# VERNACULAR VALUES

left soft vernacular hard industrial right

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## 1ST PART
## THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL CHOICE

Where the war against subsistence has led can best be seen in the mirror of so-called development. During the 1960's, "development" acquired a status that ranked with "freedom" and "equality". Other peoples' development became the rich man's duty and burden. Development was described as a building program – people of all colors spoke of "nation-building" and did so without blushing. The immediate goal of this social engineering was the installation of a balanced set of equipment in a society not yet so instrumented: the building of more schools, more modern hospitals, more extensive highways, new factories, power grids, together with the creation of a population trained to staff and need them.

Today, the moral imperative of ten years ago appears naive; today, few critical thinkers would take such an instrumentalist view of the desirable society. Two reasons have changed many minds: First, undesired externalities exceed benefits – the tax burden of schools and hospitals is more than any economy can support; the ghost towns produced by highways impoverish the urban and rural landscape. Plastic buckets from Saõ Paulo are lighter and cheaper than those made of scrap by the local tinsmith in Western Brazil. But first cheap plastic puts the tinsmith out of existence, and then the fumes of plastic leave a special trace on the environment – a new kind of ghost. The destruction of age-old competence as well as these poisons are inevitable byproducts and will resist all exorcisms for a long time. Cemeteries for industrial wastes simply cost too much, more than the buckets are worth. In economic jargon, the "external costs" exceed not only the profit made from plastic bucket production, but also the very salaries paid in the manufacturing process.

These rising externalities, however, are only one side of the bill which development has exacted. Counterproductivity is its reverse side. Externalities represent costs that are "outside" the price paid by the consumer for what he wants – costs that he, others or future generations will at some point be charged. Counterproductivity, however, is a new kind of disappointment which arises "within" the very use of the good purchased. This internal counterproductivity, an inevitable component of modern institutions, has become the constant frustration of the poorer majority of each institution's clients: intensely experienced but rarely defined. Each major sector of the economy produces its own unique and paradoxical contradictions. Each necessarily effects the opposite of that for which it was structured. Economists, who are increasingly competent to put price-tags on externalities, are unable to deal with negative internalities, and cannot measure the inherent frustration of captive clients which is something other than a cost. For most people, schooling twists genetic differences into certified degradation; the medicalization of health increases demand for services far beyond the possible and useful, and undermines that organic coping ability which common sense calls health; transportation, for the great majority bound to the rush hour, increases the time spent in the servitude to traffic, reducing both freely chosen mobility and mutual access. The development of educational, medical and other welfare agencies has actually removed most clients from the obvious purpose for which these projects were designed and financed. This institutionalized frustration, resulting from compulsory consumption, combines with the new externalities. It demands an increase in the production of scavenging and repair services to impoverish and even destroy individuals and communities, affecting them in a class-specific manner. In effect, the peculiarly modern forms of frustration and paralysis and destruction totally discredit the description of the desirable society in terms of installed production capacity.

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Defense against the damages inflicted by development, rather than access to some new "satisfaction", has become the most sought after privilege. You have arrived if you can commute outside the rush hour; probably attended an elite school; if you can give birth at home; are privy to rare and special knowledge if you can bypass the physician when you are ill; are rich and lucky if you can breathe fresh air; by no means poor, if you can build your own shack. The underclasses are now made up of those who must consume the counterproductive packages and ministrations of their self-appointed tutors; the privileged are those who are free to refuse them. A new attitude, then, has taken shape during these last years: the awareness that we cannot ecologically afford equitable development leads many to understand that, even if development in equity were possible, we would neither want more of it for ourselves, nor want to suggest it for others.

Ten years ago, we tended to distinguish social options exercised within the political sphere from technical options assigned to the expert. The former were meant to focus on goals, the latter more on means. Roughly, options about the desirable society were ranged on a spectrum that ran from right to left: here, capitalist, over there, socialist "development". The how was left to the experts. This one-dimensional model of politics is now passé. Today, in addition to "who gets what", two new areas of choice have become lay issues: the very legitimacy of lay judgment on the apt means for production, and the trade-offs between growth and freedom. As a result, three independent classes of options appear as three mutually perpendicular axes of public choice. On the x-axis I place the issues related to social hierarchy, political authority, ownership of the means of production and allocation of resources that are usually designated by the terms, right and left. On the y-axis, I place the technical choices between hard and soft, extending these terms far beyond a pro and con atomic power: not only goods, but also services are affected by the hard and soft alternatives.

A third choice falls on the z-axis. Neither privilege nor technique, but rather the nature of human satisfaction is at issue. To characterize the two extremes, I shall use terms defined by Erich Fromm. At the bottom, I place a social organization that fits the seeking of satisfaction in having; at the top, in doing. At the bottom, therefore, I place a commodity-intensive society where needs are increasingly defined in terms of packaged goods and services designed and prescribed by professionals, and produced under their control. This social ideal corresponds to the image of a humanity composed of individuals, each driven by considerations of marginal utility, the image that has developed from Mandeville via Smith and Marx to Keynes, and that Louis Dumont calls *homo economicus*. At the opposite end, at the top of the z-axis, I place – in a fan-shaped array – a great variety of societies where existence is organized around subsistence activities. In its unique way, each of these cannot but be skeptical about the claims of growth. In such new societies where contemporary tools ease the creation of use-values, commodities and industrial production in general are deemed valuable mainly insofar as they are either resources or instruments for subsistence. Hence, the social ideal corresponds to *homo habilis*, an image which includes numerous individuals who are differently competent at coping with reality, the opposite of *homo economicus*, who is dependent on standardized "needs". Here, people who choose their independence and their own horizon derive more satisfaction from doing and making things for immediate use than from the products of slaves or machines. Therefore, every cultural project is necessarily modest. Here, people go as far as they can toward self-subsistence, they themselves producing what they are able, exchanging their surplus with neighbors, avoiding – insofar as possible – the products of wage labor.

The shape of contemporary society is the result of the ongoing choices along these three independent axes. And a polity's credibility today depends on the degree of public participation in each of the three option sets. The beauty of a unique, socially articulated image of each society will, hopefully, become the determining factor of its international impact. Esthetic and ethical example may replace the competition of economic indicators. Actually, no other route is open. A mode of life characterized by austerity, modesty, constructed by hard work and built on a small scale does not lend itself to propagation through marketing. For the first time in history, poor and rich societies would be effectively placed on equal terms. But for this to become true, the present perception of international north-south relations in terms of development must first be superseded.

A related high status goal of our age, full employment, must also be reviewed. Ten years ago, attitudes toward development and politics were simpler than what is possible today; attitudes toward work were sexist and naive. Work was identified with employment, and prestigious employment confined to males. The analysis of shadow work done off the job was tabu. The left referred to it as a remnant of primitive reproduction, the right, as organized consumption – all agreed that, with development, such labor would wither away. The struggle for more jobs, for equal pay for equal jobs, and more pay for every job pushed all work done off the job into a shadowed corner hidden from politics and economics. Recently, feminists, together with some economists and sociologists, looking at so-called intermediary structures, have begun to examine the unpaid contribution made to an industrial economy, a contribution for which women are principally responsible. These persons discuss "reproduction" as the complement to production. But the stage is mostly filled with self-styled radicals who discuss new ways of creating conventional jobs, new forms of sharing available jobs and how to transform housework, education, childbearing and commuting into paid jobs. Under the pressure of such demands, the full

employment goal appears as dubious as development. New actors, who question the very nature of work, advance toward the limelight. They distinguish industrially structured work, paid or unpaid, from the creation of a livelihood beyond the confines of employment and professional tutors. Their discussions raise the key issues on the vertical axis. The choice for or against the notion of man as a growth addict decides whether unemployment, that is, the effective liberty to work free from wages and/or salary, shall be viewed as sad and a curse, or as useful and a right.

In a commodity-intensive society, basic needs are met through the products of wage-labor – housing no less than education, traffic no less than the delivery of infants. The work ethic which drives such a society legitimates employment for salary or wages and degrades independent coping. But the spread of wage-labor accomplishes more – it divides unpaid work into two opposite types of activities. While the loss of unpaid work through the encroachment of wage-labor has often been described, the creation of a new kind of work has been consistently ignored: the unpaid complement of industrial labor and services. A kind of forced labor or industrial serfdom in the service of commodity-intensive economies must be carefully distinguished from subsistence-oriented work lying outside the industrial system. Unless this distinction is clarified and used when choosing options on the z-axis, unpaid work guided by professionals could spread through a repressive, ecological welfare society. Women's serfdom in the domestic sphere is the most obvious example today. Housework is not salaried. Nor is it a subsistence activity in the sense that most of the work done by women was such as when, with their menfolk, they used the entire household as the setting and the means for the creation of most of the inhabitants' livelihood. Modern housework is standardized by industrial commodities oriented towards the support of production, and exacted from women in a sex-specific way to press them into reproduction, regeneration and a motivating force for the wage-laborer. Well publicized by feminists, housework is only one expression of that extensive shadow economy which has developed everywhere in industrial societies as a necessary complement to expanding wage-labor. This shadow complement, together with the formal economy, is a constitutive element of the industrial mode of production. It has escaped economic analysis, as the wave nature of elementary particles before the Quantum Theory. And when concepts developed for the formal economic sector are applied to it, they distort what they do not simply miss. The real difference between two kinds of unpaid activity – shadow-work which complements wage-labor, and subsistence work which competes with and opposes both – is consistently missed. Then, as subsistence activities become more rare, all unpaid activities assume a structure analogous to housework. Growth-oriented work inevitably leads to the standardization and management of activities, be they paid or unpaid.

A contrary view of work prevails when a community chooses a subsistence-oriented way of life. There, the inversion of development, the replacement of consumer goods by personal action, of industrial tools by convivial tools is the goal. There, both wage-labor and shadow-work will decline since their product, goods or services, is valued primarily as a means for ever inventive activities, rather than as an end, that is, dutiful consumption. There, the guitar is valued over the record, the library over the schoolroom, the back yard garden over the supermarket selection. There, the personal control of each worker over his means of production determines the small horizon of each enterprise, a horizon which is a necessary condition for social production and the unfolding of each worker's individuality. This mode of production also exists in slavery, serfdom and other forms of dependence. But it flourishes, releases its energy, acquires its adequate and classical form only where the worker is the free owner of his tools and resources; only then can the artisan perform like a virtuoso. This mode of production can be maintained only within the limits that nature dictates to both production and society. There, useful unemployment is valued while wage-labor, within limits, is merely tolerated.

The development paradigm is more easily repudiated by those who were adults on January 10, 1949. That day, most of us met the term in its present meaning for the first time when President Truman announced his Point Four Program. Until then, we used "development" to refer to species, real estate and moves in chess – only thereafter to people, countries and economic strategies. Since then, we have been flooded by development theories whose concepts are now curiosities for collectors – "growth", "catching up", "modernization", "imperialism", "dualism", "dependency", "basic needs", "transfer of technology", "world system", "autochthonous industrialization" and "temporary unlinking". Each onrush came in two waves. One carried the pragmatist who highlighted free enterprise and world markets; the other, the politicians who stressed ideology and revolution. Theorists produced mountains of prescriptions and mutual caricatures. Beneath these, the common assumptions of all were buried. Now is the time to dig out the axioms hidden in the idea of development itself.

Fundamentally, the concept implies the replacement of general competence and satisfying subsistence activities by the use and consumption of commodities; the monopoly of wage-labor over all other kinds of work; redefinition of needs in terms of goods and services mass-produced according to expert design; finally, the rearrangement of the environment in such fashion that space, time, materials and design favor production and consumption while they degrade or paralyze use-value oriented activities that satisfy needs directly. And all such worldwide homogeneous changes and processes are valued as inevitable and good. The great Mexican muralists dramatically portrayed the typical figures before the theorists outlined the

stages. On their walls, one sees the ideal type of human being as the male in overalls behind a machine or in a white coat over a microscope. He tunnels mountains, guides tractors, fuels smoking chimneys. Women give him birth, nurse and teach him. In striking contrast to Aztec subsistence, Rivera and Orozco visualize industrial work as the sole source of all the goods needed for life and its possible pleasures.

But this ideal of industrial man now dims. The tabus that protected it weaken. Slogans about the dignity and joy of wage-labor sound tinny. Unemployment, a term first introduced in 1898 to designate people without a fixed income, is now recognized as the condition in which most of the world's people live anyway – even at the height of industrial booms. In Eastern Europe especially, but also in China, people now see that, since 1950, the term, "working class", has been used mainly as a cover to claim and obtain privileges for a new bourgeoisie and its children. The "need" to create employment and stimulate growth, by which the self-appointed paladins of the poorest have so far squashed any consideration of alternatives to development, clearly appears suspect.

The challenges to development take multiple forms. In Germany alone, France or Italy, thousands of groups experiment, each differently, with alternatives to an industrial existence. Increasingly, more of these people come from blue-collar homes. For most of them, there is no dignity left in earning one's livelihood by a wage. They try to "unplug themselves from consumption", in the phrase of some South Chicago slum-dwellers. In the USA, at least four million people live in the core of tiny and highly differentiated communities of this kind, with at least seven times as many individually sharing their values – women seek alternatives to gynecology; parents alternatives to schools; home-builders alternatives to the flush toilet; neighborhoods alternatives to commuting; people alternatives to the shopping center. In Trivandrum, South India, I have seen one of the most successful alternatives to a special kind of commodity dependence – to instruction and certification as the privileged forms of learning. One thousand seven hundred villages have installed libraries, each containing at least a thousand titles. This is the minimum equipment they need to be full members of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad, and they may retain their membership only as long as they loan at least three thousand volumes per year. I was immensely encouraged to see that, at least in South India, village-based and village-financed libraries have turned schools into adjuncts to libraries, while elsewhere libraries during these last ten years have become mere deposits for teaching materials used under the instruction of professional teachers. Also in Bihar, India, Medico International represents a grassroots-based attempt to de-medicalize health care, without falling into the trap of the Chinese barefooted doctor. The latter has been relegated to the lowest level lackey in a national hierarchy of bio-control.

Besides taking such experiential forms, the challenge to development also uses legal and political means. In an Austrian referendum last year, an absolute majority refused permission to Chancellor Kreisky, politically in control of the electorate, to inaugurate a finished atomic generator. Citizens increasingly use the ballot and the courts, in addition to more traditional interest group pressures, to set negative design criteria for the technology of production. In Europe, "green" candidates begin to win elections. In America, citizen legal efforts begin to stop highways and dams. Such behavior was not predictable ten years ago – and many men in power still do not recognize it as legitimate. All these grassroots-organized lives and actions in the Metropolis challenge not only the recent concept of overseas development, but also the more fundamental and root concept of progress at home.

At this juncture, it is the task of the historian and the philosopher to clarify the sources of and disentangle the process resulting in Western needs. Only thus shall we be able to understand how such a seemingly enlightened concept produced such devastating exploitation. Progress, the notion which has characterized the West for 2000 years, and has determined its relations to outsiders since the decay of classical Rome, lies behind the belief in needs. Societies mirror themselves not only in their transcendent gods, but also in their image of the alien beyond their frontiers. The West exported a dichotomy between "us" and "them" unique to industrial society. This peculiar attitude towards self and others is now worldwide, constituting the victory of a universalist mission initiated in Europe. A redefinition of development would only reinforce the Western economic domination over the shape of formal economics by the professional colonization of the informal sector, domestic and foreign. To eschew this danger, the six-stage metamorphosis of a concept that currently appears as "development" must first be understood.

Every community has a characteristic attitude towards others. The Chinese, for example, cannot refer to the alien or his chattel without labeling them with a degrading marker. For the Greek, he is either the house guest from a neighboring polis, or the barbarian who is less than fully man. In Rome, barbarians could become members of the city, but to bring them into it was never the intent or mission of Rome. Only during late antiquity, with the Western European Church, did the alien become someone in need, someone to be brought in. This view of the alien as a burden has become consititutive for Western society; without this universal mission to the world outside, what we call the West would not have come to be.

The perception of the outsider as someone who must be helped has taken on successive forms. In late antiquity, the barbarian mutated into the pagan – the second stage toward development had begun. The pagan was defined as the unbaptized, but ordained by nature to become Christian. It was the duty of those within the Church to incorporate him by baptism into the body of Christendom. In the early Middle Ages, most people in Europe were baptized, even though they might not yet be converted. Then the Muslim

appeared. Unlike Goths and Saxons, Muslims were monotheists, and obviously prayerful believers; they resisted conversion. Therefore, besides baptism, the further needs to be subjected and instructed had to be imputed. The pagan mutated into the infidel, our third stage. By the late Middle Ages, the image of the alien mutated again. The Moors had been driven from Granada, Columbus had sailed across the ocean, and the Spanish Crown had assumed many functions of the Church. The image of the wild man who threatens the civilizing function of the humanist replaced the image of the infidel who threatens the faith. At this time also, the alien was first described in economy-related terms. From many studies on monsters, apes and wild men, we learn that the Europeans of this period saw the wild man as having no needs. This independence made him noble, but a threat to the designs of colonialism and mercantilism. To impute needs to the wild man, one had to make him over into the native, the fifth stage. Spanish courts, after long deliberation, decided that at least the wild man of the New World had a soul and was, therefore, human. In opposition to the wild man, the native has needs, but needs unlike those of civilized man. His needs are fixed by climate, race, religion and providence. Adam Smith still reflects on the elasticity of native needs. As Gunnar Myrdal has observed, the construct of distinctly native needs was necessary both to justify colonialism and to administer colonies. The provision of government, education and commerce for the natives was for four hundred years the white man's assumed burden.

Each time the West put a new mask on the alien, the old one was discarded because it was now recognized as a caricature of an abandoned self-image. The pagan with his naturally Christian soul had to give way to the stubborn infidel to allow Christendom to launch the Crusades. The wild man became necessary to justify the need for secular humanist education. The native was the crucial concept to promote self-righteous colonial rule. But by the time of the Marshall Plan, when multinational conglomerates were expanding and the ambitions of transnational pedagogues, therapists and planners knew no bounds, the natives' limited needs for goods and services thwarted growth and progress. They had to metamorphose into underdeveloped people, the sixth and present stage of the West's view of the outsider. Thus decolonization was also a process of conversion: the worldwide acceptance of the Western self-image of *homo economicus* in his most extreme form as *homo industrialis*, with all needs commodity-defined. Scarcely twenty years were enough to make two billion people define themselves as underdeveloped. I vividly remember the Rio Carnival of 1963 – the last before the Junta imposed itself. "Development" was the motif in the prize-winning samba, "development" the shout of the dancers while they jumped to the throbbing of the drums.

Development based on high per capita energy quanta and intense professional care is the most pernicious of the West's missionary efforts – a project guided by an ecologically unfeasible conception of human control over nature, and by an anthropologically vicious attempt to replace the nests and snakepits of culture by sterile wards for professional service. The hospitals that spew out the newborn and reabsorb the dying, the schools run to busy the unemployed before, between and after jobs, the apartment towers where people are stored between trips to the supermarkets, the highways connecting garages form a pattern tatooed into the landscape during the short development spree. These institutions, designed for lifelong bottle babies wheeled from medical center to school to office to stadium begin now to look as anomalous as cathedrals, albeit unredeemed by any esthetic charm.

Ecological and anthropological realism are now necessary – but with caution. The popular call for soft is ambiguous; both right and left appropriate it. On the z-axis, it equally serves a honied beehive, or the pluralism of independent actions. The soft choice easily permits a recasting of a maternal society at home and another metamorphosis of missionary zeal abroad. For example, Amory Lovins argues that the possibility of further growth now depends on a rapid transition to the soft path. Only in this way, he claims, can the real income of rich countries double and that of poor countries triple in this generation. Only by the transition from fossil to sun can the externalities of production be so cut that the resources now spent on making waste and hiring scavengers to remove it be turned into benefits. I agree. If growth is to be, then Lovins is right; and investments are more secure with windspinners than with oil derricks. For the traditional right and left, for managerial democrats or socialist authoritarians, soft process and energy become the necessary rationale to expand their bureaucracies and to satisfy escalating "needs" through the standardized production of goods and services.

The World Bank makes the matching argument for services. Only by choosing labor-intensive, sometimes less efficient forms of industrial production can education be incorporated in apprenticeship. More efficient plants create huge and costly externalities in the formal education they presuppose, while they cannot teach on the job.

The World Health Organization now stresses prevention and education for self care. Only thus can population health levels be raised, while expensive therapies – mostly of unproven effectiveness, although still the principal work of physicians – can be abandoned. The liberal egalitarian utopia of the 18th century, taken up as the ideal for industrial society by the socialists of the 19th, now seems realizable only on the soft and self-help path. On this point, right and left converge. Wolfgang Harich, a highly cultured communist, refined and steeled in his convictions by two stretches of eight years in solitary confinement – once under Hitler and once under Ulbricht – is the one East European spokesman

for the soft path. But while for Lovins the transition to decentralized production depends on the market, for Harich the necessity of this transition is an argument in favor of Stalinist ecology. For right and left, democrats or authoritarians, soft process and energy become the necessary means to satisfy escalating "needs" through the standardized production of goods and services.

Thus, the soft path can lead either towards a convivial society where people are so equipped to do on their own whatever they judge necessary for survival and pleasure, or towards a new kind of commodity-dependent society where the goal of full employment means the political management of activities, paid or unpaid. Whether a "left" or "soft" path leads towards or away from new forms of "development" and "full employment" depends on the options taken between "having" and "being" on the third axis.

We have seen that wherever wage-labor expands, its shadow, industrial serfdom, also grows. Wage-labor, as the dominant form of production, and housework, as the ideal type of its unpaid complement, are both forms of activity without precedent in history or anthropology. They thrive only where the absolute and, later, the industrial state destroyed the social conditions for subsistence living. They spread as small-scale, diversified, vernacular communities have been made sociologically and legally impossible – into a world where individuals, throughout their lives, live only through dependence on education, health services, transportation and other packages provided through the multiple mechanical feeders of industrial institutions.

Conventional economic analysis has focused on only one of these complementary industrial age activities. Economic analysis has focused on the worker as wage-earning producer. The equally commodity-oriented activities performed by the unemployed have remained in the shadow of the economic searchlight. What women or children do, what occupies men after "working hours", is belittled in a cavalier fashion. But this is changing rapidly. Both the weight and the nature of the contribution made by unpaid activities to the industrial system begin to be noticed. Feminist research into the history and anthropology of work has made it impossible to ignore the fact that work in an industrial society is sex-specific in a manner which cuts deeper than in any other known society. In the 19th century, women entered the wage-labor force in the "advanced"nations; they then won the franchise, non-restricted access to schooling, equal rights on the job. All these "victories" have had precisely the opposite effect from that which conventional wisdom assigns them. Paradoxically, "emancipation" has heightened the contrast between paid and unpaid work; it has severed all connections between unpaid work and subsistence. Thus, it has redefined the structure of unpaid work so that this latter becomes a new kind of serfdom inevitably borne by women.

Gender-specific tasks are not new; all known societies assign sex-specific work roles. For example, hay may be cut by men, raked by women, gathered by men, loaded by women, carted away by men, fed to cows by women and to horses by men. But no matter how much we search other cultures, we cannot find the contemporary division between two forms of work, one paid and the other unpaid, one credited as productive and the other as concerned with reproduction and consumption, one considered heavy and the other light, one demanding special qualifications and the other not, one given high social prestige and the other relegated to "private" matters. Both are equally fundamental in the industrial mode of production. They differ in that the surplus from paid work is taxed directly by the employer, while the added value of unpaid work reaches him only via wage-work. Nowhere can we find two such distinct forms through which, in each family, surplus is created and expropriated.

This division between unpaid work off the job and paid work through employment would have been unthinkable in societies where the whole house served as a framework in which its inhabitants, to a large extent, did and made those things by which they also lived. Although we can find traces of both wage-work and its shadow in many societies, in none could either become the society's paradigm of work, nor be used as the key symbol for sex-specific tasks. And since two such types of work did not exist, the family did not have to exist to couple these kinds of opposites. Nowhere in history is the family, nuclear or extended, the instrument for linking two complementary but mutually exclusive species of work, one assigned primarily to the male, the other to the female. This symbiosis between opposite forms of activity, inseparably wedded through the family, is unique to commodity-intensive society. We now see that it is the inevitable result of the pursuit of development and full employment. And since such kinds of work did not exist, sex-roles could not be defined with such finality, distinct natures could not be attributed to male and female, families could not be transformed into a solder to weld the two together.

A feminist analysis of the history of industrial work thus removes the blindspot of economics: *homo economicus* has never been sexually neutral; *homo industrialis* appeared from the beginning in two genders: *vir laborans*, the workingman, and *femina domestica*, the hausfrau. In no society that developed toward the goal of full employment has shadow-work not grown apace with that employment. And shadow-work provided a device, effective beyond every precedent, to degrade a type of activity in which women cannot but predominate, while it supported one which privileged men.

Quite recently, the orthodox distinction between production and consumption functions ceased to hold. Suddenly, opposing interests turn the

importance of unpaid work into a public issue. Economists put shadow prices on what happens in the "informal" sector: S. – the contribution that the work done by the client in choosing, paying for and carrying his cake adds to the value of the cake; G.B. – the calculus of marginal choices made in sexual activities; L. – the value of jogging over heart surgery.

Housewives claim pay for housework at the rate for such services in motels and restaurants. Teachers transmogrify mothers into trained but unpaid supervisors of their own children's homework. Government reports recognize that basic needs as professionally defined can be met only if laymen also produce these services, with competence but without pay. If growth and full employment retain their status as goals, the management of disciplined people motivated by non-monetary rewards will open up as the latest form of "development" in the 1980's.

Rather than life in a shadow economy, I propose, on top of the z axis, the ideas of vernacular work: unpaid activities which provide and improve livelihood, but which are totally refractory to any analysis utilizing concepts developed in formal economics. I apply the term, "vernacular" to these activities, since there is no other current concept that allows me to make the same distinction within the domain covered by such terms as "informal sector", "use value", "social reproduction". Vernacular is a Latin term that we use in English only for the language that we have acquired without paid teachers. In Rome, it was used from 500 B.C. to 600 A.D. to designate any value that was homebred, homemade, derived from the commons, and that a person could protect and defend though he neither bought nor sold it on the market. I suggest that we restore this simple term, vernacular, to oppose to commodities and their shadow. It allows me to distinguish between the expansion of the shadow economy and its inverse – the expansion of the vernacular domain.

The tension and balance between vernacular work and industrial labor – paid and unpaid – is the key issue on the third dimension of options, distinct from political right and left and from technical soft and hard. Industrial labor, paid and otherwise exacted, will not disappear. But when development, wage-labor and its shadow encroach upon vernacular work, the relative priority of one or the other constitutes the issue. We are free to choose between hierarchically managed standardized work that may be paid or unpaid, self-selected or imposed on the one hand and, on the other, we can protect our freedom to choose ever newly invented forms of simple, integrated subsistence actions which have an outcome that is unpredictable to the bureaucrat, unmanageable by hierarchies and oriented to the values shared within a specific community.

If the economy expands, which the soft choice can permit, the shadow economy cannot but grow even faster, and the vernacular domain must further decline. In this case, with rising job scarcity, the unemployed will be integrated into newly organized useful activities in the informal sector. Unemployed men will be given the so-called privilege to engage in those production-fostering types of unpaid activity that, since their emergence as housework in the 19th century, have been considerately earmarked for the "weaker sex" – a designation that was also first used at that time, when industrial serfdom rather than subsistence was defined as the task of women. "Care" exacted for the sake of love will lose its sex-specific character, and in the process become manageable by the state.

Under this option, international development is here to stay. Technical aid to develop the informal sector overseas will reflect the new sexless unpaid domestication of the unemployed at home. The new experts pushing French rather than German self-help methods or windmill designs already crowd airports and conferences. The last hope of development bureaucracies lies in the development of shadow economies.

Many of the dissidents that I have mentioned take a stand against all this – against the use of soft technology to reduce the vernacular domain and to increase professional controls over informal sector activities. These new vanguards conceive technical progress as one possible instrument to support a new type of value, neither traditional nor industrial but both subsistence-oriented and rationally chosen. Their lives, with more and less success, express a critical sense of beauty, a particular experience of pleasure, a unique view of life cherished by one group, understood but not necessarily shared by the next. They have found that modern tools make it possible to subsist on activities which permit a variety of evolving life styles, and relieve much of the drudgery of old time subsistence. They struggle for the freedom to expand the vernacular domain of their lives.

Examples from Travancore to Wales may soon free those majorities who were recently captivated by the modern "demonstration model" of stupefying, sickening and paralyzing enrichment. But two conditions must be met. First, the mode of life resulting from a new relation between people and tools must be informed by the perception of man as *homo habilis* and not *homo industrialis*. Second, commodity-independent life styles must be shaped anew by each small community, and not be imposed. Communities living by predominantly vernacular values have nothing much to offer to others besides the attractiveness of their example. But the example of a poor society that enhances modern subsistence by vernacular work should be rather attractive to jobless males in a rich society now condemned, like their women to social reproduction in an expanding shadow economy. The ability, however not only to live in new ways, but to insist on this freedom demands that we clearly recognize what distinguishes the perception of *homo economicus* from all other human beings. To this end I choose the study of history as a privileged road.

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The 2nd and 3rd Parts of Vernacular Values" will appear in subsequent Mailings.

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# Watch Out For Reagan

*By Carey McWilliams*
*PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Carey McWilliams, one of this country's leading liberal thinkers and editor of The Nation for 30 years, died June 27, 1980. Few editors have inspired hundreds of young journalists and writers as he did. He believed passionately in open sources and full discosure. He saw the power of liberalism coming not from the establishment or the mainstream, but from the aspirations and struggles of those on the margins. And he opened the pages of The Nation to them. His long string of publications—including Factories in the Field, Ill Fares the Land, North from Mexico, The Great Exception, Witchunt: The Revival of Heresy—detailed the social and political ills of the country.*

*Shortly before his death, McWilliams, a contributing editor of PNS, said there was one story he wanted to write. And this is that story. It expresses his conviction that the political elites of this country have decided America's survival is now dependent on being put through a period of authoritarian controls.*

IT IS MY belief that the Establishment—that elusive but very real force in American life—has of recent weeks opted decisively for Ronald Reagan. I also believe he will be elected president.

The reasoning behind that conclusion may be a bit perverse, however. I am convinced the Establishment has decided that authoritarian controls must be imposed to get the country out of the mess in which it finds itself; that there is no other way to preserve the power structure.

In short, it believes that democracy is doomed in a world of shrinking resources and rising expectations, but that the structure which surrounds it can survive if we abandon some of our freedoms.

It would be fatal to such a strategy if the man in the Oval Office had even a whiff of the demagogue about him: that would be a dangerous warning sign. What the strategy calls for is a president who enjoys the confidence of the people, a president who is regarded as a nice guy.

Ronald and Nancy Reagan are a familiar and likeable couple. The former California governor is a bright, if not original, thinker. He radiates traditional American values. He is not a hater. He likes people. He appears to feel that there is good in almost everyone. He is a very secure man; what you see is what he is.

If a figurehead president is desirable, Reagan is the ideal nominee. As controls began to be imposed, people would not grasp what was happening until it was too late.

Ronald Reagan exudes the faith that happy days are just around the corner, that there are simple answers to complex questions. And in these troubled times he appeals strongly to anyone who does not want to face the unpleasant implications of an era of limits and retrenchment. Many Americans want reassurance that the Great National Barbecue will continue indefinitely, and this is exactly what Reagan offers. He tells us that we are still the most powerful nation on earth; that we can stil do pretty much whatever we want to do. He radiates an image of the self-confident America of the 1950s.

This, he tells us, is the reality. The nightmare version of our future is false. He is sincere, but a newspaper friend once reminded me that sincerity, like virtue, is an art.

This scenario of a figurehead presidency for an authoritarian Establishment is one that I advance with great hesitation. But there is reason to believe that it reflects a dangerous possiblity and should therefore be carefully considered.

The structure of the Imperial Presidency, after all, has not been entirely dismantled. The C.I.A. has ample capacity to carry out dirty tricks and domestic assignments. The Republicans are publicly favoring a relaxation of constraints on the F.B.I. as proposed by Nevada Senator Paul Laxalt, a close Reagan advisor. Local police intelligence agencies have the necessary files and dossiers to facilitate widespread surveillance.

Under the guise of a "national emergency," such controls could simply be imposed in a piecemeal fashion—and the events ahead might well seem to warrant them. Ronald and Nancy Reagan may project a nice, friendly image of security and happiness, but a well-meaning Reagan would be in no posiiton to restrain the military industrial estabishment, the joint chiefs of staff, or resist a political strategy of the sort I am describing in the midst of crisis.

Suppose the Russians decide to be beastly? What then? Reagan cannot move without the powerful support of the Establishment now lining up behind him, which could mean a crack-down on everything—and everyone—the Establishment sees as subversive. It could mean a return to the mentality of security clearances and loyalty tests. It could mean that individuals suspected of holding the wrong opinions will find it harder to get and hold jobs.

It could recreate the "us vs. them" atmosphere which we knew to our shame in the McCarthy era, and appear to have shamefully forgotten today.

## Inflation

# Bigger Than All Of Us?

SUPPOSE THERE IS no cure for inflation. Suppose our persistent runaway inflation was unstopable. Sounds extreme? Perhaps—but a highly regarded, though little known, English economic historian believes that this is exactly our current situation. What's more—he has a startling new theory to back up his belief and a solid basis of historical evidence to prove it.

Based on a detailed study of prices in England over the past one thousand years, Professor E. H. Phelps-Brown, advances the idea that chronic inflations—like our own—occur in great uncontrollable eruptions lasting anywhere from one hundred to two hundred years. During such periods (he claims) there is literally nothing man can do except to survive as best he can.

The Phelps-Brown studies show that in England prices have exploded to unprecedented heights only four times in the past one thousand years. The fourth period of runaway inflation, he says, is the one we are living in right now.

Each of the three great inflations prior to our own shared one striking characteristic. Runaway inflation and far reaching social revolutionary changes affecting the very structure of society seemed to be component parts of the same phenomenon.

History calls these three revolutionary eras of the past the Commercial Revolution, the Age of Discovery and the Industrial Revolution. They are names familiar to all.

Our Revolution also has a name. It has been called the "Revolution of Rising Expectations." John Kenneth Galbraith has described it best. He says "in all industrial countries hitherto disadvantaged groups are releasing themselves from the belief that they were not meant by reason of race, class or national origin to have less. They are asserting their claim to enjoyments, leisure, good housing, vacations, education, more than memorial clothing, and cultural activities formerly considered the exclusive perogative of teh affluent and the rich."

To put it bluntly, all over the world people who once knew their place—and stayed in it—no longer do. Worldwide they are now saying they are entitled to a fairer share and that they mean to get it.

If the Revolution of Rising Expectationscan be said to have started between the end of World War II and the Korean War, it is now only about thirty to thirty-five years old. The Phelps-Brown theory tells us that we may have at least another sixty-five to seventy years before it runs its full course.

The first rampaging inflationary-revolutionary period recorded by Phelps-Brown—the Commercial Revolution—occurred between 1150-1325. During these almost two hundred years prices increased almost four hundred percent. The period 1150-1325 also was witness to two developmens which literally changed the fabric of society.

First, in England between 1150 and 1325, there was a great leap forward in agricultural production. Food became plentiful. Scarcity gave way to surplus, releasing many people from the never ending tyranny of back breaking incessant farm labor.

Second, the new freedom—the new mobility—produced another result. It destroyed the prevailing feudal system. Cities grew. Trade expanded. New jobs, new skills emerged. The feudal system based on attachment to the land no longer served. During the period 1150-1325, in its pure form, it disappeared.

The record shows that about 1325—suddenly—for no apparent reason—prices stopped rising. Price equilibrium returned. Phelps-Brown suggests the cause was simply that the revolutionary wave had spent itself. Stability, consolidation of gains had again become normal.

Two hundred years later—starting about 1520, another period of enormous inflation returned. There was another runaway upward leap in prices. Again they rose about four hundred percent.

In the view of history, the one hundred and thirty years betwen 1520 and 1650 was again one of those times when man broke with his past. Between 1520 and 1650, the Middle Ages in Europe gave way to the Age of Discovery and Expansion. It was the age of looking outward—the age when Europe colonized America, Africa and Asia.

It was the age of revolutionary thinkers like Copernicus, Galileo and Martin Luther who transformed the way men thought. It was the age when strong European nation states emerged. A new era—a new way of life came into being. By 1650, however, things had once more settled down. So did inflation. Revolution and expansion had run its course.

What happened in the third inflationary period, between 1750 and 1850, is far too well known to recount. The Industrial Revolution swept across Europe and America ushering in the modern world. As it did, prices again surged upward. This time for a century.

The provocative resemblance between our twentieth century inflation and the three explosive inflationary cycles of the past raises the obvious question. Are we not once again in the grip of inevitable unstopable life changing forces—doomed—as were those in the three inflationary eras of the past—to wait it out as best we can? Professor Phelps-Brown thinks we may be.

The Phelps-Brown history theory suggests that our rampaging inflation, like its three predecessors, must be viewed as part and parcel of modern man making still one more painful transition from one form of society to another. It also suggests that our inflation—like the others—may not end until our revolution, too, has run its course.

Perhaps, says Phelps-Brown, there are factors about which we are completely unaware that set an inflationary stamp on an age. Factors that will successfully resist any attempt at human control.

Assuming the history theory to be correct, our world may be in yet another of those remarkable transitions which have brought us from caves to our present state. Professor Phelps-Brown suggests that only after new forms of society have come into being; only after the revolutionary currents have played themselves out, will inflation disappear and normalcy and stability return.

One day, the theory holds—as happened three times before in the last one thousand years—"suddenly" a new equilibrium, a new stability will return. In 1980, "suddenly" unfortunately may still be two or three generations away. A sobering thought for us caught in the eye of the storm. A sobering thought for us hoping for an early restoration of economic stability.

*—Robert Weber*

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