

The Essex Hall Lecture for 1975

URBAN PROBLEMS

and

MORAL ISSUES



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THE LINDSEY PRESS

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I

MANY nineteenth century thinkers ardently believed in Progress. They saw an ever-expanding future for the human race (or at least for its white-skinned members) pioneered by scientific research and consummated by technological ingenuity.

We who live in the latter half of the twentieth century can with hindsight see that their vision was largely an illusion, that as much evil as good has resulted from scientific discoveries, so that now we are faced, amongst other lesser evils and problems, with the terrifying prospect of an irreversibly polluted planet and widespread starvation.

But if in this century we have learned to be cautious about applying the results of research in the natural sciences we have come to pin our hopes, perhaps excessively, on the application of the more recently founded and rapidly emerging social sciences of psychology and sociology.

It is a curious fact that although the Greeks were probably the most self-conscious people in the ancient world they did not develop the social sciences — apart from politics — in the sense that we now know them. The empirical study of man in society eluded either their imagination or their need.

When Science eventually came into its own in Europe during the seventeenth century its exponents concentrated on the external universe rather than on man's inner nature or on the pattern of his social relationships. It was not in fact until the following century that the possibility of establishing a genuine social science moved nearer to realisation when men were prepared to ask *what is* before plunging into speculative discussion about *what ought to be*. Yet even then the study of social relationships and structures was dominated by philosophers, literati, economists and historians. The necessary step of applying notions of causality to human behaviour and of carrying out objective empirical enquiries to test the validity of theories and propositions was delayed until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the present century when social survey and other fieldwork methods were developed as essential tools.

The results of ever-increasing interest and research into our own behaviour have been greater frankness in facing problems and greater awareness of social realities. Social psychologists and sociologists have invaded the fields of industry, education, religion, penology, music and even sport, and practitioners have become progressively more sensitive to their research findings and to the implications these may have for policy and organization.

We live in a research-conscious age which has its own peculiar perils. The greatest of these is uncritical acceptance of the pronouncements of experts.

This is the Essex Hall Lecture for 1975, and was delivered in Liverpool on April 9, 1975. Essex Hall is the headquarters of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, and stands on the site of the building where the first avowedly Unitarian congregation met over two hundred years ago. The lecture was founded in 1892, and many distinguished persons in varied fields have contributed to the series. The delivery of the lecture is one of the leading events during the annual meetings of the Assembly.

A list of previous lectures still in print will be found in the catalogue of the Lindsey Press.

The Lindsey Press, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London, WC2R 3HY

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Set in Gill Sans, 10 pt on 11 pt

Cover by Jon Bowman

Designed by John Rowland

Printed by Leicester Printers Ltd., The Church Gate Press, Leicester

Technical expertise is a new form of intellectual idolatry and in recent years has led us into many avoidable errors. But there is also a valid use of experts. The findings of social science research can help us at least to grasp the complex nature of the problems with which we are involved and they can further show us how there are often unintended and extremely undesirable consequences of policy decisions made upon inadequate foundations or as the result of mere political prejudice. The role of social science is not so much then to tell us what to do and where we should be going, but to lighten the pathway beneath and before our feet. The fact that our society is more open to scrutiny than it ever was is a general social gain. If we do not understand our own selves and if we do not understand the nature of the social matrix in which we live, we are never likely to be in a position to make positive steps forward in the direction of achieving a better society. We can, if we so decide, make use of increasing technical know-how to serve our ultimate ends. Scientific knowledge, moreover, may help us further by clarifying our objectives and revealing the viability of our values in specific settings and milieux. There is in any case no prospect of going back to an earlier position, and we must strive critically and intelligently to make the best possible use of what social science has to offer us. It is vital, however, not to allow any science or scientific expertise to be our master.

I imagine that we are all aware that the world is shrinking, that the ever-increasing speed of travel and of communications is forcing us closer and closer together. At the same time throughout the world there is a steady and probably irreversible drive towards the creation of a common urban and largely industrial way of life. Well over half the people in developed countries already live in urban communities and over half of them in large cities of over a million inhabitants. By the year 2000 the figure may have reached well over 80 per cent. We are all bound up in this general process and thus to discuss the problems of modern society is in the main to discuss the problems that arise from rapid urbanisation and centralisation. What distinguishes societies from one another is the degree to which each has advanced down a more or less similar road. As we move towards a common way of life we tend to have to face common problems which, in a strange way, is making the whole world kin. We are all involved in one another's affairs and problems. Crises now are often world-wide in their effects and long-term implications. An outbreak of war anywhere is a potential threat to us all. So, too, in the field of economics I believe that prosperity in any country is seen to be bound up with prosperity or at least the absence of poverty elsewhere. Economic recessions and financial crises equally seem to have widespread consequences. The planet is indeed in process of becoming one and indivisible both in its good and its bad aspects.

So much by way of introduction.

I want now to consider more closely some of the problems that are common to most industrial centres and urban areas today. Indeed, to study what is happening in our cities is to put the whole of modern society, as it were, under a sociological microscope, for in urban areas we can see in little all the multiple and extremely complex issues which face Western Civilization itself.

It is a remarkable fact that although cities have historically been the cradles of great civilizations (Robert Ezra Park indeed called them 'the natural habitat of civilized man') they should in modern times have also been identified as foci of social malaise. We frequently talk about Crack-Up Cities, Unviable Urban Environments, Insensate Coke-towns, Ghost Cities of Paper. New York is said to be a nightmare on the verge of breakdown. Journalists speak of the dying Heart of America in Washington and of Calcutta as choking itself to death. The question is indeed whether modern urban man can survive at all in the monstrous artifacts of his own creation.

Such statements may sound exaggerated, even hysterical, but they illustrate that the problems that face us today in our increasingly urbanised society have added a new dimension of impotence, frustration, anxiety and fear, since, as is now apparent, we are failing to find answers to our problems and solutions to our dilemmas in spite of all our technological expertise and scientific sophistication. When Jane Jacobs chose *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as the title for her cautionary book about urbanization she was doing no more than highlighting the critical nature of what is taking place, for, just as we are polluting the atmosphere, poisoning the seas and oceans and turning some parts of the earth into dustbowls and wilderness, some of our greatest, wealthiest and biggest cities appear to be faced with insoluble human problems and in imminent danger of economic and political collapse.

How extraordinary that this should be so, and what has brought this state of affairs about? One major urban problem which has been clearly identified and described is poverty. Poverty in a general state of economic plenty and financial affluence, however unthinkable, is a social fact. We have developed the most sophisticated technological civilization the world has ever known but its richest and most advanced society, the United States of America, is nevertheless riddled with chronic unemployment and seemingly endemic poverty. A minority of the population, especially those obliged to live in the most crowded and undesirable inner city localities, have little hope for the future and seem condemned to exist only on the doles supplied from central sources from the surplus of the rest of the community's productivity.

Poverty is not especially an American problem. It is merely that its very existence in that land of plenty seems to be particularly incongruous and morally obscene. It is itself indeed a major source of pollution. We have deep pockets of poverty and deprivation in our own cities, as Ken Coates and Richard Silburn showed not very long ago in their study of the St. Ann's ward of Nottingham,* and those of us who are familiar with the older and less salubrious districts of other big cities, be it London or Liverpool, Glasgow or Birmingham, know that similar areas can be found there which contrast sharply with the general blandness and material well-being of most other sections of post-war society. There is no need to demonstrate here that many families in these distressed areas live below what may be regarded as a reasonable standard, inhabit insalubrious houses and flats and have poor prospects for the future. We may take it that, although the overall amount of urban poverty, not to speak of rural impoverishment, has diminished during the present century, there are still many very poor families and a number of grossly under-privileged communities even today whose members seem to have dropped through the social welfare net, and the continuing existence of such groups and areas is a badge of shame to us all. The submerged tenth which Charles Booth spoke about in the East End of London at the turn of the century may now be only a submerged twentieth: all the same a comparatively rich, technically competent modern society should surely be expected by now, relative deprivation apart, to have found some way of dealing with them and of bringing them into line with the material comfort which most people in recent years have enjoyed.

So one might expect, but obviously such is not the case. The poor, although much reduced numerically, remain with us and their continuing existence seems to be closely associated with, and probably causally related to, some other very serious social and economic problems, all of which seem characteristically to be associated with city life and inner city conditions more especially.

In down-town ghettos and slums there exists a tangled skein of multiple adversities and deprivations. Bad housing, overcrowding and insanitary dwellings, and even much more modern blocks of flats and maisonettes deteriorating in an environment of mingled waste-land and concrete jungle, characterise those city areas where racial and social discrimination seem to have set a whole mini-nation of people apart from the mainstream of modern life. The term 'Riot Renaissance' has indeed been coined by journalists to typify the inner city districts with their bricked-up windows, boarded-up doors, graffiti-covered walls and general air of blight and destruction. It is sometimes merely enough to give a home address in Liverpool 8, or Moss side in Manchester, or Govan in Glasgow to be refused a job. In such areas police activity, too, tends to be uncompromisingly direct and tough.

**Poverty and the Forgotten Englishman*; Penguin Books, 1970.

Inner city problem areas are the long term outcome of processes which have their origin in the economic structure of a society which has historically been deeply divided, in earlier times into nobles and peasants, more recently into rich and poor, and, now, into the successful and the unsuccessful. Such areas are not merely geographical, they are also cultural, political and economic, and their residents characteristically have come to embrace what has been called 'the culture of poverty' — that is to say, to accept inferiority and failure and the status of second-class citizenship. Other adverse factors and indicators of malaise are to be found co-existing with poverty. All are well known and here there is no need to do more than list them.

In the educational sphere a very low level of attainment, even for many children who have many basic gifts and high I.Q.s, is common. This, coupled with early leaving and high rates of drop-out, truancy and minor delinquency adds up to a considerable degree of comparative cultural deprivation and occupational handicap. In the sphere of work, too, we find low levels of skill, or complete absence of skills, and a reliance upon manual work, casual employment and, in times of economic recession, high levels of unemployment and redundancy.

With regard to health, certain kinds of mental illness, such as schizophrenia, seem to be unusually common and the rates of mortality and infant mortality are abnormally high. Drug addiction and alcoholism are further symptoms of despair, apathy and social withdrawal.

In family life, many absentee fathers are found, women are frequently left on their own, cruelty to children and wife battering and even incest are far from being rare. Many families seem indeed to be beyond the help of the social services and develop what in the past used to be called the 'problem family syndrome'.

Delinquency, stealing, violence against the person, general destructiveness and disrespect for all property whether personal or public, are all widely observable in these localities. The rates for both juvenile and adult crime are high and seem to be rising almost continuously. This is especially true for the poor urban neighbourhoods where, as John Lindsay points out, the residents are 'three to ten times more likely to become the victims of a violent crime than any other city dweller.'² In the rooming-house districts there are often very lonely and isolated people who cannot rely on anybody's help in times of difficulty.

Not all problem areas are fragmented, of course; some are more settled, and there are kindly neighbours or kinsfolk nearby, and at street corner level the transient emotional security of the teenage 'gang'. Life is not always disorganised, but the stabilising elements are few and unreliable. People tend to be distrustful of others and to fear contamination. Ethnic and

²*The City*; Bodley Head, 1970, p.167.

racial minorities who are often obliged to live in such run-down localities tend to group together for support and defence and, from time to time, racial hostilities and group jealousies flare into violent conflicts with one another and with the police. The so-called 'Ghetto Rebellions' of American cities in recent years, often apparently sparked off by some fairly trivial incident in the long hot summers, indicate the frustrations and hostilities which characterize the urban poor, and especially the Negro poor, who seem to be almost completely alienated from the successful majority of the population and, as a result, driven by despair to desperate and counter-productive reactions.

Not all families, of course, even in such problem areas, evidence these characteristics. Some indeed seem to survive the experience almost unscathed. But the risks are great, and for children in particular the overall pattern of disadvantages (familial, educational, environmental) can produce mental reactions to the experience of rejection, which are then handed on to the next generation in the form of deep feelings of inferiority and smouldering resentment. Even national policies of urban renewal not only fail to help such families and individuals but positively seem at times to make things worse for them. Housing policy invariably reinforces social segregation simply because slum clearance and sheer housing need demand that every priority and help shall be given to the poorer and most disadvantaged section of the population (the lower lower class). This is true whether we are thinking of the redevelopment of central urban areas or of the new housing estates erected on land on the peripheries of cities and conurbations; the only exception to this rule being those new towns which have *ab initio* catered for all social classes and a wide range of income groups. But in the older city centres we have tended to create new ghettos so that the less able, the old and the poor are congregated together to an even greater extent than, say, fifty years ago when inner city neighbourhoods contained a fair proportion of intelligent and ambitious people who were only held back by sheer lack of opportunity from climbing up the social ladder and making a new life for themselves in a better-class district. But, with the coming of the welfare state and the great increase of opportunities in an expanded state education system, most of the able and highly motivated members of the lower classes have already taken advantage of the new situation and gratefully joined the growing body of middle-class, home-owning white-collar or skilled workers, who constitute the norm in Western industrial societies. While the housing of families not living in insanitary conditions, or able to buy their own homes more or less where they want, has been left to private enterprise, a social map of most big cities can be drawn today which follows the contours of the class structure and the income gradient. The poor seem to get poorer, the disadvantaged more isolated, the least successful more deprived as contemporary social processes grind on their way. Even though it is true that a comfortable living standard, if not actual

affluence, is now enjoyed by a much wider bracket of the population, those who have been left behind are more cut off and more hopeless than before.

John Lindsay, in his book* based on his own personal experience of running New York, has painted a truly frightening picture of the social problems (especially crime and poverty) that face the administration but which they are increasingly powerless to solve, or even to reduce. Lindsay shows how mounting costs have outstripped the city's revenue, how the demands on welfare rise steeply as the more prosperous leave to live in safer and more salubrious suburbs and how central government's fiscal policy adds further financial burdens to the economic nightmare that cities like New York have to face. While conditions in Britain, for a number of structural reasons, are less severe, we have nonetheless made life in our own inner urban areas more problematic and difficult in recent years as a result of our policy of mass-redevelopment. We have swept away whole neighbourhoods of older property and replaced them by much more highly rented tower blocks of flats, or by building enormously expensive new estates miles away from the city centre where many of the new residents are unknown to one another and the whole atmosphere is one of unfinished business and raw novelty. Perhaps the biggest insult that the modern planners and architects have offered to inner city families is the tower block itself — surely in future years to be indicted as a symbol of our failure to understand the nature of social and family life, of our lack of sociological imagination and sheer architectural arrogance. The creation of urban motorways with their expensive concrete spaghetti junctions in congested places is yet another illustration of planned ruthlessness. In order to bring commuters quickly into cities many houses lying in the track have been demolished to make room for them, atmospheric pollution and noise have been vastly amplified and urban amenity itself imperilled at great public expense. As Phil Heywood wrote in his sensitive study of *Planning and Human Need*:

The urban motorway has little to recommend it. It is unwanted by a majority of the population, very expensive, unjust in that its benefits are confined to the more affluent while its costs are common to all, self-defeating, because it generates more traffic than it can handle without the construction of further motorways, and ultimately destructive of the urban environment it is supposed to serve. Its only defence, that there is no alternative, is not true.†

Here we must condemn the experts, the planners, architects and engineers who were the advisors of the ignorant politicians who, in the final analysis, must nevertheless carry the responsibility for such expensive blunders.

*Op. cit.

†David and Charles, 1974, p.91.

The terrible truth is that once accepted and translated into bricks and mortar, concrete and tarmac, the plans of the experts have more or less determined the physical future of many inner city areas and new estates for at least another fifty years. Once buildings are put up it is almost impossible to demolish them. Somehow or another we will have to learn to live with our planning errors and to find new ways of making their consequences less disastrous than at the moment they seem to be.

It is, of course, no use impugning the experts for bad faith. Their failure is our communal failure since a great many of us made the fatal blunder of believing what the pundits told us and of acting uncritically on their advice. We could have done better. For one thing we might have listened to what a few sociologists and some social workers were trying to tell us a quarter of a century ago about the dangers of destroying established communities and the social disadvantages of high rise flats. But it is a simple fact of history that we did not and that the politicians, national and local — for the best reasons, of course — went ahead with their destructive plans and implemented pseudo-utopian lunacies.

If it is true, as I have argued, that we have done lasting harm to our cities in recent decades, both by inadequate economic provision of funds for urban redevelopment and by thoughtlessly bulldozing whole neighbourhoods and forcibly resettling their residents in new and often unattractive new areas, why did the planners allow this to happen? I have said that I do not think their actions were due to bad faith, but rather to a general failure to see the true human and sociological nature of the processes with which they were, for the best reasons, interfering. The expert, it now seems clear enough, was not sufficiently expert, his expertise was much too limited, his vision partial and even superficial. The architects, engineers and politicians did not often ask for help from professional urban sociologists, and, even if they had, it is very doubtful if they would have got the right advice in the period of reconstruction following the end of the Second World War. Because urban sociology itself had not really advanced beyond its own early naturalistic stage and was still deeply enmeshed by the attractive but misleading theories of the Chicago school (which flourished under the inspiration of Robert Ezra Park and the guidance of Ernest Burgess and other well-known social scientists, from the nineteen-twenties onwards), it had little practical advice to give to those whose job it was to rebuild our shattered cities and to create the new, more equitable social environment that democratic principles required. The Chicago urban sociologists, for all their insight and personal brilliance, went up a broad blind alley of their own making and got sidetracked into trying to develop a theory of urban growth based on an ecological model, appropriate enough to the world of natural science, but which simply ignored too many vital factors to be adequate for the analysis of human societies. Neither theories based on organic nor those based on mechanical models can hope to do justice to the real social world which we

inhabit, a world of which we are partly the creatures and at the same time partly the creators.

The essential *hubris* of the Chicago and some other sociological schools has been their conviction that they could explain human and social action by social laws which correspond to the laws which seem to govern the physical universe. The Chicago school was perhaps the most spectacular example of this heresy. Yet Park himself at his shrewdest moments saw the fallacy in such a view and could speak of the city as being a moral rather than a natural artifact as, for example, when he wrote:

Human society, certainly in its natural and more rational expression, exhibits not merely an ecological, but an economic, a political and a moral order . . . One might perhaps say that the foundation of society was everywhere to restrict competition and, by so doing, bring about a more effective co-operation of the organic units of which society is composed.*

For all their influence the Chicago school was a failure. Later research work which we have no time to examine today showed up the fallacies and shortcomings of their general theories. They had hoped to be able to explain why cities had grown in the way in which their data seemed to indicate, they tried to enunciate general laws governing urban growth and, furthermore, they hoped that, thus equipped, they could make confident predictions about the future. But they failed because they did not see clearly enough that the growth of the city is more a moral and philosophical than a purely economic or ecological phenomenon. What they forgot to take into consideration was nothing less than the nature of man himself. The fatal flaw in their magic crystal was neglect of the essentially rational and self-determining qualities of men who are more than the puppets of circumstance, more than straws swept on by economic tides or the helpless victims of societal pressures.

Men make cities according to their ideas of what is appropriate at a particular time and place. Cities reflect men's ideas about the social world they live in, and the difference between a mediaeval town, with its cluster of houses snuggled under a fortified hill, and a modern megalopolis like Los Angeles or Chicago is a measure of growth not only of technology but, more importantly, of social and political philosophies. There are no laws, like the so-called laws of nature, to account for the transformation.†

The models of the Chicago school of urban sociologists are now of mainly historical interest. Another equally dangerous delusion which is not quite so dead, is what has been called architectural determinism, the idea that the

**Human Communities, The Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park, Vol. II, The Free Press, 1952, p. 157.*

†J. B. Mays, *The Poetry of Sociology*. Liverpool University Press Inaugural Lecture Series, 1968, p. 13.

men who build the homes and decide on the physical layout thereby determine how the future residents will relate to one another. This view has also been shown to be exaggerated to the point of falsehood. There are now no viable theories which leave out of account the elements of choice and political decision. We know that there was no absolutely binding need to redevelop our outworn urban areas or to create new ones in precisely the ways we did. Tenement flat blocks, for instance, are as much social as economic or architectural choices. Or, to put it in another way, all planning decisions are disguised value judgements; all planning is in fact a moral as well as a technical exercise.

Bearing this in mind, let us now turn to consider what we are at the moment doing about urban problems and what we might hope to achieve in the future if a greater measure of common purpose and common values could emerge and prevail.

III

If the acute urban problems we face may be summed up in such terms as poverty, racial discrimination, endemic crime and delinquency, substandard housing, an unviable technological environment, cultural deprivation, poor education and unemployment, and if it be agreed that such facts are, amongst other things, intimately related to the existence of multi-problem families, mental and physical ill-health and other personal disadvantages what, in addition to the ineffectual rehousing and redevelopment schemes, which we have already discussed, has been done to try to help the residents of inner city or new housing estate? The answer is to be found in the various kinds of social reforms and interventionist programmes which have been attempted in recent years in such run-down and deprived areas, and in various forms of community action which have been undertaken to deal especially with such major issues as poverty and juvenile crime.

The most radical and comprehensive description and critique of these programmes to date is to be found in *Dilemmas of Social Reform, Poverty and Community Action in the United States** by Peter Marris and Martin Rein. In this detailed case study of actual projects the authors have abundantly demonstrated the obstacles and difficulties that are involved in a democratic, pluralist, capitalist society when government or social work agencies, sponsored by the community and backed out of public funds, try, artificially, to interrupt the existing social processes on a very limited and often quite parochial scale. It is very much a matter of kicking against the socio-structural pricks. Whether the project be *Mobilization For Youth*, concerned with the problem of youthful drop-outs, or *Operation Headstart*, designed to overcome early educational disadvantages, or various projects in connection with the Presidential Anti-Delinquency programme campaign, the end result is invariably frustration. Such attempts are wrecked on the rocks of the very social system which has in one mood and voice brought them into being. As Marris and Rein conclude, 'no movement of reform in American society can hope to supplant the conflicts of interest from which policy evolves.' Democratic procedures themselves can obstruct community reform plans. People are free to hinder or to support community based projects. The outcome of such ventures cannot be controlled from on high, by government decree, without at the same time undermining the foundation of the freedom of citizens to take part in decision making in the affairs of their own society. Gloomily, Marris and Rein conclude: 'All the money, energy, talent and manoeuvre that goes into a movement of reform may achieve little more than a glossy prospectus and a distinguished committee'. It all ends then not with a bang but a whimper. 'A vision of opening opportunities for millions of maltreated youngsters might end with a dozen children in a makeshift nursery school, or a class of seamstresses learning a

*Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967.

poorly-paid trade for which they were already in demand.' 'American society', they go on, 'so liberal in its tolerance of criticism and innovation, suffers from a corresponding impotence to enforce any reintegration.'^{*} We may fairly conclude that the same diagnosis is true of our own more highly structured society. Indeed, though perhaps for rather different reasons, the attempts that have been made in England in the last decade to emulate the American projects have all so far at least proved to be more or less abortive. The Educational Priority Area experiment which stemmed from the notion of positive discrimination in the Plowden Committee Report[†] ran its allotted span and ended more or less in stalemate. The gains were few and far between, limited, local and predictable. No policy change or fresh impetus has resulted other than a small increase in pre-school nursery schooling. The more sophisticated Community Development Projects which were launched jointly by the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Security in certain selected inner urban areas in an attempt to stimulate citizens to be more actively associated with the solution of their own problems and more willing to manipulate the existing social services for their own well-being, although not yet completed or objectively evaluated, seem destined to a similar fate to that which overtook the EPAs. The CDPs and various other projects have become assimilated to the government's urban aid programme — an extraordinary mixed bag of community organisation, groupwork, cash grants for specific projects and attempts to pioneer new forms of employment in very depressed localities plus money for a whole hotch-potch of good works and worthy causes — is little more than a kind of first aid for the deprived, a financial bonus for run-down neighbourhoods, a boost for local endeavour during difficult times; in fact something of a smoke-screen to hide some of our running social sores under the guise of operational research. I have nothing whatsoever against the concept of urban aid or against specific ventures which have received help under its banner. I can only say, however, that such programmes are never likely to do more than tinker with the basic shortcomings of our social system and mislead both politicians and the public into believing that something really drastic and dramatic is under way.

One of the recurring concepts invoked in almost all recent discussions of the problems of urban and, especially, of inner urban life, is that of 'community'. Community is a tantalisingly aloof yet emotionally highly evocative idea which has haunted the sociological and social-work consciousness for a long time. It is very much a vogue term, a 'with it' concept. We now talk about 'community care' of the mentally sick and the handicapped; even of 'community medicine' which we must suppose is vastly different from any kind of medicine we have known before, although it does sound at times

^{*}Ibid.

[†]*Children and their Primary Schools, A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)*, in 2 vols.; H.M.S.O., 1967.

rather like the offspring of our old friend public health! Indeed, that modern man's guide to enlightened social work, the Report of the Seebohm Committee^{*}, devoted a whole chapter to 'The Community' and recommended that social work 'should encourage the development of community identity and assist mutual aid, particularly in areas of rapid population turnover, with high rates of delinquency, child deprivation and mental illness and other indices of social pathology.' Precisely how this might be done, however, was left in a cloud of vague generalizations and hopeful clichés which seem to involve giving more money to existing organizations and providing more technical help and stimulation through professional community workers. The latter are urged also, as one of their principal objectives, to try to increase the amount of citizen participation in local affairs. Such recommendations read satisfactorily enough in a fat government report and sound convincing when promulgated from the conference platform but, as anyone who has ever been involved in neighbourhood social work for any length of time knows, they are enormously difficult to translate into precise actions.

Perhaps we ought to pause here and say briefly what we mean by this word 'community'. Primarily it refers to the quality of personal relationships within a group setting, involving some degree of shared life, the acceptance of certain norms of behaviour and an agreed set of values. There has also got to be some common territorial or institutional base where communal sentiments and common activities can be focussed. I imagine that anyone who has had the good fortune to live, even for a short time, in a small community would regard it as an unforgettable experience. I know this is so in my own case. For nearly a dozen years I lived and worked at the University Settlement in Liverpool and those years were among the most fruitful of my life. There I experienced the fellowship of work, based on being a member of a social work team. There, too, I experienced the fellowship of sharing my life with other residents of the house; with students and co-workers in a long succession of mutual endeavour and social events. When I came to leave the Settlement, I left a part of me behind and ever since have looked back longingly and lovingly at those community-based years. All the same, what I am describing is very much an ideal and the experience of genuine community is clearly something that rarely occurs in the ordinary everyday world of conventional social life. It is, for this reason, a very dangerous concept to employ in connection with social welfare work.

Is it really conceivable, though, that the presence of a few professional community workers will overcome the deep-seated strains towards anomie which sociologists have found to characterise these urban problem areas? Have not the churches and the settlements for many years tried to do very

^{*}*Report of the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services*; H.M.S.O., 1968.

much what the new social work professionals hope to do and with results which they themselves would no doubt readily assess as only partially successful, or sometimes even almost complete failures?

The urban ghettos of chronically disadvantaged people are the product of many years of social, economic, political and cultural influences interacting in a complex web of causality to produce the end results that we now deplore. Part of the trouble must be that many of these residents in problem areas are in some ways constitutionally and hereditarily deficient and cannot compete successfully against more able, more adaptable and more resilient personalities in the kind of social system we operate. But this cannot be the whole story. It is surely the social matrix itself which is partly to blame and the normal operation of accepted institutions which help to produce a comparatively deprived group or underclass at the base of the social ladder.

Can any social action ever eliminate this problem group, or are we in fact doomed always to carry a proportion of relatively deprived, relatively less successful and relatively inferior citizens? Furthermore, if we cannot, does it matter?

IV

Our answer to those two rhetorical questions must surely be in both cases 'yes'. It does matter that we have a proportion of deprived families and individuals living less wholesome lives in inferior environments, but it is very hard indeed to envisage a time when there will be no disadvantaged people at all. Perhaps all we can hope to do is progressively to reduce their numbers in both the absolute and relative sense. And we can see to it, too, that if we do have to have the poor that they shall at least be the best dressed, most comfortably housed poor in the world!

That is what I would call the practical, pragmatic and purely political position. But in our hearts we know there is more that remains to be said,

more to be admitted, not only about our society and its organisation, but more importantly and distressingly about ourselves.

We cannot evade the moral challenges by appealing to social laws. As we now know, such laws do not exist for us to hide comfortably behind them. In modern societies there must be overall planning. This cannot be avoided and, as we have said, all planning decisions are basically value judgements, and all value judgements are moral — even religious — decisions.

Planning, it needs to be said, must be both qualitative and quantitative. It should not solely be concerned with the number of people who have the basic material necessities and normal comforts of life, but also with promoting high cultural values and ethical standards which, historically, have always been the concern of minorities and sometimes, too, of social elites. There is a moral and cultural dilemma here that we in the Western democracies must face — the danger of down-grading standards and values while striving to achieve a more egalitarian and just society. We could quite easily become submerged by materialism, commercialism and an ever more insatiable hunger for luxuries and consumer goods, which, even if we could distribute them more equally, would not advance, and might even injure, the fundamentally spiritual nature of our civilization. If the market approach to civilized life is inadequate, so, too, is one based on limitless aspiration for more goods, more energy, more industry. That way lies pollution and ultimate sterility for the entire planet.*

My own belief is that man is essentially a moral being and that civilization is a hazardous ethical pilgrimage. The whole history of our civilization has been, in Schweitzer's view, a long and difficult struggle to attain a truly ethical outlook on life.† It is a dangerous journey, with many defeats and setbacks, and only occasional steps forward. What Schweitzer implies by ethics is similar to what others mean by transcendence, that is to say by the exercise of will and self-control we strive to overcome the baser and more egocentric aspects of our human nature and personality drives. Civilization is then the subjugation of nature, and especially our own human nature, to the rule of ethics and the tenets of morality.

The key concept at the sociological level is, I believe, that of community. How best may we come to live together and organise our affairs so that a just society may ultimately emerge? But, as we have already rather gloomily said, the sense of community is more often an aspiration than an actuality. We talk about it a great deal, but find ourselves in a hundred ways frustrated from attaining anything remotely like it. It is a bitter commentary that we perhaps come nearest to achieving true community as a nation only when we are at war and threatened by an external enemy.

*See especially Barbara Ward and René Dubois, *Only One Earth, The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*; Penguin Books, London, 1972.

†See his *Civilization and Ethics* and *The Decay and Restoration of Civilization*, both books published in English by Allen and Unwin, London, 1923.

If we cannot blame the planners or shelter behind sociological laws then where can we hide? It may be true that our social institutions exert strong pressures upon us and strictly limit our freedom of action, but it is also true that these institutions are themselves what we have made them and allowed them to be. They can be changed, if only we will it and if enough of us will it! The issues before us, then, are moral choices. The problems that face us are religious in origin and not truly political, technical, economic or scientific.

As Robert Lynd put it in his classic work *Knowledge For What**; 'We watch culture change and say that "it changes". But culture does not "work", "move", "change", but is worked, is moved, is changed. It is people who do things, and when their habits and impulses cease to carry an institutional folkway, that bit of culture disappears.' We must learn then to change our culture, to reshape our institutions, to reorder society. Or in Schweitzer's language to make our world more ethical. But what principles shall prevail and what can the possible basis of our social consensus be? Marxist socialism is a possible candidate which attracts the young, but one which I reject because it is in the last resort authoritarian. Democracy is good because it rests on the Christian principle of reverence for human personality, it upholds, within reason, the rights of minorities even while agreeing that in most things the will of the majority shall prevail. I would base social ethics upon Christian principles even in an age which is avowedly non-Christian in the sense that Christian belief and practices are now only adhered to by a small proportion of the population. I can find no other ethic which combines reverence for life with concern for minorities, which raises the notion of duty above that of right and which in so many substantial ways resembles the 'good family'. Just as the Christian church is in the world for the world's and not for its own sake, so the Christian ethic is the leaven of our secular society because our secular society needs it, cannot long survive without it. Even if men cannot accept the theology and metaphysics, the dogmas and creeds of the Christian church, they can surely come together to accept and agree on its ethics for these, I would argue following Schweitzer, are the true ethics of civilization itself. Christian, or to keep in line with my own argument, civilized ethics are simply love in action, principles and actions which stem from the desire to deal with other people in the way in which we ourselves would hope to be treated — that is to say, with mercy, compassion, justice, loving-kindness and brotherly equality. As William Temple said many years ago when he was Bishop of Manchester: 'We have to work out again the social principles of the Gospel; we must hope to be able to offer the distracted world a *Christian sociology* which all Christians agree to propagate.'† This means that our social relations must be re-shaped and our institutions revised in ways which will demonstrate our acceptance of

these ethical principles. For this we need a sociology of commitment, a sociology which will help us to rebuild our social world nearer to the heart's desire. A new spirit is called for which encourages people to care more for mutual aid and mutual affection than for personal gain and individual success. But the obstacles are great and lie mainly within ourselves. To quote Temple again, 'We are the social problem; we are the source of calamity.'*

Progress, if it comes at all, will come only as a result of individuals and groups making personal sacrifices on behalf of others. It cannot be achieved by force or by legislation. Social justice can come only through right relationships or, in more Christian terms, salvation will not be achieved in isolation but in a redeemed fellowship.

But the trouble with our industrial democracies is that the motives for redemption are usually absent. The majority of the population are comparatively well-off and enjoying the good things of the affluent society. They are reluctant to let their advantages go or to share them with their less affluent and less successful fellow citizens. They do not sufficiently reverence the lives of the social under-class to take the necessary political and economic steps to restore their self-respect and place in the community. But, until they do, the democracies will make no more moral progress and may indeed become less ethical and less civilized even than they are today.

Reverence for life, abiding concern for human personality, the more abundant life of which Jesus spoke must always take place within a social context. As William Temple would argue, man is naturally and incurably social. So, we return to the concept of community, the dream that has always haunted the imagination of both religious and secular man. This deep-seated yearning for community is at the sociological level an echo of the soul's search for God, for the kingdom of God which, insofar as it exists in the here and now, demands loving and just social relations between individual men and different groups. It is a socialist ideal but without the coercion and totalitarianism of such communist states as the world has so far known. Totalitarianism is, I believe, always anti-Christian, it is always opposed to the full flowering of the human spirit and as such is profoundly unethical. Of course, there must always be law, authority and discipline in society. Planning is necessary and unavoidable, but the planning must be ethically sound and based on fundamental respect for the individual life and the free human spirit. Otherwise it is tyranny. Our trouble today is that, for political reasons, we tend to avoid long-term and to adopt only short-term policies. So increasingly productivity raises the material standards of industrial countries while simultaneously it increases pollution and continues to drain away the world stock of valuable natural resources. 'What is

*Princeton University Press, 1939, p.38.

†*Personal Religion and the Life of Fellowship*; Longmans, 1926, p.75. The italics are mine.

*Ibid, p.78.

needed,' Sir Brian Flowers argues, 'is some means of bringing technological progress under social control, for making both government and industry more responsive to the desires of the community, and more responsible for investigating the reasonable long-term implications of technological change upon society at large.* This cannot be done unless we ourselves decide to forgo short-term advantages for the long-term common good. Such problems as poverty, racial discrimination, crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, vandalism, ghetto-ization, slums, violence and cultural nihilism will be solved only when we make our social structure more ethical and more just. This, too, must not be achieved by any lowering of cultural, educational or aesthetic standards. The process must be one of raising up those who are below the norm, not of levelling down those who are above it. Material goods will have to be sacrificed for cultural gains, private affluence give way to communal amenity. As Barbara Ward and René Dubois put it in a more ecological context: 'To add another car and another television set to already affluent families at the cost of dead lakes and dying rivers begins to look absurd.'† As they suggest 'for the first time, the logic of convergence is beginning to outweigh the effects of sects and schisms'‡, and we are coming, however slowly and painfully, to realise that mankind is truly one and indivisible. At the societal level, the same truth is being borne in upon us, resist it how we may try. Man is essentially a social being and societies are basically moral structures. Social planning and policy must, therefore, be ethically sound, otherwise they will fail and fall disastrously.

But the prognosis is not optimistic, nor is the eventual outcome necessarily going to be a happy one. However much we may know about urban history, however subtle may be our analysis of the facts of urban living, however advanced our science and technology, they will not tell us what to do. What is needed above everything else at the present time is clarity of vision, purity of heart and moral stamina. The crisis we have been discussing is not so much an urban as an ethical crisis, a crisis of values and of courage to do what we know to be right. In such a predicament it is good to listen again to the voice of Schweitzer speaking of 'the individual as the sole agent of the renewal of civilization' and maintaining that only individual men can perform the necessary function 'of producing new spiritual-ethical ideas'§. Individual men means people like you and me! Knowing our inner selves may lead to pessimism, but this need not be so depressing at the communal level. There is nothing at least in the study of sociology which leads me to believe that we are not largely responsible for our own actions and, to a fair degree, masters of our own destiny.

**Technology and Man*, The First Leverhulme Memorial Lecture: Liverpool University Press, 1972, p.24.

†*Op. cit.* p.204.

‡*Ibid.*

§*The Decay and Restoration of Civilisation. Op. cit.* pp.68-9.

THE LINDSEY PRESS

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