalization, the effort being to erase more thoroughly the distinctions that continue to emerge and to create new injustices, in consequence of the pursuit of power, the accumulation of wealth, and the misuse of authority.

Yet the revolutions are unable to obliterate the differences among men, bringing the claim that revolution never goes far enough, since all men ought to have the same rewards, acquire the same authority, and be allowed equal powers. So there is confusion and quarreling among even revolutionists, as well as among the rest. For it becomes difficult to hide the fact that individuals with the capacity for clear thinking, sustained effort, and consistently good judgment gravitate to positions of authority, whether they seek it or not. Others look to them for guidance, and for encouragement and help. Being human, they give what help they can. By this means, natural hierarchy comes into being all over again, since there is no working together among human beings without *some* division of responsibility, *some* graded exercise of authority and accountability,

and *some* trust among all who join in a common enterprise.

Occasionally a philosopher comes along who tries to clarify obscurities in this situation. He may say, "Certainly there are differences among men. Some have better skills than others. Some have better judgment. Talents differ. Genius is rare. But we are all human, and this is the common denominator. A man does not exploit his children because they are weaker and less experienced. He shields them from harm, teaches them exercises, trains them in work, and provides them with responsibility as they show the capacity to assume it. In just this way, the more experienced can show the less experienced how to grow."

And then someone will reply, "In a community of saints, that might work perfectly, but these people who have money and power and authority do not act like 'fathers.' Or when they do, they become the kind of fathers that don't want the young ever to grow up. We have to get rid of these people so we can *all* grow up. They can work alongside of us, if they want to, but not stand over our heads."

The debate has to end here, since to continue would be to elaborate all the political theories we have become familiar with, and have tried out since the eighteenth century, with no impressive result that we can brag about.

We have made this elementary summary only for the purpose of showing the kind of dialectical dead-ends which are reached in almost any branch of this argument. There is no conclusive way of dealing with the problem, although one can usually manage to discuss some aspect of it usefully if all the "labels" or fighting words are left out.

For example, it is quite possible to tell about the achievements of fine men—so long as you don't try to construct a political theory out of their example. You can praise books concerned with excellence in almost any constructive activity without getting into deep water, but a full account of the hard work that came before the excellence may not be appreciated. There is also a paradox to be faced. There are situations in which the old truths don't readily apply, where the familiar rules can't be made to work. Sometimes other principles are required.

Take for example the case of José, a partly Puerto Rican boy who came to George Dennison's First Street School in New York City. José had been able to read Spanish when he was seven, but now, at thirteen, he could read neither Spanish nor English. Dennison tried to teach him to read. First he made friends with him, to gain his trust. Gradually he came to understand the roots of the boy's difficulty. Explaining the problem in his book, *The Lives of Children*, Dennison speaks of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's method of teaching by introducing to the children words they used in everyday life—words relating to the vivid, colorful part of their lives.

> One might say that she created an environment which gave to the learning of reading some of the same highly individualized support we give routinely to the learning of speech. Just the opposite had been done to Jose, and his problems were compounded by the change from Spanish to English. Reading, for him, had few of the attributes of speech, and none at all—except in negative ways—of the attributes of feeling. He could not imagine his own identity waiting to meet him in books, as it met him on the streets and in his play with other boys. In fact, he still stumbled over the word "I." It is worth mentioning here that this collapse was not the merely negative phenomenon it is taken for by so many educators. There was something self-protective concealed within it, for the identity which did in fact lie in wait for him in the books that do exist—which is to say, in the society which does exist—was precisely that of a second-class citizen, shunned where others are welcomed, needy where others are comfortable, denigrated where others are praised. A white middle-class boy might say, with regard to printed words, "This is talk, like all talk. The words are yours and mine. To understand them is to possess them. To possess them is to use them. To use them is to belong ever more deeply to the life of our country and the world." Jose, staring at the printed page, his forehead lumpy, his lip thrust out resentfully—anger,

> neurotic stupidity, and shame written all over him—seemed to be saying, "This belongs to the schoolteachers, not to me. It is not speech, but a task. I am not meant to possess it, but to perform it and be graded. And anyway it belongs to the Americans, who kick me around and don't want me getting deeper into their lives. Why should I let them see me fail? I'll quit at the very beginning."
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> At the same time that such thoughts tormented him, he esteemed the powers of those who could read, and he could remember quite clearly reading the postcards from his father. He was determined, at First Street, to learn to read. Or so he thought. The truth is, he wanted to cease failing; he wanted to have *already learned* to read. He did not know what it meant to learn, and he did not know what it meant to read.

Dennison helped José, but not enough to feel comfortable about the boy's future. What had he tried to do? In the terms of Leo Tolstoy, he had tried to help José along the way to becoming equal to himself—equally at home, that is, in written English. For that is how Tolstoy defines education—it is making pupils equal to—and therefore independent of—their teachers. This is the meaning of *liberal* education—to set people free. But José couldn't *feel* any equality coming along. Too many obstacles—not of his own making, or Dennison's—stood in the way. Well, he *should* have felt it, with help like that, you might say. But the odds were too great. Dennison didn't have enough collaborators in the community. The surrounding society was not dedicated to José's re-education. "I believe," Dennison added, "that a Puerto Rican teacher, at home in both English and Spanish, and familiar with both cultures, could have helped José far more than I."

In view of situations like that, one can see why teachers like George Dennison and others who work with minority groups don't like to use those splendid slogan words like "achievement-oriented." With people whose lives have been turned upside-down, so many of the rules work in reverse. Just to get these people back to "normal" promises to be a lifetime undertaking.

Whom, then, do you "blame" for José's predicament? Who is accountable? When everyone is responsible, no one is responsible, as Dwight Macdonald once said. Yet we may have a good approach to a definition of human excellence. The one who *accepts* responsibility for helping to restore equality is surely among the most excellent of men—recognized or not, rewarded or not.

It *is* different for persons born to the Anglo-Saxon heritage. They are the people whose ancestors first spread the word about equality and established the idea for all Americans—although some said it was for all the world. As John Schaar says in his paper, "Reflections on Authority":

> At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires.

The point, here, is that homilies about all men being equal and having the same starting-point, so that individual effort, thrift, and hard work fully justify the rewards they bring; and that the distinctions which result are not only natural, but inevitable and good—the point is that our lives are not really illuminated by these principles—or not illuminated enough.

One can say that all men are equal in essential qualities and in possibilities, but equality does not mean that there is no room for improvement, or that excellence is not desirable. To be equal does not mean that we are finished in our development—good enough the way we are. We are obviously *not* good enough the way we are, since we abuse power when we have it, convert authority into arbitrary rule, and suppose what *ought* to be can be established by moral fiat, instead of slowly evolved by progressive reconciliation of the contradictions in our lives.

Actually, the interpretation of "equality" to mean that no one is more fitted than anyone else for any particular task or responsibility is mainly the result of thinking of authority in terms of its rewards instead of its responsibilities. Inevitably, the moral problem of rewards leads to the postulate of equality in this sense, since rewards are too often increased out of all proportion to work done or services rendered.

But if we think of authority, not in terms of its perquisites or emoluments, but as representing knowledge based upon experience, as embodying uncommon judgment, and as entailing obligations and duties, then the question of the rewards received becomes comparatively insignificant.

With this clear, we may turn to Ortega's conception of the "mass man," as distinguished from those who make a consistent effort to improve their abilities and set for themselves goals the pursuit of which is likely to carry them beyond the development of many others. Ortega wrote in *The Revolt of the Masses:*

> In the presence of one individual we can decide whether he is "mass" or not. The mass is all that which sets no value on itself—good or ill—based upon scientific grounds, but which feels itself "just like everybody," and nevertheless is not concerned about it; is, in fact, quite happy to feel itself as one with everybody else. Imagine a humble-minded man who, having tried to estimate his own worth on specific grounds—asking himself if he has any talent for this or that, if he excels in any direction—realises that he possesses no quality of excellence. Such a man will feel that he is mediocre and commonplace, ill-gifted, but will not feel himself "mass."
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> When one speaks of "select minorities" it is usual for the evil-minded to twist the sense of this expression, pretending to be unaware that the select man is not the petulant person who thinks himself superior to the rest, but the man who demands more of himself than the rest, even though he may not fulfil in his person those higher exigencies. For there is no doubt that the most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures: those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties; and those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection; mere buoys that float on the waves. This reminds me that orthodox Buddhism is composed of two distinct religions: one, more rigorous and difficult, the other easier and more trivial: the Mahayana—"great vehicle" or "great path"—and the Hinayana—"lesser vehicle" or "lesser path." The decisive matter is whether we attach our life to one or the other vehicle, to a maximum or minimum of demands upon ourselves.

By reason of statements of this sort, Ortega has been called a "conservative thinker," but it would be more accurate to say of him that he recognized the necessity for self-improvement and striving for excellence, and saw that no society could survive without the example and leadership of people who make this sort of effort. His critics have neglected his emphasis on the idea that the best persons make the highest demands *upon themselves,* and that they do not claim to be superior to the rest. They prefer not to have attension drawn to them, and would probably make unsuccessful politicians because of their reluctance to bid for power and make personal claims.

Here is another aspect of the paradox we spoke of earlier. The men least likely to succeed as leaders may be the ones who would be most useful to us. Why do we need "leaders" at all? In principle, we don't, just as in principle we are all equal. But in practice we seek out leaders and models, and in practice we look for authority and the grades or places where we can fit in most easily, although not expecting to stay in one place forever.

Does the practice contradict the principle? Is the acceptance of hierarchy in everyday life a violation of the equalitarian ideal?

Well, the fact is that all forms of life have structure, and all levels of expression integrate—give unity to—both complex and simple powers and resources. An orchestra needs a conductor, a team needs a coach or a captain or a quarterback to call the signals. Traffic requires a traffic manager; schools need teachers, even if they are

only students who are older than the others. So there is hierarchy graved in the nature of things. The world as an object is best understood as an array of hierarchical systems, all in tumultuous harmony with each other, making the ecological totality. One cannot straighten out disorders in the ecological system without understanding the food chains and other hierarchical interdependencies. What could be more hierarchical than the organization of human knowledge around a central cluster of values which give meaning and purpose to the uses we find for our knowledge?

The problem is not the erasure of the last trace of structure in our human relationships, but the conversion of hierarchy into patterns of mutuality. The interdependencies of life should not be evaluated only in terms of their misuse, even though this habit of judgment easily develops from frequent experience of the abuse of authority and the excesses of power.

The reconciliation of the paradoxes of human life—because men are both different and equal, both leaders and followers, both wise and foolish, both ordinary and great—is achieved by seeing these polarities not as fixed and unchanging, but as capable of fine balance through self-modification. The moral contradictions now so plainly evident are only the starting-points of human growth, not what men will be at the finish line. The laws of nature will work differently when men begin to think of themselves in different terms. Ruth Benedict's "synergistic society" illustrates how this might work out in social terms. (See Chapter 14 of Maslow's *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Viking, 1971.)

In such a society, the pursuit of excellence becomes progressive mastery of skills and accomplishments which benefit all members, and "elitism" would then mean no more than recognition of qualities desirable for every member, to be won by working toward equality with the most excellent of men.

The obstacles to this order of social and individual realization are many and well known. Yet they lie mainly in human conceptions of morality and interest. There is no obstacle so formidable as a closed mind, no barrier to progress as firmly fixed as the belief that life is chiefly a war against the evil intentions and exploitive tendencies of other men. These tendencies are not unreal, but they are reinforced by an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and carefully nurtured antagonisms. Excellent men create another atmosphere.

REVIEW
THE SPECTACLE OF CHANGE

JUDSON JEROME'S book, *Culture Out of Anarchy* (Herder and Herder, 1970) is about the colleges of the United States, but, as he says in his Introduction, its issues could "as easily be seen in politics or churches, theater, law, the family, industry or commerce, drugs or drink, styles or amusements, the class struggle or the mass media." Mr. Jerome is a teacher of English literature with much experience of colleges, so he discusses the phenomena of cultural death and birth from this point of view. His book is one that parents of young people who are thinking about going to college ought to read. Of course, the prospective students should read it, too.

A paragraph from the first chapter gives some idea of the contents:

> I hear students telling me what I never had the guts or imagination to say: the system isn't working. The whole network of departments, fields, areas, credits, requirements, courses, grades, which we have accepted as the design of higher education, does not relate coherently to human learning or experience. Now the network is collapsing of its own Byzantine weight.

Suspicions along these lines began to haunt Mr. Jerome in 1967, when he was teaching at Antioch:

> It was a dreadful season on the Antioch campus—a tenth of the student body in jail following a draft protest in Cincinnati, strikes against the college administration for involvement with Defense contracts, a surge of drug use and behavior which flouted public mores. A group of us, students and faculty, began organizing an Inner College which we hoped would enable us to relate more decently and provide greater academic freedom. That winter I wrote an essay, "Innovation and Academic Backlash" (published in *Life* and partially incorporated in this book), calling for a total re-examination of what we were doing. There seemed little point in trying to lay blame on a whole generation of college students; something was deeply wrong in the culture—and in the academy which it had produced.

Later he helped to organize Antioch Columbia, in Maryland, close to Washington, D.C., which was an attempt "to combine the opportunity for free and undirected learning with sometimes highly focused and specialized thrusts." The idea was to allow Antioch to engage in experiment without disturbing the existing pattern in Yellow Springs, Ohio, although the influence of the experiment would doubtless be felt by the parent institution. The experimental college is lodged in Oakland Manor, Columbia, which used to be a large plantation home. There is great freedom for the students:

> Sometimes a student will not be seen around the Manor for weeks at a time, but it may turn out that he has been deeply involved in educating himself nonetheless. About ten have left (though it is not clear whether all have dropped out of the program) because they couldn't stand Columbia (which at this stage of its development offers very little in recreational and social life to young adults—and reminds suburbanites too much of home), because they found nothing in the program to engage them, or because they discovered better learning opportunities in California or West Virginia or somewhere else. One girl, after participating in a seminar on communes, set out across the country to visit some she had on a list. That was months ago. If she ever turns up and has something to report, we will help her organize her learning and apply for credit.

This may seem like an odd way to run a college, but it should be remembered that Antioch has from the days of Arthur Morgan had an alternative work and study program, so that students have both work in the school and work on jobs, and they earn some money on the jobs. At Columbia, however, it has not been easy for the students to find sufficient or appropriate jobs. Giving college credit for work done on jobs was not always easy, and while the students sometimes said that they didn't care about "credits" or "degrees," it became evident that they were more interested in a degree than in studying for it. A member of the faculty at Antioch Columbia said:

> I've been talking to students about the various kinds of free schools available, wide-open do-your-own-thing programs in all kinds of interesting

> settings, communes with educational components, and so forth. Why don't you go to one of these? I ask. It boils down to the fact that they're not accredited, that the kids can't earn credit toward a degree. In order to get the bread from their parents, so they don't have to do anything else, they have to be in an accredited college. So if the degree, at one level or another, is what really makes this place different from any of the really good alternatives among free schools we have to take our licensing function seriously and provide some diversity in how it is handled for people of different needs.

Problems of this sort are considered throughout the book. What *good* are credits and degrees? Could a school which did not offer degrees survive? When Judson Jerome went to school, he wanted a degree very much, but now he wonders about its meaning:

> Some are asking whether colleges should grant degrees at all—and at least one of the new colleges, Rochdale (Toronto) has chosen not to do so. What is the meaning of a bachelor's degree today? In the past it certified that a student had had a symmetrical exposure to the arts and sciences and had completed some component work in a major discipline. That was vague enough—but the absurdities of the formula are becoming increasingly apparent. When I was an undergraduate in the forties, we accepted without much question that we had to take a course either in an ancient language *or* in mathematics I guess we assumed some equivalence in dry mental rigor. When I became a professor in the fifties, I began to realize how little educational thought and how much academic politics went into the design of required-course programs. They seemed less a vision of Renaissance Man than the result of a need to populate courses taught by teachers with tenure. It also became evident that when a man told you he had a bachelor's degree there was no particular knowledge or skill you could expect of him. He had, in effect, been knighted as a gentleman in the Western world. He had put in time: residence requirements seem the most immutable of stipulations for a degree.

This book is a searching evaluation of college and university education in the present. Mr. Jerome describes the failures he sees all about, then says:

> We should have known that if seven million bright and healthy people were locked in a network alien to their lives—one which systematically denies their manhood and womanhood, ignores them as individuals, subjects them to tremendous pressures to achieve ends with which they do not identify—there would eventually be trouble. Not only did we not foresee the trouble, but even now many in our society refuse to recognize its implications. The blissful complacency of the academic world before the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in 1964 is equalled only by the vexed complacency of much of the academic world today. Educators ask, sometimes plaintively, sometimes belligerently, why can't we just have law and order? Why can't we just stamp out these symptoms?

The author answers these questions at some length. He gives particular attention to community colleges and to six experimental schools, one of which, Antioch Columbia, has been briefly described. Community colleges are sometimes good places because their programs are not entirely ruled by the tyranny of the graduate schools. A dean of a community college told Jerome: "The best courses we offer are really unaccredited," meaning that they would not be acceptable in terms of credits if the student taking them transferred to a university. So that while original and innovative things occur in community colleges, as also in extension divisions of universities, an inferiority complex develops easily. "The concept most people have of a community college," an English teacher said, "is that it's for idiots, the ones who can't make it in a four-year school, so it's going to train them in some sort of useless thing like data programming." But Jerome was impressed by what the college was doing for a Vietnam veteran who had returned from the war almost a nervous wreck. Asked if the college helped him, he said:

> "Definitely. . . . The first thing it did was keep me busy. I take eighteen or twenty credits a semester, so much as they'll let me. And of course I work. Right now, I run a 'deli' during the week, park cars on weekends, go damming pretty regularly, and come here for classes. I like this school, so I spend as much time as possible on campus. . . . When I was in the service I thought I knew what I wanted to do—architecture. I came here and I started finding out that I was good at more things than I thought. I wasn't just interested in architecture; I like design,

> and I found out I was good in poetry and all of a sudden I could put to use all the experience I've had in the service. In the Marines I learned coordination, and I've got imagination, so I became interested in choreography. Right now I'm choreographing a dance for little kids. Another thing is painting. I did that great big blue mural on the main staircase in the student center—they asked me if I could fill up that big empty space. I've learned an awful lot about all the possibilities of art. Anything from choreography to working on a sports car engine, that's art to me."

Then there was another student,

> —the quiet simple girl [who] takes physical therapy because she likes helping people and knows with that skill she can get a job anywhere. But the faculty thrust here as elsewhere is to awaken an interest in scholarship and high culture, in the sophisticated values of cosmopolitan society. Though the college is willing to start with the roughest ore, its intention is to cultivate and recruit for the elite.

Yet this was the school where, after a poetry reading, Jerome had a fine time talking with a number of excited, interested, and seriously inquiring students.

The accounts he provides of even the good experimental schools are less than inspiring, although his book is filled with reports of rather remarkable individuals. His interest is in trying to create an educational matrix in which adult students—for those ready to go to college are adults—can make themselves free. The hand of the past weighs heavily on all existing institutions and seems to weaken the attempts to bring new and better ones into being. Yet the people who could do it exist, if this book can be believed.

COMMENTARY
MORAL PRODUCTS

BY now it should be generally recognized that the books critical of the public schools have little effect on present practice for the reason that neither the administrators nor the teachers have much sense of wrongdoing. They work under terrible pressure and are driven by imperatives that have come to seem absolutely necessary. There is the further consideration that writers like George Dennison, John Holt, Ivan Illich, Jonathan Kozol, and Herbert Kohl are seldom read by teachers in the public schools. And there are certainly *some* public schools which are exceptionally good. However, after reading Kohl's account of his experiences in this week's "Children," it is natural to ask:

Are the schools *really* that bad? Well, we have another book about that, which ought to be mentioned—*Children and Their Caretakers* (Dutton, 1973, paperback, $2.95), edited by Norman K. Denzin. This book is a collection of articles which have appeared in *Trans-action* (now *Society*) . The general purpose of the contributors is to show that children tend to be regarded as the raw material which society must "shape," while the children's natural capacity and inclination to shape themselves are being ignored.

Some of the material in this book is familiar, as for example the first paper, "How Teachers Learn to Help Children Fail," by Estelle Fuchs, which was reviewed here when it came out in *Trans-action.* Despite her good intentions, the new teacher described by Miss Fuchs fell into the pattern of classifying the children she taught in the first grade, because of administrative requirements. Many of the papers deal with these tendencies in schools and other institutions. Reviewing the contents of this volume, the editor says:

> We find, then, that bad children and bad parents are moral products. We find, too, that our society has institutionalized a complex set of agencies and organizations to judge who are good and bad people. The readings in this volume suggest that *a good or bad child or parent is a person who has been so defined by some person, or social organization.* They have been labeled fit or unfit, college-bound, a drop-out, hyperactive or autistic. Unfortunately, Americans from the middle-income sector have been too successful in securing the acceptance of their moral perspectives. They and their schools and social welfare agencies repeatedly establish the fact that the bad parents and bad children do not come from "good" respectable families. That this moral perspective will change in the near future is doubtful.

In this book the anatomy of the public schools—particularly in urban areas—is laid bare. There are many suggestions offered for changes, but much evidence is provided to show how good suggestions can go awry. Much of the book deals with the problem of poor reading, since this lies back of many of the failures to learn. Herbert Kohl's book is a catalog of ways to meet these poor reading problems, although it is evident from what he says that the problems ought never to have existed in the first place.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SOLVING NON-PROBLEMS

IN *Radical School Reform,* edited by Ronald and Beatrice Gross, Joseph Featherstone tells about "reading" in the English Infant Schools (children from five to seven). Learning to read, in these schools, is not a problem. The method involves some kind of "osmosis." Reading isn't a separate subject and the children learn a great deal from each other. Featherstone says:

> They hang around library corners long before they can read handling the books, looking at pictures, trying to find words they do know, listening and watching as the teacher hears other children reading. . . .
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> Increasingly in the good infant schools, there are no text books and no class readers. There are just books in profusion. Instead of spending their scanty book money on 40 sets of everything, wise schools have purchased different sets of reading series, as well as a great many single books, at all levels of difficulty. Teachers arrange their classroom libraries so they can direct students of different abilities to appropriate books, but in most classes a child can tackle anything he wants. As a check, cautious teachers ask them to go on their own through a graded reading series—which one doesn't matter.
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> However a child picks up reading, it will involve learning to write at the same time, and some write before they can read; there is an attempt to break down the mental barrier between the spoken, the written and the printed word.

In any event, learning reading is not a problem for the children, nor for their teachers. Herbert Kohl would agree. That is, under normal circumstances he would agree completely. In his Preface to *Reading, How To* (Dutton, $5.95, 1973), he says:

> There is no reading problem. There are problem teachers and problem schools. Most people who fail to learn how to read in our society are victims of a fiercely competitive system of training that requires failure. If talking and walking were taught in most schools we might end up with as many mutes and cripples as we now have non-readers. However, learning to read is no more difficult than learning to walk or talk. The skill can be acquired in a natural and informal manner and in a variety of settings ranging from school to home to the streets.

This book by Kohl could be described as a manual for removing the obstacles that schools and other influences have put in the way of the natural and informal means of learning to read. Kohl is apparently a specialist in such problems, so he has lots of "case studies." One is of a sixth-grade girl, Lillian, who had a reading "score" of 2.7 when she needed at least 5.0 to be promoted to the seventh grade. If she didn't improve her score she would not be able to enter junior high along with her friends, and would be put into a "dumb" class in elementary school. So Kohl was asked to give her first aid.

He started her reading to him, and she got through several pages, but panicked after making a simple mistake. She had been to reading clinics and had been "diagnosed" often enough to make her think she was "sick." But she *wanted* to read well, so they kept at it. After a while Kohl began to realize that she couldn't focus her eye on the written word very well, so he had her put her finger on the page as a guide to the line. This worked when they read together at her home. (The focusing difficulty was apparently an after-effect of an automobile accident. Her other abilities were unimpaired, but the reading problem developed along with headaches.)

Using her finger on the page solved Lillian's problem at home, but at school it was different. Her teacher and the school's remedial reading specialist wouldn't permit her to do this, and the teacher's supervisor agreed with them. To oblige the school to let Lillian read in her own way, Kohl had to get a note from the girl's doctor and threaten a lawsuit. So she improved her reading, lost her panic, controlled her nervousness, and took a test which showed her improvement. The school then claimed she and Kohl had "cheated," so he called on the doctor again, and made another legal gesture, simply in order to help the girl to graduate into junior high, as she deserted!

This example of how a school can inhibit learning, Kohl says, "is not such an exception as it might seem." So there are "problem schools."

> Lillian was nervous because of her accident. But she was even more nervous at the prospect of not being promoted. She was separated from her friends and put into a class for "special" students because she couldn't read. She took tests, but nobody believed her results, thereby undermining her confidence and making reading more of a problem. And there was no way for her to escape the situation because the law says that she has to go to school, and her mother cannot afford a private school or a special tutor.
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> In this case the remedial reading clinic was no more successful than the regular classroom. That's not surprising since their goals are the same—fit the child to the system of learning without bothering to find out how the child learns best.
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> I have thought a lot about my experience with Lillian and about what specifically helped. Nothing was done to her in a medical sense. No technical knowledge was employed, though I had some experience watching young people read and helping them develop programs based upon what I could perceive about their approach to written material. There was no way Lillian could fail so far as I was concerned. As long as she wanted to learn how to read we would keep on exploring strategies together. Eventually, we were bound to hit on something that worked. If not, I would ask a friend to help. Lillian was not a failure, she was just seeking a way to learn how to read again.

Anyone who has anything to do with helping children to read will benefit from this book. It takes the process of learning all the way from the beginning to the advanced stage of learning how to read critically, and at this level the skills of reading and writing become almost interchangeable. Kohl has developed dozens of little devices to use in teaching reading. At the start, he says, you need to work with the simple words which most children are able to recognize before they learn the alphabet. These are words that are familiar because they are seen on street signs, as with the word "Stop." There are words like "For Rent" and "Men" and "Ladies" and "In" that appear on signs everywhere. Kohl describes little games that can be built around such words; names can be used in games, too, when they are familiar. Kohl lists the words that beginning readers need to learn to recognize without effort. A rubber stamp outfit can be used to advantage, since children enjoy putting together basic words and printing them. At the same time, the alphabet is introduced. Sets of letters can be arranged in various ways, for learning their sounds as well as to identify them by name. Easy words are often changed into other words by substituting letters, and doing this brings up new problems, like the silent E at the end of some words. There are other oddities of endings which require formal teaching and drill. Kohl describes games and gadgets for teaching these things.

In consideration of the constant flow from the presses of books on children, teaching, schools, and education, we have wondered from time to time whether we ought to score books on some involuntary guilt-feelings scale. It doesn't seem right to keep on reviewing book after book, when there are too many books already! But the ones we do review often seem so good they can't be ignored, even though, in another kind of society, they might not be needed at all. Herbert Kohl's book, at any rate, would be good in any kind of society, although it could probably be made much shorter for teaching reading to children who have fewer bad influences to recover from.

FRONTIERS

Liberation in Africa

SOCIAL experiments and theories are being tested in various parts of the world, mostly with mixed results, since the theories can hardly help being mixed in conception, although of them all, the experiment now going on in Tanzania is probably the most interesting. Tanganyika became independent in 1961 and after uniting with Zanzibar in 1964 became the Republic of Tanzania. It is a one-party (TANU—Tanganyika African Union) state which has Julius Nyerere for President. The country has a population of 12.3 millions with an Asian minority of shopkeepers, although the latter no longer control wholesale trade. Nyerere strongly opposes racism.

In 1967, after a month's tour of the rural areas of the country, Nyerere and other TANU leaders issued the Arusha Declaration, which called on the people for hard work and self-reliance to take the place of foreign gifts or loans for the nation's development program. It had become evident that foreign aid was contingent on pleasing the investor countries, and Nyerere refused to conform his policies to their wishes. In consequence, much of the aid given in the early '60s was withdrawn. Shortly after the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere nationalized (with compensation) foreign-owned banks, insurance corporations, food mills, and import firms.

In an article in the May *Atlantic*, Nadine Gordimer describes the significance of Nyerere's policy. She begins by speaking of the "two freedoms" Africans must win:

> Liberation knocks twice in Africa. First, for release from white man's rule; again, for the creation of a new life in which the peasants may eat, and look up from the hoe.
>
> The first summons has proved comparatively easy to answer, outside Algeria and the white South. Peasants and educated elite have risen to it in one accord. The second goes unanswered in most states. Black elite replaces white: through industry financed and owned by foreign investors, a small section of the population becomes urban middle-class, for industrial workers are privileged people rather than proletarians in the African context. The majority continues to scratch the soil for scrawny returns of the inevitable raw material crop.

The Arusha Declaration was intended to change the pattern of response to the second summons in Tanzania:

> With the Arusha Declaration in 1967, he [Nyerere] committed one of the poorest countries in Africa to trudge up to the door on the second knock in the only way he believes it can be done: with a form of socialism homogenized on African Soil.
>
> This socialism, unlike the European prototype—he has written in an early pamphlet—is neither born of the agrarian and industrial revolutions nor based upon class conflict, since Africa has had neither the "benefit" of the two revolutions nor the problem of conflicting classes. Its basis is the traditional African social system of the extended family, visualized as extended to the wider society of the nation. "'Ujamaa'—familyhood (in Swahili, the official language of Tanzania]—then, describes our socialism," Nyerere says. "It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man, and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man."

The Arusha Declaration outlines the program in practical terms. It involves reliance on people, on their intensified efforts as productive farmers, instead of money. Nyerere warned that the money would not be forthcoming without jeopardizing the country's independence. Taxes could not produce the needed funds, and loans from abroad for industrial development would mean that urban areas would chiefly benefit, while the farmers paid off the larger part of the loans. He pointed out that increased agricultural production was possible, since already there had been large gains and the villagers had themselves built schools, dispensaries, and community centers.

In *Africa Report* for March, 1967, which printed substantial extracts from the Arusha Dedaration, Martin Lowenkopf wrote that Nyerere is determined to prevent the development

of neo-colonialism in Tanzania. While the country will accept loans when they are without strings—since some money is needed for development—the Declaration emphasizes that the foundation of Tanzanian growth must lie in the efforts of the people themselves. In this way they will gain self-reliance as well as, in time, accumulate the capital needed for further industrial progress. However, since 95 per cent of the Tanzanians engage in small-scale agriculture, Nyerere stresses the primary need for education in better tools and cultivation methods, saying that this would be a sound investment for such funds as are available.

Commenting on the achievements since the Declaration, Miss Gordimer says:

> Two million peasants in more than four thousand Ujamaa villages already in existence represent the country's greatest effort—on its own, in accord with the most severe of Nyerere's principles of self-reliance—to toil its way up from the past. Their success or failure so far has followed predictably out of the varying circumstances of their foundation. Where poor and landless people with nothing to lose are given land on which to live and work collectively, their shared benefits in terms of material welfare and dignity are greater than anything they have experienced individually. Where social misfits are banded together to form such a community, it founders.

The account is impartial, with attention to weaknesses as well as strengths. Speaking of planning mistakes, Miss Gordimer says:

> For example, the government invested in a tire factory shortly before the austerity ban on new cars. These are problems of inexperience. On the credit side, the public sector increased its overall surpluses considerably in 1971, and an increase of 40 per cent for the lowest wage-earners has been approved.

Decentralization of political power is the next objective, as part of the struggle against the spreading bureaucracy of a socialist system. In Dar es Salaam, the capital, it is said that to further this end Nyerere may repeat what he did in 1961—resign the presidency temporarily and "go into the savanna, the highlands, and under the coconut palms live among the real Tanzanians and make flesh of the words of TANU and the Arusha Declaration where it really matters most—at the level of the hoe."

Meanwhile, Chinese technicians are building a railroad for Tanzania, which will go from the capital to Zambia—costs being shared equally by the two countries. Nyerere has made it plain, however, that "Tanzania is not for sale, not even to those with whom she may share a broad ideology." The railroad will give Zambia access to a seaport in a friendly country, instead of having to ship its copper exports through "white" and hostile Rhodesia, South Africa, or Mozambique. Tanzania's important agricultural region, Kilombero, will also be benefited. Track construction is a year ahead of its schedule.

No one makes predictions about Africa, these days, but it is evident that these writers see Nyerere as a humane and devoted leader of his people, and are as optimistic as they dare to be. Tanzania, says Miss Gordimer, is attempting to create "socialism with a human face." Martin Lowenkopf remarks that "Nyerere, a former schoolmaster, is officially—and by preference—called *Mwalimu* (teacher), and his leadership is closer to that of the philosopher-king than any other in Africa, or for that matter the world."