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1976: Agenda for Tomorrow

By

STUART UDALL

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. 1968

Pp. ix, 173, \$5.75

A Question of Priorities New Strategies for an Urbanized World

By

EDWARD HIGBEE

Morrow. 1970

Pp. vi, 214, \$6.00

Utopian literature is rapidly turning a corner. Traditionally concerned with dreams of new social orders and economic systems, it is at length discussing the vital factor of environment, from whose welfare that of man is inseparable. This is not to say that environment has been wholly ignored, for geographers such as Ellen Semple have argued that human cultures have largely been determined by it. Beyond this, present-day authors are demonstrating that end results come from the interaction *between* cultures and environments.

The classical Utopias were works of fiction and high literary art, conveying their criticism of contemporary society not so much by pointing out its evils as by portraying ideals, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions. Messrs Udall and Higbee, no less humane and remarkably good writers as well, belong to a tougher breed. Armed with modern scientific knowledge and political realism, they make very clear the disastrous effects of reckless breeding and powerful, unregulated technology.

Having done this, each proceeds to be quite specific as to what is necessary and possible in the way of practical remedies. Differing as they do in approach and emphasis, Stewart Udall, experienced public servant, and Edward Higbee, vocal and versatile geographer, come through fairly well shoulder to shoulder. Both hold, and argue convincingly, that our present scale of public expenditures, rechanneled as they should be, is adequate to take care of our sorest ills.

Leaving aside the obvious matter of what could be done with the diversion of war costs to domestic reforms, the vast sum now devoted to serving private automobiles could work wonders in developing rational mass transportation. Excessive payments for crop control

(now happily reduced) have been enough to alleviate largely the curse of hunger and malnutrition throughout the nation, surprising as this may seem. And so on.

Both authors are sensitive to social injustice, Udall emphatic against racism and for population control, Higbee urging the necessity for cultural diversity. Perhaps the greatest difference in other respects is Higbee's apotheosis of the city as the creator of resources. Not that there is disagreement on its importance as a focus for improvement; rather that Udall is probably the more convinced of the human need for a tie to the land. Higbee, on the other hand, expounds the folly of the agrarian viewpoint in the modern world. He considers it obsolete in view of new technologies in agriculture, and pernicious in view of the narrow anti-urban legislation that has long been prevalent.

Present tax laws must be modified to prevent what Udall calls antisocial uses of land, while Higbee discusses the inequity which drains tax money into the federal government, leaving local communities with the responsibility for schools and other public services.

Higbee argues that loyalties are now to organizations and institutions rather than place and physical neighbors. I doubt whether Udall would accept this wholeheartedly; certainly he understands that no technical or legislative measures can succeed without genuine emotional sanction. In other words, the basis of cultural change lies in the elusive realm of the intangible, with instrument subordinate to desire and design.

Recalling the powerful impact made by Ida M. Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and other critics of our economic system early in the century, I am willing to risk the guess that these two books, if widely read and digested as they should be, can have a comparable influence.

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