

THE TIMES

I have spent the last three years of my life trying to bring together the insights and practical intuitions of movement colleagues into some coherent picture of our world. I am going to assume some things about other people which I know to be true about myself. One of these is that I am caught up in the complexity of the 20th century world. It has dawned on me very practically that we live in a complex world, in a complex age. I am also going to assume that there is a peculiar sort of complexity going on, the complexity of having to decide to engage in that unbelievably complex social process.

I am going to tell you a story. It is a very helpful story. I have been saying for years it will be a great story. The reason it is a great story is that we are living it. Indeed, the whole earth lives this story. In that fact, the story finally finds its significance.

To begin the story, I have to talk about our times. We live in a time of transition. We live in an age where the images that held together the great cultures of civilization are gone. Arnold Toynbee said, in his study of the history of civilization, that thirty full-fledged civilizations have existed in the whole history of the globe. Of those thirty, twenty-nine are no longer in existence. The one he said was still in existence was Western Civilization. I would suggest that the record is now perfect.

Why has every great culture gone out of being? The Indian culture, the African culture, the Chinese culture, and so on, have all gone out of being for no apparent reason. The basic values that hold together what it means to be a human being are gone. The basic social institutions men have forged in our time are gone. The family has collapsed. The nation state has collapsed. The local community has collapsed. The metropolitan center has collapsed. Schools have collapsed. The only thing that has not collapsed, it seems, is the economic process. If you go into the very midst of the economic giants of our day, you would see there, too, the collapse.

People have now created poetry to talk about this transition. The preceding period was a period of civilization. That period was 15,000 years long. Whatever it is we are moving into is Post-Civilization. Whatever we mean today by civilized human beings is going out of being. People use poetry to describe the time we are moving into, such as "post-human" era, or the time of "humanness plus one." Arthur Clarke says that humanness plus one is going to be the self-conscious human being who is much better suited for life among the stars than we poor weak creatures are for walking about on dry land. Chardin says this is the time of consciousness,

and we are moving into the time of post-consciousness. That which you depend on to remind yourself that you are not an animal is no longer adequate to freight being a human being. Kazantzakis said the old world is crashing down and the new world has not yet been built. Something like that has been the story of our lives.

Yet, in the midst of that story, something has happened. What happened was the 1960's. The noisy decade of the collapse happened all across the globe. Where the ferment in society in the Fifties had not really shown itself except here and there, all of a sudden it exploded in the Sixties. Youth stood up, and moved all across the world. Women grasped that the images they had been given to freight the meaning of their lives were gone. It has become clear that the images created to freight maleness are not adequate either. So we stood in the midst of an abyss. The black revolution rose up, maybe that was where civilization was utterly shattered. As every other culture collapsed, it was Western civilization that moved in and saved the day, so we thought. Then in the heart of that one civilization, the word became clear. Everything had collapsed.

If you think back to the Sixties, it was the time that out of nowhere came the disestablishment, standing over against the established demands of society. The third world was the disestablishment over against the rest of the world. The women were the disestablishment over against the men. The Blacks were the disestablishment over against the Whites. The youth were the disestablishment over against the adults. The clamor that broke out here and there, the riots and the bloodshed, the cost in human suffering was like a society tearing itself apart. Then a stranger thing happened. Students who were not in Vietnam, but in Ohio, were shot at Kent State. They were not shot by Vietnamese or by gangsters. They were shot by National Guardsmen. The response had nothing to do with National Guardsmen; the response was the students shut down the University. When the students shut down the University, they found out that what was going on in the university was inadequate. This finally came to a head here at the University of Illinois when the students said to the establishment, in the administration, "We're not going to open up this school till you change things." The administration said, "We'll change. You tell us what to do." The students went back to school. The students started attending classes all over again. They started writing term papers. Now they are streaking. That kind of unbelievable abyss has opened up.

Michael Harrington has recently written a book called Fragments of A Century, in which he recounts his life story through the Sixties. After being one of the leading forces of discontent for renewal within the Roman Catholic Church within the socialists, in the Civil Rights movement, in the Peace movement, Harrington says he was called in by President Lyndon Johnson to be an advisor to the War on Poverty. The man has a nervous breakdown. His psyche could not contain, could not deal with the unbelievable happening of the Sixties. We have passed the point where collapse, where destruction, where the sense of innocent suffering was overwhelming to the sense of the New being birthed. It's almost as though the Seventies up until now, have been the recovery from a corporate nervous breakdown. The sixties were the noise of collapse and Seventies have been the silence of waiting. Gone are all the movements that were so prevalent. The Civil Rights Movement is gone. The Peace movement is gone. The women's movement has either turned in upon itself or everyone has just said forget about it. But it is not that we live in the time of waiting in the sense of sitting back in a chair. Rather the silence of waiting is the silence that falls upon soldiers as they move toward the beach waiting to be dispersed. It is the silence that comes upon an army as it begins to ready itself to charge into battle. It is an electric silence.

What happened in the Sixties to cause such a period of poised waiting? The happening was really three-fold. In the first place, it became clear when you deal with any part of society, you are in fact dealing with all of society. That is Kent State. You do not deal with the War in Vietnam simply in Vietnam. That is, when you are dealing with the war in Vietnam, you are never dealing simply with the war in Viet Nam. All of society is one complex web of relationships. To attack anyone is to attack them all. Secondly, the gap between the individual and the social disappeared. It became clear that there was no such thing as being a man of integrity, when civilization has collapsed. There was no such thing as being a responsible human being when you live in a society that was committing war on innocent people. It did not matter what side of the issue you were on. The third thing is only now coming clear: the gap between the global and the local disappeared. It is not even shocking to us that people in the Middle East raise Cain and the next week I am waiting in line for gasoline. All of a sudden we now have a way to participate in the globe. When I buy my car, I am deciding the future of the planet. With every gallon my car burns, it is not enough to watch the exhaust go out the back, but the precious resources of the globe be burned.

Those three awarenesses characterize what happened in the Sixties. Out of that awareness, a new consciousness began to emerge, a new basis, a new set of values, to which every human being could say, "Yes." Those values went something like this. Whatever else you are dealing with from here on out, you are dealing with All the Earth. It is no longer possible to think of yourself as dealing with only your nation in 1974. Ecology is now an issue that affects one part of the globe over against any other part of the globe because you are dealing with the whole Earth. The second presupposition that became clear was that whatever else you mean by society, it had to do with All the People. There is not going to be a society of Whites. There is not going to be a society of Blacks. There is not going to be a society of simply adults. "All the Earth and All the People" is the basis, the image, without which there is no future of civilization. That fact became clear when those men stepped out of that rocket ship onto the moon. They televised not only those men: stepping out, standing on the moon, but there behind them was the earth.

The third dimension is that those realities and the reality of new civilization coming into being, has to do with All the Consciousness. That is to say, that this new civilization, this new sense, this new consensus across the world which has so changed our lives and turned them inside out, has, in the first instance, nothing to do with the stuff of life. It has nothing to do with the way people organize themselves. It is simply the awareness that comes from sitting in your living room and from watching Viet Nam and Israel. Watching, watching, watching. It is simply the awareness that comes from watching the people outside this building, and every culture outside the door. It is the awareness that comes from walking down the street. It is seeing the unbelievable diversity in any one of those communities in the Guild experiment. It's the awareness that comes when you watch a line of cars at a gas station. This new consensus, this new solidarity among men, this new grasping after a new civilization is a new kind of consciousness. That new consciousness is underneath the times in which we live. We call it Resurgence. In a few short years, certainly not before 1968, or before Kent State in 1970, society has shifted. Our architecture symbolizes this Resurgence: the Opera House in Sidney, and the pyramid building in San Francisco. In Minneapolis, they have a building that is all glass on one side. You drive by it in the evening and it looks like a pillar of fire. You drive by it in the morning, it is the same. They tell me that on the way into town from the airport in Washington, there is one place where, if you look around, you can count twenty-three cranes on top of buildings, where construction is going on. For whatever reason, mankind has decided to rebuild the great cities. In twenty years, there will probably be more building going on in

these cities than we have ever seen in history. Resurgence is that kind of an unbelievable upheaval at the universal level.

There is a Turn as well that affects our lives. That Turn happened to our consciousness, to our orientation. First of all, this is a time of a turn to our own history, a turn to the secular where the very times we have lived through, the Sixties, have become an art form. We have not had the eyes to see. We never realized when we were living through the Sixties what marvellous times they were. We never realized before, the wonder and the glory in the lives that are now ours. Our very own experience, our very own expenditure, our very own engagement in society has become spiritual to this body.

Michael Harrington has a quotation on that sort of experience in talking about his experience of attempting to change society and, having the vision of what is necessary falling apart, dissolving before his very eyes. But then he had a fantastic insight. He said that when people begin to form themselves together into movements to engage in society, and their vision of change falls apart, they find they were really after not that vision, but a new profound sense of engagement, a new possibility of grasping after a relevant vocation, a new ground out of which to participate in the practical dimension of human life. That kind of engagement will not go away,

That's the key to the fundamental reality of our time. In our lifetime, the new social vehicle has been created. A brand new social vehicle has been created. At any time, there are two dimensions that make up a social vehicle. First of all, it is people, all the people across the globe. But those people are not a social vehicle. No, the social vehicle is not only made up of bodies of people, but of people who have a vision, who have the practical vision, an image of the future which not only informs them about the solution of the problems they find themselves in, but gives them a picture of their own engagement in the midst of that new future. Secondly, a social vehicle has to do with practices or a method, or a means by which people can concretely map out the implementation of the vision they stand before. The basis of that vision has to do with "All the Earth;" we live in a global society. I had the pleasure of visiting some conservative businessmen in Minneapolis and we started to talk about the future, and there were some educators there, some liberal educators there, and they started talking about the problems of the Japanese economy. The businessmen said, "You fools, don't you realize that we live in a global society?" I looked at those businessmen and said, "What do you mean a Global Society?" And they said, "I'm leaving next week for Japan. I had two people over from Europe to my plant this past week and all I know is that if we don't deal with the Japanese economy so it doesn't collapse, my firm is going to go under."

The second basis of that vision has to do with all the people. With every single human being in the earth, this foundation has fundamentally to do with the breakloose relative to human consciousness. This has a practical manifestation as well. As a result of the Sixties, as a part of the Resurgence, human beings can have a new direction, a new sense of movement, a new focus to their lives. They grasp a practical task they can participate in. In the midst of the Resurgence of the 17th Century, that task had to do with sailing over the seas; it had to do with the whole globe. In Egypt, it had to do with building those unbelievable pyramids. People grasp a new direction for themselves. They grasp a new sense of fellowhood, of community, a new mode of relatedness in which a man does not lose his uniqueness but rather has it intensified. At the height of the Sixties, we began to break through and grasp the fact that youth were not wrong. They lived a different

life than the adults. It was not that elders were useless, but simply lived a different life from the people who were twenty or forty. It was not that the women had been down-trodden by the men, but that there were fundamentally different operating images, which in the midst of radical engagement with society, could begin to be re-appropriated. New forms of life began to emerge.

Then thirdly, a new drive began to emerge, a new raw human power, a new sense of being able to pick up and build civilization. Look at the myriad little groups in this community and that community, that deal with one little issue and another little issue, in which most of the people are not really interested in or even very much involved. Present there is a kind of unbelievable drive to be engaged in dealing seriously with the social processes.

As we grapple with the recreation of society in our local communities, our operating context is this emerging new social vehicle, this new direction, and this new drive. These are the profound happenings that are the seventies.

- James Wiegel