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OVERVIEW OF THE AMERICAN CITY

American cities can be looked at in many ways, but one thing everyone should be able to agree on is that they are in big trouble. They are dilapidated, congested, trash-strewn, unsafe, rebellion-prone, poverty-stricken, polluted, frightened, demoralized and generally on the run. They give every indication of being beyond hope, and little leadership or new ideas are in evidence suggesting otherwise.

Actually all cities throughout the industrial world are in trouble, but U. S. cities seem to be especially bad. In contrast, Toronto and Montreal, which Americans visit in great numbers, have a completely different tone. Not only do they look better, they feel a whole lot better, with an optimism and verve that is noticeably absent from Chicago, Cleveland, New York or Los Angeles. This is a striking paradox, that the richest and most powerful nation in the world is losing its ability to maintain healthy communities, that somehow material growth has created problems that are bigger than the people, not just in the environment but in social and psychological life as well.

This article will be an attempt to take a cold look at this situation. The approach will be sociological, with an eye toward social relations and problems of organization. It will be diagnostic, with an emphasis on what is wrong and how it might be righted. This analysis will also be from the heart, for I have lived in American cities all my forty years and my six children will probably be doing the same. These are my cities and their sadness is my sadness.

I will begin by discussing some of the broader trends in recent American history which characterize the whole of national life and not just the cities. It is a mistake to view our urban problems in isolation from the rest of the country, as though they were brought by processes that only occur in cities and could be changed merely by changing something about cities. This country is a single country, and the decisions that come from the national power centers, the White House, large corporations, Wall Street, the Pentagon, the Congress, and so on, are decisive for the health of local communities of

all kinds. I will therefore discuss four national trends which are crucial for understanding the urban problem.

Then I will focus more closely on the cities themselves and the way in which national problems have taken their toll in a special way there.

Finally I will discuss how these damaging trends might be reversed, or at least slowed down, referring in particular to the service professions.

RECENT NATIONAL TRENDS THAT HAVE HURT CITIES

WAR

For more than thirty years the United States has been at war in one sense or another. First World War II, then Korea, then ten expensive years of Cold War and finally seven more hot ones in Viet Nam, which still continues. Throughout this period innumerable billions of dollars have been spent getting into fights or preparing for them, while the public treasury has been so depleted that cities have been falling apart. There is no question about the money being there. All the cities' money needs could be more than taken care of by diverting money from the military to civilian use; but war and excessive anti-Communism have kept them from this.

This is not the place to analyze the politics of the Cold War, but if one reads the newer revisionist historians, he or she will find a strong argument that there need not have been a Cold War, nor a Viet Nam, and possibly not a Korea. These were largely American mistakes, and they were made at incredible expense in community welfare. One might say that in fighting imaginary enemies abroad, or enemies that did not have to be enemies, the U.S. bled itself white at home.

What makes this waste even worse is that it was preceded by ten years of still another kind of waste in the Great Depression, which also took a vast toll from the physical and social health of the cities. That waste came from weakness in the economy and an unwillingness on the part of national leaders to make changes in the 1920s that might have prevented the depression of the 1930s. In either case the material costs have been enormous, and the money needed for social services and decent housing has gone up in smoke.

It seems obvious that the U.S., and especially its cities, will never be healthy until money is no longer poured into military ventures. Just what that might require in revisions of foreign policy no one can say exactly, but it certainly requires that the U.S. stop assuming that every country that becomes socialist is inevitably its military enemy.

DOING NOTHING ABOUT INEQUALITY

Throughout this period of public waste, material inequality among social classes and ethnic groups has gone almost unchanged. Average incomes have gone up because the size of the pie has increased, but the shares that different groups have received have not changed. If anything, the bottom 10 or 20 percent of the population get an even smaller share of the dollars than they did at the beginning of the century. The statistics on this whole question are imprecise, but the general pattern of unchanging inequality is clear.

Why is inequality a problem for the cities? There was a time when the U.S. could more easily tolerate large gaps between the rich, the middle groups and the poor because there was a certain acceptability attached to these differences. The immigrants in the cities had come from countries that had strong traditions of aristocracy, and the American aristocracy of dollars did not grate against them. The same was true for the native poor, the various dark peoples in the rural South or Southwest. All they wanted was to be secure on the bottom rung of the ladder, and perhaps to go up a notch. Equality with their "betters" was beyond their ken.

But in the last seventy years the idea of equality has obtained an importance in this country it never had before. This is probably largely because there is a new kind of symbolic equality in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the only equality was political and legal; one man had one vote, and all were equal before the law, but even this had serious limitations. Economically, there was a vague feeling that everyone should have an equal chance to get rich, an equality of opportunity, but it never went beyond a vague feeling. It was certainly never implied that there should be an equality of position itself, with people all living at about the same level.

In the twentieth century, symbolic equality has gone beyond the political-legal level into the spheres of education and information. Schooling has been enormously equalized in recent decades. The average American and even the poor receive a schooling much closer to that of the elite than ever before. This democratization of schooling, however, has had little effect on the democratization of incomes.

The same effect comes from other symbolic changes. The mass media, especially radio and television, provide a tremendous amount of information to the ordinary American that he did not have in the old days. He has a much better idea of what is happening in this country, of its problems and how he ranks in relation to those above him. And he is much more liable to want what they have! Mass advertising alone, with the mass production of consumer goods that stands behind it, ensures that ordinary greed will be democratized as never before. If a country democratizes its education, its status symbols, its information, and does little or nothing about the distribution of wealth and income, then that country is in for a lot of trouble.

That is exactly what has been happening, especially since World War II. There is now a built-in source of anger and resentment, and this has focused especially in the cities. One of the ways this shows up is in ordinary property theft, a fast way to share the wealth. Another is in the urban rebellion of Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. Whether one interprets these actions as deliberate attempts to change things or as irrational outbursts, either way they stem from the pangs of a feeling that inequality is unjust and that it is legitimate to rebel.

Inferiority of economic position seems to be especially galling when superimposed on ethnic inferiority. Poverty does not hurt as much if one is in the dominant white ethnic group with full status in the ethnic market, but if one is considered ugly and sub-human as well as being poor, then this is doubly painful. This is more serious as the lower ethnic groups become a greater proportion of the urban population. The old urban poor of several decades ago, mostly Catholic or Jewish, were lowly but not the lowest. The new urban poor are from the bottom groups: Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians, and Southern whites, all of whom were formerly rural dwellers. When they were safely tucked away in the small towns and farms of the South, Southwest, or Puerto Rico, they were a much less angry group of people. But being crowded together in cities is an altogether more radicalizing experience, which will be discussed later.

Therefore, a second national trend, which is causing enormous trouble for cities, is that the U.S. just cannot seem to do anything about that "new deal" long talked about. The old inequality remains, yet its symbolic justification, its moral rightness, has been thoroughly shattered since World War II. Of course, part of the solution to the second trend is doing something about the first.

BUREAUCRACY

The term "bureaucracy" refers to those large, impersonal, top-down organizations that are absorbing more and more ordinary human activity. The great-grandparents of this generation, wherever they were, were farmers, small businessmen, professionals, craftsmen and ordinary workmen in ordinary workshops. People today have become organization men and women, working and living in giant power centers which nobody seems to own or control. There was a time in this country when increased size, impersonality, and strict organizational discipline were progressive trends. Size cuts costs; impersonality prevents corruption and favoritism; and discipline standardizes output. Bureaucracy, in other words, is often the only route to efficiency. But it has its limits. Eventually it stifles innovation, encourages buck-passing, instills dead traditions of its own, and, above all, keeps the individual from the fulfillment he can get

only in acting autonomously, under his own steam. Eventually the psychological costs of large-scale organization offset its material benefits. In fact, if activity is too boring and deadly, even efficiency and material benefits decline.

While inequality is the special grievance of the urban underclass, bureaucracy plays the same role for the middle class, especially its youth. If the New Left of the 1960s had any central message, it was that giant organizations have outlived their usefulness, and that new forms, which permit autonomy and participation, must be developed. This is actually just a restatement of good old American frontier values, and it touches a deep yen in everyone. But the depression and the wars took the independence out of many and increased tolerance for regimentation. To many older people who lived through the 1930s and are glad to have any job at all, regardless of how impersonal or programmed it may be, this complaint of middle class youth sounds absurd. Young people, however, are living in a completely different psychological world, in many ways more valid and futuristic than that of their parents.

Precisely because young people have not known a prolonged economic depression and have come to take a minimum of material security for granted, they place a great premium on psychological fulfillment. And they do not find it in present institutions, large universities, trade unions, political parties, government agencies and business corporations. Instead, youth say, bureaucracies are a psychological gauntlet in which their inner selves are molded into interchangeable parts, their softest sentiments into fixed smiles, their autonomy into automata.

The big city, along with the comfortable suburbs in which these young people grew up, is viewed as the home of bureaucracy. This means that many of the most talented and sensitive young Americans are fleeing the cities, physically and psychologically. If they cannot get out, they set up their own youth ghettos or counter-cultures within cities. At a time when this country needs talent and innovation more than ever, many of the most talented are turning their backs on the task, and the very bureaucracies that need new blood and fresh ideas are too rigid and overdeveloped for the self-reform that might attract idealistic youth.

Bureaucracy is the channel for much of the material waste described above, and it is the foundation for much of the inequality too. The Pentagon and its wars is only the capstone of this whole system. The entire organizational landscape needs humanization.

POLLUTION

Finally one must consider the destruction of the environment, which has galloped so swiftly in recent years. The water, the soil,

the air, the flora and fauna—the whole of Mother Nature—is being squandered. The dimensions of this problem are just now being examined, but it looks as though American wealth is a cruel hoax on the future. Just as some children take certain drugs that give immediate thrills at the expense of permanent damage, the gross national product has turned out to be the most costly drug of all. This problem goes well beyond the question of cities, but it is the cities that are being hurt the most. Pollution hastens the flight from the cities for those who can afford it. It confirms the suspicions of youth that our institutions are morally bankrupt, it demoralizes those who do try to do something about the liveability of cities, and it further bewilders a leadership that is already totally confused.

Pollution worsens the inequality problem because it subsidizes the rich and hits the poor the hardest, it worsens the bureaucracy problem by burning up people for product, and it increases waste by being the biggest waste of all.

The four trends—wars, inequality, bureaucracy, and pollution—seem to lie behind the sadness of our cities. All countries have these to some extent, but the U.S. is farthest along the suicide trail. The U.S. has the most military waste, the most smoldering inequality, the most gargantuan bureaucracies and the most tortured environment. There is little wonder that its cities are becoming uninhabitable, but there is much wonder that its people are so helpless to do anything about it.

SPECIFICALLY URBAN TRENDS

While the roots of urban problems are to be found in national problems, these trends have had their worst effects in the big cities. Since World War II there have been certain qualitative changes in city social life, deriving largely from the trends already described, which have made cities especially bad places in which to live and especially resistant to favorable change. I will again discuss some trends, this time getting somewhat more concrete and closer to the problems of the urban professional.

THE URBANIZATION OF THE RURAL POOR

I have already mentioned the special importance of the rural poor moving to the cities and replacing the earlier waves of immigrants. What has happened is that a scattered, unorganized rural proletariat has become a concentrated, physically contiguous urban proletariat. This has made them much more angry than they had ever been down on the farm. It has also exposed them to the new forces of symbolic equality mentioned earlier, as they sit there for years and years of schooling, watching the parade of wealth and power on their television sets and living side-by-side with the high-rise urban middle class.

Even though in dollar terms, urban poverty is less severe than rural, we are beginning to see that it hurts a good deal more. This is because it is more "naked" in terms of moral or social cushioning. To use Karl Polanyi's term, "social embeddedness" is lacking for the new urban poor. Rural poverty, with the softening effects of church, local elite, and even the soothing effects of being close to nature is lacking for the new poor in their post-war urban ghettos. If anything, the urban environment makes their poverty worse because it makes their social situation more transparent and unrelieved.

To put this another way, the most declassed ethnic groups have moved from the rural fringe to the urban center of national life. Politically, this was a most important move because it increased their power enormously, the power to see and be seen, to intensify moral contradictions, to challenge inequality through crime and political rebellion, and to throw a monkey wrench into the institutional works. American poverty and ethnic untouchability, once safely tucked away in the background, have now moved to the foreground. This means they can no longer be safely ignored. It also means that cities will be pressure cookers of anger and despair as long as cities and city conditions remain as they are.

THE FLIGHT OF JOBS TO THE SUBURBS

One of the most ironic facts about the new urban poor is that they arrived in the cities, pushed from farms by agricultural modernization, just as the good jobs were leaving the cities. Most of the new jobs in recent years have appeared in the suburbs as part of the trend toward industrial decentralization. The main unskilled jobs left in the cities, within easy range of the poor, are the low-paid underclass jobs in retail stores, personal service, nonprofit institutions, and light manufacturing. The unwillingness of the suburbs to build low-cost housing and permit dark ethnic groups within their boundaries has, in turn, confined the new poor to the low-cost, but badly overpriced, slum housing, far from the better industrial jobs.

This, of course, is totally unnecessary by any kind of efficiency logic, but it is very logical when one considers the emotional power of racial prejudice. People moved to the suburbs in the first place largely to get away from the lower ethnic groups. Naturally they are not going to turn around now and invite them into their new communities. To protect suburban bigotry, the new poor are separated from the new jobs, even while the suburbanites are muttering about crime in the streets and people who "don't want to work."

THE DEPLETION OF URBAN ORGANIZATION

At the same time the rural poor have been plopped into the cities, and the good jobs shifted to the suburbs, the chance for the new poor

to get organized and do something about it has greatly diminished. To appreciate this point one must go back a few decades in urban history. The inter-war urban poor of the 1920s and 1930s were largely Catholics of recent Southern or Central European origins. There were also Jews, especially in New York City, and some Protestants, but the central type was the Slavic or Mediterranean Catholic.

This religious attachment was an important organizational bond and, by contrast with the new poor, it had two important consequences. It gave poverty a socially embedded quality so that it did not hurt as much, and it offered possibilities for collective action that would help the poor to climb out of poverty. These resources, in descending order of importance, were fourfold: the Church itself, trade unions, political machines and ethnic societies.

The Catholic Church has always been an enormous friend to the American establishment, for it constantly acted as a conservative influence on the Catholic urban poor. The European Church's hostility to socialism, and its suspicion of labor unions and popular government were transferred to this country, and, through the enormous influence of the clergy, shaped the ordinary poor Catholic into an obedient citizen, quiet in his grievances and slow to see the injustices of his society. Poverty was, in fact, defined as a religious blessing, making it easier to get into heaven, which doubtlessly made it much easier to bear.

When joint action was needed, as with trade unions, the Church used all its influence to keep these organizations from moving very far to the left. These influences were moderating and anti-reform, but there were progressive influences of a sort too. The Church acted as a super-ethnic group, a culture carrier which gave the Catholic proletariat a view of life as larger than themselves, for interposed between themselves and the continent-wide state there stood a firm well-organized community which was theirs, and out of reach of the Protestants who ran the country. Thus Catholic poverty was defined, segregated, cushioned and even sacramentalized in a way that softened its effects and muted its political thrust.

From this basic community and culture, the Church also acted as the social basis for much of Catholic secular organization, especially ethnic societies, trade unions and political machines. These secular organizations were largely extensions of the Holy Name Societies, Knights of Columbus chapters, and Catholic Alumni associations of the cities. Perhaps the classic case of how this worked occurred in one neighborhood, Stockyards Chicago, in which the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (B.Y.N.C.) was organized in the late 1930s. This was a coalition of the Catholic pastors, the ethnic societies, the packinghouse union, and then gradually the local businesses and Democratic politicians. The B.Y.N.C. was an extremely good thing for the neighborhood, and while it did not end the Great Depression—

World War II did that—it did gather the scattered political resources and give the people a united voice downtown with City Hall and the Cardinal. It also helped them develop a great deal of neighborhood pride and cooperation, and to this day that old neighborhood looks better than it did thirty years ago! The B.Y.N.C. is frequently cited as a bad example of neighborhood organization because it seems to have slipped into a certain amount of racism in recent years, fearful of the drift of the South Side Black ghetto. This is true, although it scarcely matches the more sophisticated racism of the suburbs. In any case it illustrates the organizational resources that were available to the Catholic poor.

In contrast, the new urban poor have none of these organizational capabilities. Religiously they are a mixture with no church strong enough to organize the others. Above all the Blacks are in small, non-centralized Protestant churches, which, while they supply many individual leaders from the preacher ranks, do not supply an overall sense of membership, loyalty and organization. The Spanish-speaking Catholics are themselves fragmented into Mexican origin, Puerto Ricans and others, and their Catholic origins are much more anti-clerical and disorganized than were the Europeans'.

In a similar way, ethnic societies among the new poor are weak and poorly developed, especially among the Blacks who are still trying to define their ethnicity in a positive way. In fact, the new poor are ethnically antagonistic to each other, and the process of organizing one section can often be done only by mobilizing hostility toward other sections. This fighting over crumbs, as a Black congressman recently called it, is most counterproductive, but it illustrates the bind.

In the trade unions the new poor are again in an inferior position, for they work in predominantly non-unionized sectors of the economy, in jobs too isolated for easy organization and at pay too small to attract the dues-conscious established unions. When they are in unions, as in the Detroit auto plants, they find that the union hierarchy is still occupied by the representatives of the old poor who organized these unions some decades ago.

When one looks for the political machine, it turns out it has been weakened in most cities, and what is left is still largely controlled by the old ethnics, who bring in the new under distinctly subordinate conditions.

All this is dramatized in the career of the urban community organizer, Saul Alinsky. Alinsky was the key organizer of the Chicago Stockyards neighborhood in the 1930s. Afterwards he tried to organize in various underclass communities, Mexican-American and Black, and while he had limited successes in some Black communities, notably Rochester, New York, and the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago, these organizations do not seem to have lasted well. Alinsky

is now back to the middle third—the better paid working and middle class—and has become part of the recent move to glamourize the plight of the middle American. This pattern is especially visible in Chicago, where among the thirty or so neighborhood organizations, those of the new poor are largely paper organizations, while those of Catholic neighborhoods are much more likely to have mass participation and organizational muscle. The only real underclass organization in Chicago is the top-down kind, within the Democratic machine, and this provides little benefit for the Chicago underclass as a whole.

The new poor then, in addition to feeling the weight of the oppressive national trends described earlier, also find themselves in angry ghettos, without residential or transportation access to the better industrial jobs and without the organizational levers it would take to do something about their situation.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The picture is such a gloomy one that one is tempted to say nothing can be done, and let it go at that. It is always much easier to criticize a troubled society than to make suggestions for improvement, but this itself is no accident. It is not because critics tend to be “non-constructive” and unwilling to just go along with whatever meager reforms a society may be making. Rather, it is because societies in trouble develop defenses and blocks that inhibit constructive thought, much as neurotics blinker themselves to keep from facing their problems. These defenses range from relatively mild controls over teaching, preaching, writing, and electioneering to more severe controls over new social movements which are labeled illegal and subversive. An excellent example of this is the suppression of the “citizen participation” movement of the poverty program, which was an excellent new idea, but which unfortunately threatened the vested interests of certain urban political machines. For this reason it had to go, and cities are therefore deprived of all the new attempts to solve urban problems which that program should have been allowed to explore. The same is true for any number of radical ideas and social experiments that were initiated and repressed throughout the 1960s. The normal process of experimentation, brainstorming, boat-rocking and social change which a society must permit if it is to find new solutions to new problems has been stunted in the U.S., and there is consequently a dearth of fresh ideas.

This process is itself a major element in our urban problem. To put this another way, the goals of a rational urban policy are easy enough to determine; just reverse everything said in the earlier part of this article. Unfortunately the means to do this are all illegal, unpatriotic, or have been suppressed before they were allowed to be fully invented.

Certainly a continuation of present responses looks like a loser. Current public programs range from the trivial to the harmless to the downright destructive. Law and order programs are not eliminating crime, and may actually be increasing it. Bigger and bigger urban bureaucracies do little more than worsen the bureaucracy problem. Spending programs based on inequitable tax structures deepen the inequality. Symbolic reforms that yield only token or "demonstration" programs just widen the gap between symbolic and real equality. And wars, aimed at protecting but actually hurting the country, just drain energies away. Going in circles and hoping that this country will "muddle through" as we have done so often in the past just does not look like it will work this time.

The old American way of handling problems "from below" was a combination of divide and conquer (Protestant vs. Catholic, Black vs. white, etc.), buying off leaders, making minor concessions and hoping that across-the-board productivity gains would handle the rest. But in the last twenty or thirty years this country has been undergoing nothing less than a moral revolution, in which traditional citizenship ideals are being taken seriously by bottom groups. The declassed groups are now taking the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights seriously and they demand to be treated like all other Americans. This is scarcely an excessive demand, and it is amazing that it took so long for them to make it. This means that the key problem of the U.S., and especially of its cities, is one of giving full citizenship to all Americans.

This also means the solution to the urban problem is largely one of finding new political means and methods. Positive programs will come only with a power change, and one that is long overdue. A nation's political power structure may lag a bit behind the times, but only for a while, and then at some cost. Eventually politics must express basic morals; it must reflect what large groups of people think is just and due, otherwise that nation will be ungovernable. It is exactly that gap, between morality and politics, which has been widening in the U.S. and this is why the country is drifting more deeply into crime, demoralization and ungovernability. In a sense the solution is that all groups be given approximately the same amount of real political power, and then let solutions be found through a true democratic process, but that is too general a way of putting it.

Of course the best way to organize the bottom groups (by which I mean uniting political resources so that they will have more effect than if they remain scattered) would be if the people at the top, who own and run most of this country, did everything they could to promote organization at the bottom. But even though this would be in the country's best interests and in everyone's long run interests (i.e., our grandchildren's), the top people are afraid, and rightly so, that they would lose political and economic power in the short run.

Organizing the bottom will inevitably lead to a redistribution of political power, which in turn will lead to some economic redistribution. Given that people at the top of any society tend to be selfish and shortsighted, the voluntary giving over of organization and power will not happen. Organization can only happen by going against the grain, with all the bumpiness that that implies.

ETHNICITY

Earlier I discussed underclass ethnicity, in contrast to the Catholic forms of ethnicity, as a weak point, but there are hidden strengths. Ethnicity is always a latent resource because it is something emotional that people have in common and can use as a basis for joint action. When the Catholics came en masse to this country, they had little ethnic identification at first. Instead of seeing themselves as Italians or Poles or Hungarians, they identified with their home village or regions, and only slowly did they adopt a broader ethnic consciousness. Ethnicity, as a resource, had to be formed; it was not immediately formed. The same seems to be true for the underclass ethnics. Blacks are badly divided into light and dark, middle class, working class and underclass, rural and urban and so on. These splits impede the creation of an ethnic group, and until they are reasonably healed, the tremendous latent power of Black ethnicity will not be fully usable.

The Spanish-speaking people are divided into two main groups, Mexican-origin and Puerto Rican, with further splits within each group. On the edge are Cubans, Philipinos and various South Americans. The Spanish-speaking legislators in the House and Senate are beginning to explore the possibilities of a legislative coalition, but it will be a long time before their masses begin working together.

American Indians are only "Indians," an outsiders' word, to non-Indians; they identify themselves as Dakota, Potawatomi, Cherokee and so on. Tribalism is their ethnicity, and the only connection among tribes is a vanguard movement called "pan-tribalism." They do not identify with an ethnic group called "Indian" and therefore their concentrations in Northern cities are utterly disunited into a myriad of separate tribes. The same is true of Southern whites from the border states, whose basic identity is often the county of origin, and woe betide the outsider from some other county who strays into that county's favorite bar in Detroit, Chicago or Cincinnati.

In other words, the underclass ethnic groups are not yet ethnic groups and therefore do not have the organizational-political power of ethnicity at their disposal. Time will change this, but any rallying points that can speed up the process will speed up power.

MATERIAL INTERESTS

If the established trade union movement and the major political parties are ineffective channels of organization for interests, then others should be tried. Two obvious possibilities are government welfare and tenant-landlord relations. Both are already the bases of organization, in the National Welfare Rights Organization and the National Tenants Organization. These groups are against the grain of national propriety, for paupers on welfare and public housing should be humble, not aggressive, but they are very much in the grain of the underclass situation, and these two organizations are a natural for an eventual merger of some kind.

Prisoners and ex-convicts are another natural place for organization, for loss of citizenship rights and job discrimination against those who presumably have paid their debt to society seems clearly unjust. Prison organization itself is also clearly in need of drastic change.

The low-paid, and as yet unorganizable jobs are still another natural place for underclass organization. This will take imaginative, dedicated organizers and new forms of organization, but surely some of the underclass occupations could be organized.

LOCAL CONTROLS

The decentralization of all forms of public administration, including the decentralization of real power, looks to be very much in the interest of the underclass. There was a time when centralization, even to the national level, was the more progressive avenue. This was because the brand of localism at the time was not local enough; it was local control by local middle and upper class elites. But centralization of administration, in the federal bureaucracies, is no longer always the more progressive form of administration; the poverty program proved that. Now local control to a level below that of local elites is the more progressive approach, and even though some explorations will probably prove unsuccessful, any change in this direction looks helpful for underclass organization and power.

VOTING

Malcolm X used to talk about "bullets or ballots," and he would end up saying the choice was up to the establishment, not the masses. Maybe he was right at the time, but not now. Bullets will not work, period, no matter who chooses them. And it is beginning to look as though some decent reforms can come in this country through the ballot. Two trends indicate this: the new vote for eighteen year olds and the drive to register voters among the underclass. Especially if these two trends combine some serious political reforms can be expected in the next decade. The new local political arenas will be the

communities where these two trends can have their greatest effect, Black cities and college towns, and especially smaller cities that have both groups. This will not make for national change in itself, but it will supply laboratory communities in which enough progressive political power will exist to try new things. It will also supply "model cities" for other cities to copy. It could also provide the anchor points for larger state and regional political moves. It would be a mistake to expect the new vote to make major changes, but it is a new resource and can be combined with others.

I will not discuss some of the more tangential possibilities for change that are on the scene, but one that could go either "left" or "right" is the new mobilization of "middle Americans," primarily Catholics in the North and Protestants in the South. This middle group is now a political football, rebounding from those higher to those lower, back and forth. They have traditionally oriented to classes above them, and will probably do so again, but there is a chance that they will make limited alliances with those below, especially if the Catholic hierarchy begins looking more kindly toward serious social reform. If there is ever to be a progressive third party, or a strong move toward reform by one of the major parties, it will require an alliance between underclass and working class, not an extremely likely possibility, but one worth working toward.

THE MIDDLE CLASS PROFESSIONAL

Underlying this discussion of underclass organization is the question of the role of middle class professionals. That many of them will vote and contribute money in a progressive direction is assumed, but their actual professional work must now be examined.

One of the greatest ironies of urban life is that many of the most humane and tolerant of the middle class, the social workers, teachers, professors, librarians, nurses, and so on are unwittingly engaging in the worst injustices. This is so because they work for agencies and organizations that are institutionally oppressive, and despite the personal good intentions of these various professionals, the policies of their organizations and the conditions under which they work make the consequences of their actions immoral. Librarians can only work within the limits of the books that are actually published and purchased for use in their libraries and the canons of library "professionalism"; teachers within the confines of their curricula, employing testing criteria and demands from the next higher educational level; social workers within the laws, agency rules and benefit restrictions; nurses within doctors' traditions, medical technology and hospital potential, and so on. These institutions are all tilted toward the middle class or working class and away from the underclass. This inequality is manifested in a number of ways.

The *location* of many service institutions, particularly hospitals and better universities, is, like the newer suburban jobs, out of reach for the urban underclass. The *style of interaction and speech* is impersonal and formal, thereby presenting an uninviting atmosphere for the more earthy and informal underclass. The *mobility strategy* is to lift the more motivated and talented clients into a higher class rather than helping the whole group move up collectively. The *power strategy*, by the logic of bureaucracy, is to foster dependency for clients rather than independence and autonomy. And the *target for service* is the better-off and more elite members of the underclass or working class (called "creaming" in some organizations), rather than the ordinary or hardship cases.

Recalling Herbert Laswell's famous definition of politics as "who gets what, when and how," it must be admitted that service bureaucracies are politically biased against the underclass, even when officially designed to serve them. This bias would have to be reversed before the vast horde of goodhearted service professionals can engage in actions which actually have good effects. The same is true for the masses of humanitarian young students who are now graduating from our universities and entering nonprofit organizations and service professions. They will have to change the institutional makeup of these professions and organizations before their good intentions will have effect.

This means that the notion of "advocacy," modeled after the role of the lawyer who disinterestedly helps whatever client is his, will have to be applied across-the-board to all the professions. The circle of change will then be one in which professionals truly help the underclass and give them self-help skills, the underclass use these skills to improve their own organization and political power, they use this power to change the service professions even more, and thus the vicious circle gets reversed.

The role of librarians, therefore, is to examine the politics of their profession, make whatever changes in style and content are necessary for "advocacy," and give the information and skills which the new urban poor actually need. This information and skill will doubtlessly be related to the resources already mentioned: ethnic organization, material organization, local control, and voting. It will also be related to other resources that can only be discovered through trial and error.

Thus time has outmoded the old model or stereotype of the librarian, standing innocently over piles of musty books, dressing in the fashions of the previous generation, shushing the natural impulses of children and blossoming youth, glossing over the problems of the community, and responding pliantly to the powers that be. The times have placed librarians at the center of social change, inviting them to use the immense power of information to help give new life and health to sad cities.