



Review and Reflection

BY
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THERE IS a growing longing on the part of many Americans for getting away from it all, dropping out of the rat race—"copping out," as the saying goes. Hustling for the buck does not seem as glamorous as it once did.

Large cities which are supposed to be the acme of civilization are instead becoming the "acne" of civilization. Rent, taxes, crime and pollution are causing middle class people to flee in great numbers from the cities, leaving the field to depressed minorities. Unless some reversal takes place, the future of our cities is dismal indeed.

There is increasing talk—and action—not only about getting out of the cities but getting out of the country altogether and finding some other spot in the world to live.

The youth rebellion seems to be a large-scale rejection of traditional values—a rebellion to which older people do not have an adequate response as they do not really believe the things they preach to youngsters. The relaxation of moral standards has affected all ages and it is said that the patrons of pornographic literature, plays and motion pictures are mostly middle aged people.

The traditional faiths are in decline, and despite earnest efforts on the part of many clergymen to make their religion "relevant" most people are not buying it. Unfortunately, they are not looking for application of religion to solving today's world problems, but rather for an escape from these oppressive problems. The kinds of cults that are burgeoning are those that offer a haven away from the harsh realities. Old Eastern disciplines that look for private inner release, such as Yoga and Buddhism, are finding Western adepts in increasing numbers. Bizarre new cults are also flourishing. There has even been a revival of witchcraft, magic, fortune-telling, astrology and the like. These anti-rational and "dark age" tendencies bespeak a large-scale escapism.

One of the most devastating of today's "cop-outs" is the growing addiction to drugs. Formerly the drugs and nostrums that were popular were the kind that braced one for facing the world—"pep pills," stimulants, etc. Nowadays, drugs are taken for escape, for fantasy experiences and "trips" as a substitute for enjoyments denied by the real world, especially to victims of poverty. Of course there is a terrible price that must be paid for

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this illusory and fleeting pleasure—a financial, medical and social price.

An addict has to pay exorbitant prices for his "fix," in addition to suffering mental and physical deterioration. His payments enrich the criminal element and he usually becomes a criminal himself—for it is virtually impossible to earn the funds needed to keep him in drugs.

Crime in New York and other cities has risen steeply within the past decade and the main reason cited is drug addiction. The desperation of addicts has made streets unsafe not only at night but even in the day. This only adds to the unattractiveness and further decline of the city.

With all this, one wonders whether society is in danger of falling apart. As one looks around, society still looks normal. People are going about their daily activities, automobiles are clogging the highways, buildings are being constructed. Is the "copping out" more talked about than done? Is it a minor phenomenon? Today's cop-out crowd do seem to stay close to the conveniences of civilization. Are they just playing at dropping out?

There have been previous periods when games were played—but followed by the real thing. In the 1900's the Great Powers played at war games; the grim reality came in the next decade. In the 1920's intellectuals played at being disillusioned; then came the terrible disillusion of the 1930's.

Will today's game of coping out be followed by the real thing? That is, will society actually crumble because great numbers of people will flee from the seemingly insoluble and intolerable problems of living and working together? Will our towers of Babel be left to moss and lizards?

Or will the outcome be much less dramatic—neither the rosy picture painted by some halcyon prophets nor the disaster foreseen by prophets of doom—but merely a continuation of the same old business of bumbling along with periodic breakdowns and flare-ups—an on-going state of dissatisfaction with no decisive action?

Whatever the case, the spirit of our times is certainly not optimistic and people seem to have lost belief in progress. An apparent normalcy covers a deep malaise. After each of our frequent outbursts, the wounds seem to heal, but the healing powers of the social organism are limited. If current tendencies continue, it is hard to see how society can avoid collapse.

If it is not too late to prevent this, it is high time for fundamental social and economic analysis and radical (root) reform.