

Toward the Rediscovery of a Future for America

By Charles A. Reich

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Day-to-day events leave us with a feeling of chaos; it seems as if we must be mere powerless spectators at the decline and fall of our country.

But these same events are capable of being understood as part of a larger process of social change—a process that is fearsome and yet fundamentally hopeful. And we may be participants—we may regain the power to make our own future—if only we understand what is taking place.

In Spain, the American President rides in an open car with a military dictator who by using lawless force has repressed all meaningful social progress. In Viet Nam, halfway around the world, young Americans are compelled to fight in support of another corrupt dictatorship.

These are not separate events; they are symptoms of a larger pattern. Women's liberation, black militancy, the campaign against the SST, gay liberation, the long hair of youth are not separate events, either; they too are related. The many wars, the many revolutions, are one.

It Was No Surprise

The agonies of the great industrial nations, and especially our own, are no mystery. They have been fully predicted and explained by many social thinkers. There is much room for argument among schools of thought, but the main outline is clear.

Neither machinery nor material progress is inherently bad. But we have achieved our progress by a system which shortsightedly wastes man and nature by failing to protect them in the haste for gain.

This process has now reached a point where remedial action is desperately urgent. Knowing this, why are we unable to guide our progress along more rational lines?

This brings us to a second element of our crisis, an element which also can be explained. American society has been amalgamated into a single monolith of power — the corporate state — which includes both the private and public structures. This monolith is not responsible to democratic or even executive control.

The corporate state is mindless and irrational. It rolls along with a momentum of its own, producing a society that is ever more at war with its own inhabitants. Again, there is plenty of room for different theories of the state, but the major pattern of unthinking and uncontrolled power must by now be accepted.

If our nation's immobility can be explained and understood, we must ask once more: Why are we unable to refashion our system? All social systems are merely the creations of men; men make them and men can change them. But the power to act is limited by our consciousness. Today most Americans are *not conscious of the realities* of their society.

Consciousness Is the Answer

One segment of the American people remains at a level of consciousness that was formed when we were a land of small villages and individual opportunity; Consciousness I is unable to accept the reality of an interdependent society that requires collective responsibility.

A second segment of the American people understands the realities of organization life but does not see that organizations and their policies are, by themselves, inhuman. Consciousness II supports the corporate state and seeks happiness in its artificial rewards, mistakenly believing that such a state is necessary and rational in this industrial age.

These two forms of unreality, Consciousness I and II, render us powerless. We cannot act constructively so long as we are prisoners of myth. Consciousness I exhausts its energy blaming scapegoats such as Communists, hippies and liberals. Consciousness II offers solutions that would but strengthen existing structures.

What the times urgently demand, what our survival demands, is a new consciousness that will reassert rational control over the industrial system and the corporate state, and transform them into a way of life that protects and advances human values.

It is not necessary to destroy our machines or our material well-being; it is only necessary to guide them. Such a new consciousness must reject the old myths, must reject the mindless operation of the state, must reassert the reality of nature and of man's nature.

Today, in this moment of most desperate need, that new consciousness is at last emerging—the spontaneous outgrowth of the fears and hopes of the new generation.

All around us today we see new ways of thinking and living: long hair, student protest, rock music, rejection of old careers.

Many people find all of this shocking, frightening, senseless. But against the background of what has gone wrong with America, it all makes sense. There is a

logic to it that explains each large and small experiment.

Taken as a whole, it represents the only large-scale search for common sense and self-preservation that can be found in America today, the only major effort to come to grips with reality and thereby reassert man's control of his own fate. This is the beginning of a new consciousness, Consciousness III.

If the American corporate state is, despite the wishes of a majority of its people, mindlessly destroying the land, culture and people of a country in Southeast Asia, it is rational to refuse to become an instrument of that war, and to refuse obedience to laws that seek to compel a human being, despite his deepest convictions, to kill other human beings.

If the state wants its citizens identically boxed and packaged, all the better to serve its rigid organizational structure, it makes sense to wear long hair and beards and clothes that constitute a refusal to be regimented.

If official language has been so debased that making war is called "making peace," and human needs are described in terms of manufactured appliances, there is a genuine need for the new language of rock music to aid in the effort to regain truth.

A revolution usually means the seizure of power by one group from another. But the revolution of the new generation is very different. It is not directed against other people, but against an impersonal system. And its objective is to place that system under the guidance

of a mind—to reassert values where none are now recognized.

The first stage of this revolution must be personal and cultural—the reassertion of values in each individual's life. The revolution will change the political structure of the state only as its final act. This is revolution by consciousness.

Revolution by consciousness is possible—and an orthodox revolution is not—because the corporate state, while almost impregnable from outside, is astonishingly vulnerable from within. It is operated not by force but by willing workers and willing consumers. They have been persuaded to pursue goals set for them by the state.

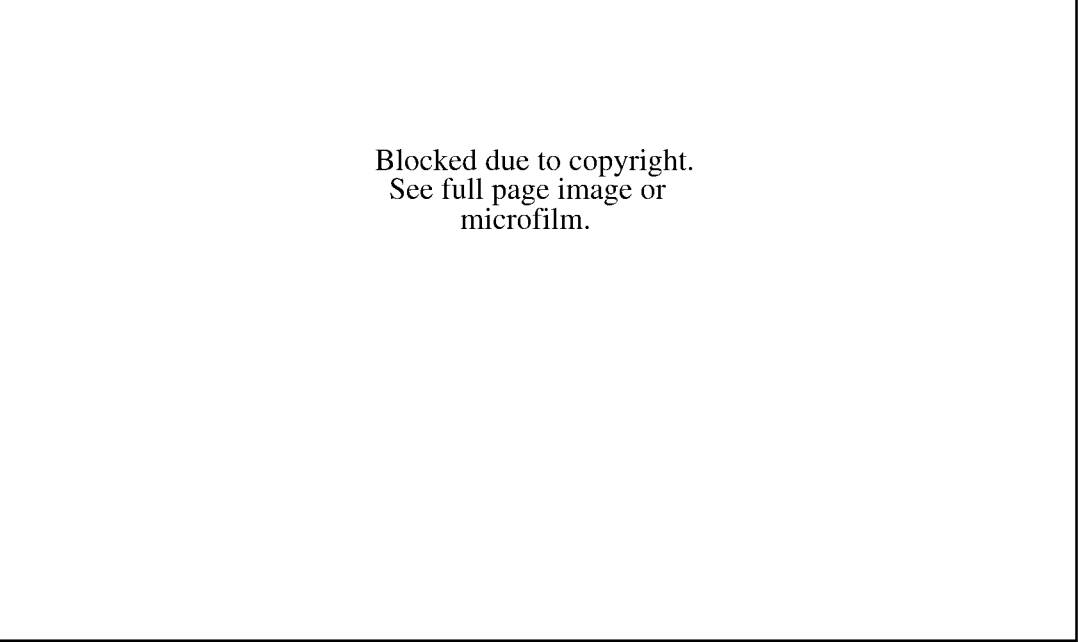
Force State to Obey

But if young lawyers will work only in firms that do some public service, if consumers refuse to buy the furs of endangered animal species, the state will be forced to obey, and it will begin to be turned to human ends.

Opinion is not enough. People must change their working and consumer lives. And they can do this only by a rediscovery of self. It is only by a renewed self-knowledge that we can learn what work gives our lives meaning, and what material things will not impoverish us but affirm us.

Recovery of self is possible for people of all ages and conditions. The coming revolution has started with youth, but all others can join.

There need be no unnatural warfare between generations, incited by promoters of hate. Parents do not want to hate



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“There need be no unnatural warfare between generations. . . .”

their children. And children—our children of the new generation—desperately want the support and the wisdom of older people, who have too long left it to the young to carry alone the burden of resisting the inhuman corporate state.

The new consciousness dreams the old American dream—of individual fulfillment and brotherly love. It is the old dream restated in terms of the realities

and the promise of a technological society, where man must understand and master his machines.

To write about the coming revolution in terms of abstract concepts like “consciousness” is to risk missing its essence.

This revolution does not find expression in theories. It is expressed all around us by the bloom of renewed life.

Faces are gentler and more beautiful.

People are better with each other. There are more smiles, more love.

There is new hope, for young people have rediscovered a future, where until recently no future could even be imagined. This is the revolution: the rebirth of people in a sterile land.