

THE INTELLECTUAL ONE WORLD

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The entire issue of the latest *American Scholar* (the quarterly publication of Phi Beta Kappa) is devoted to the "Electronic Revolution" and to the discussion of the philosophical problems of modern mass communication. Many of the articles are in the form of addresses given at a great gathering of international intellectuals, Vision 65, sponsored by the International Center for the Communication Arts and Sciences and held at Southern Illinois University in October 1965.

There is some comfort in knowing that the professional intellectuals of the world are seriously concerned and busy trying to solve the dilemmas thrust upon modern society by its headlong rush into an age of electronics and space exploration. There is less comfort knowing that the international community of university- and foundation-based genius vacillates in as hopeless a muddle of optimism and pessimism regarding humanity's fate as do the rest of us ordinary individuals, although it does its vacillating on a rarefied, abstruse level and with a lot more words.

They are really all "one-worlders," our intellectuals, and whatever their field of specific interest, they seem united in a compulsive sense of frantic urgency about the necessity of establishing a worldwide cooperative community before it is too late. Time is short in their opinion and unless, through the electronic marvels now at our disposal, this can be accomplished within the next decade or two, the probability of atomic catastrophe destroying civilization is a real one. We have the means, they say, with our programmed computers, our modern technology industry and agriculture and our worldwide television, to make the world's resources adequate and available to all, and it must be done. According to the acknowledged genius, R. Buckminster Fuller, 71-year-old architect, designer and professor at Southeastern Illinois University, "man on earth is now clearly faced with the choice of Utopia or Oblivion," and the millennium can be achieved only through "a design science revolution of spontaneously coordinate university-aged youth." (an abstruse enough concept.)

That the finest minds available are earnestly occupied with the awesome and urgent problems of the present is reassuring. The discouraging aspect of the situation, whether or not one agrees with the solutions, is how the intellectuals will develop the leadership and political power to fulfil their dream of a world-wide society. In the past, intellectualism has never been known for its practicality. There have been wise men in every civilization since the beginning of history, but their number, just as now, must represent only a small fraction of the world's population. The wars and the catastrophes that have beset civilization throughout history originate among the non-intellectuals, and have occurred in spite of the teachings and admonitions of the wise. And as they occur, the intellectual community (and the great mass of unthinking humanity) is swept along helplessly by overpowering forces beyond any control.

There is such a force building up in powerful social pressures and restlessness now, - in the Americas, in Europe, in Asia and in Africa. Despite modern technology and cybernetics, the hope for one-world understanding and cooperation within the short time allotted us by the intellectuals seems slim indeed. By comparison, the conditions for the establishment of Utopia may have been more favorable in the 16th century of the ill-fated Sir Thomas More. At least in those days none of the antagonistic nations possessed the frightening capabilities for instant annihilation and devastation now existent. Notwithstanding the modern capabilities of intellectualism, it is doubtful that our basic human intelligence and understanding are any better than they were almost 500 years ago. Unfortunately, when the conflagration comes again, there may be no road back as in the past.

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