The Unwanted

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Summary: Describes the problem of unwanted children, those kicked out of the school system, and neighborhood efforts to start a special school. Sees one cause of the problem in greed, as many mothers and families increasingly have to work more and more to stay ahead, neglecting children in the process. Keywords: voluntary poverty (DDLW #736).

There are 750 young people still kicked out of the New York school system and the problem is what to do with them. It used to be that Chicago was considered the gangster city of the nation, but now it is New York, and the horrifying story that it is the youth groups who are responsible for the murders, muggings, and general violence which is part of the atmosphere of the whole world today. Serious as the war is in other parts of the world, the War between children and adults is a most extraordinary and terrible aspect of war. The class war, the war between worker and scholar, the war of the sexes–these are all aspects of war.

It has been suggested that the public school on Greenwich Avenue, now empty because of the new School built on 12th street, be used as a "600" school for these children of Manhattan who have been kicked out the public school system here. When volunteers to teach were asked for, 190 volunteered. This in spite of the suicide of one school principal and the beating up of another within a recent period. Only forty teachers are needed. A "600" school is one for delinquent, retarded, sick, or disturbed children and has been in existence for the last 20 years, roughly speaking. Some are in hospitals. Unfortunately it is now being considered as a half way house to jail.

Over in Greenwich Village where this proposed school is situated there is an organized movement on the part of parents in the PTA to urge a tearing down of the old school to build a playground, a school yard for the children of the new school, who up to this time have never had a school playground. Also they are terrified at the thought of their children being molested as they go to and from school. During meetings attended by as many as 500 people, there have been threats of a boycott of the new school it this new project of a "600" is carried out.

During this last trip I had the pleasure of attending a session of a school near Pittsburgh for children who are retarded and often delinquent, who come from

the poorest homes, who carry knives, razors and are sometimes involved in violence. Many of our friends are teachers who tell of the "blackboard jungle" conditions around the country. We see it here at Chrystie street, which is part of the East side with its gang wars and I myself have seen gangs of young boys near First avenue racing into battle, with iron bars as weapons but fortunately dispersed by police arriving on the scene. There was a very fine article in the New Yorker about the work of a Youth Board member, who on a personal level mingled with gang members over in Brooklyn, went to their hangouts and entered into conferences with them to try to avert fights and bloodshed.

This morning we received a call from John Lawrence, public relations man for the Council for Improving Village Conditions, who spoke of the problem of the unwanted children coming to the school on Greenwich avenue. He had been trying to get organized groups interested, as the East Side Neighborhood Association is interested on our side of town, but so far could do little. He was now proposing a one-man protest and an attempt to help the first batch of young people to arrive at the school. We wish him well.

The problem is deep seated of course. It is not just a question of the war spirit of our generation, of movies, television, "comics" with their violence. It is also a question of bad housing and no place to go but the street. It is of course a problem of the woman who goes out to work and abandons the home and locks out the children. Some do this from greed. We heard of one case of a nurse holding two jobs and her husband also working and still the family were always in debt, and the younger son was a truant from school, and already a case for local social workers. We have the problem in the neighborhood of the Peter Maurin Farm in Staten Island. When it comes to the poverty which forces the mother out to work, it is a vicious circle. As long as women work, they will receive less pay, they will take the jobs from men, they will be preventing their own children from getting part time work on working permits. Now with a "recession" from prosperity, there is all the more reason for married women to question the work they are doing, the necessity for it, what it is leading to.

The contribution of each one to a problem is not just a drop in the bucket. It is laying a stone, a brick, to build a new edifice within the shell of this old order, and the immediate cost may be an acceptance of voluntary poverty and charity, but in the long run it will work for good. So once again we get back to the need for a foundation of voluntary poverty, an understanding and appreciation of it as a means to an end.