

November 25, 1983

PRACTICAL MORAL ENGAGEMENT

During our conversation after the movie, "The Day After", the leader suggested that we may want at some future time to reflect on the implications of that movie to the International Exposition of Rural Development - or at least to reflect on how the two are related. Being unable to await a future time, my thoughts came pretty quickly. For I believe this movie was a massive blast at the armament mentality and a virtual announcement that there is a consensus to prevent this holocaust.

I think we can learn from the Public Relations of whoever promoted that film. As a film, it did not have near the dramatic, emotional impact of TOWERING INFERNO or EARTHQUAKE, or even the fire scene in BAMBI. But here it was a major topic of news on all three channels and covered in TIME and NEWSWEEK two weeks before showing. And for a couple of days afterwards, still more news. Denver had a hotline with three psychiatrists standing by for calls right after the showing, (they weren't used), and three secretaries of state formed a panel for discussions of the issues raised by the film. For such a relatively innocuous film, that's what I call promotion.

It was especially interesting to hear both McNamara and Kissinger stating that the nuclear freeze movement did not go nearly far enough to deal with the problem it was highlighting. I believe that the IERD goes much further - in fact that the IERD is providing to the world a demonstration of the economic, political, and cultural viability of peace. If the movie showed that peace is necessary, I believe that in aging the International Exposition of Rural Development, we are showing that peace is possible. ~hat, I think, is what it means to be showcasing success.

Perhaps we need to think for a moment of the IERD as the second of a one-two punch at the forces of war that are at work in the world. And what if we were to mobilize tile comparable level of promotion'

There seems to be a sense in which the issue of nuclear destruction has become for many people the moral issue of our times. By that I mean that whatever attempts are being made to plan for the future find themselves having to respond in some way to the possibility of nuclear annihilation. I do not necessarily believe that this is adequate analysis of the underlying contradictions, but it is simply a statement of fact.

More importantly, there seems to be two major movements among Those Who Care in acting out their moral responsibility. Although there is some occasional overlapping in practical action and a similarity of concern bout current issues, the two approaches are startlingly different. They have differing intents, strategies, presuppositions, and, I believe, results. On, I think, unwittingly promotes the very immorality it seeks to deal with. The two movements are: 1. The movement to PREVENT THE DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIZATION OF THE PRESENT; and 2. The movement to PROMOTE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CIVILIZATION OF THE FUTURE..

The first, the movement to prevent the destruction of the civilization of the present is epitomized by tile anti-war movement. But in this camp could be included the antinuclear movement, the ecology movement, advocates of health foods, exercise buffs, endangered species groups, and the anti-chemicals groups. All these and similar groups have in common the intent to protest against someone else. They are highly visible, politically active, and depend for success on getting someone else to change their actions or opinions or policies. These groups tend to play the role of the righteous underdogs demanding justice from the high and the mighty. Their major strategy is to display a massive show of public opinion. -A good example was the day of protest at the Rocky Flats Arsenal where around 10,000 protesters held hands in an attempt to encircle the boundaries while singing We Shall Overcome. The underlying strategic assumption is that sufficient shows of public opinion will force leaders of structures to shift direction. It is built on the insight that public figures do pay attention to numbers of people involved in a particular cause. Its achilles heel is its tacit presumption that the people are dependent on the leaders. This being so, it is actually promoting the hierarchical mode of analysis and the adversarial mode of action.

The second, the movement to promote the construction of the civilization of the future is epitomized by the International Exposition of Rural Development, But it might well include the movement for alternative energy, rural health movements, community education the neighborhood housing services, the human development

projects and the hospice movement. These have in common the intent to promote a constructive resolution to some particular problem or some set of perennial problems. They tend to be barely visible at all, to remain neutral in partisan politics, and to rely on local initiative and creativity. They play the role of creative innovators actively seeking the wisdom of many viewpoints and welding them into novel syntheses and workable solutions. Their strategic ploy is to handle issues locally and thereby to demonstrate the possibility of new structures and relationships coming into being. People operating in this mode tend to be self-sufficient as facilitators in gathering the expertise they need and mustering the support of multi-sector coalitions in working.

The first movement is confrontational, the second, inclusive. As such, each bears the stamp of its time frame. One is oriented towards the past, and the other towards the future. Both are positive movements of 'Those Who Care', but the IERD is clearly on the edge of building a profoundly human future.

We set aside a week to spend our limited brooding time to get at the meaning of the IERD, placing it in the perspective of the two movements is one insight that came from that. But there are three additional clues, one of which is negative, that all point to another insight.

First, the negative: on the talk show the other day (a one-and-a-half-hour radio show interviewing ICA, NSC and two selected projects) when our selected project representative was describing the intricacies of alternative energy technology, I found myself bored to tears. I simply could care less about the possibilities of cubing cornstalks in hopes of making biogas.

Second, a positive: At a presentation to a church, one man arrived who had just returned from Peru where he had seen our project. He was more excited than I have ever known him to be, and after waxing eloquently supportive of our proposal, remarked "I saw what I can do! I can get reading glasses to those people in the project (he's an optometrist) so that they can see to use the sewing machines and have a local industry, mostly what impressed me was his sheer urgent delight at finding something concrete he could do.

The third clue was a statement by the poster artist Michael Signorella at the Nov. 9 IERD funding evening. His comments were priceless: "It's not often you get a chance to do something practically helpful for your fellow human being that will better their lives. That's what I've found in the IERD, and that's why I am pleased to have been able to design the poster."

It's true from these clues that the IERD is on to something - providing practical ways to promote a constructive future for us all. The projects can practically share their insights through displays and fund-raising and travel; they can be signs and not just flukes; the National Steering Committee can do what they do best - promote, introduce contacts, raise funds, facilitate; they can be guardians and not just volunteers. And the ICA can do what we do best - co-ordinate, honor people, weave stories, create events and be real inventors of the future and not just riders into someone else's future.

One of our colleagues remarked that she had been present when the IERD was dreamed up in a meeting. The Year of Order Council needs to be a time when we have meetings like that once a week, a time when we can put practical form on people's urge to be usefully engaged with their lives.

One final significance of the Exposition is its capacity to disclose the actual power in the hands of local people. These projects are finding it entirely possible to raise their money for the trip to India. Now this is not without considerable groaning about impossibility. But they are winning, and it is surprising to them. We have declared for years that local people are on the rise. But I suspect we were not quite clear about how history has already provided for them access to influence to a greater extent than they or we have imagined. Local practitioners of development are very soon going to find themselves at center stage in the movement to create the future. And I believe they will make it.

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