

## A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCOY

### *Is Anybody Listening?*

This is the title of a challenging volume by William H. Whyte, Jr., and the editors of Fortune magazine. It is subtitled *How and Why U. S. Business Fumbles When it Talks With Human Beings*, and contains some pretty sharp observations on that fumbling.

As the title suggests, American business (primarily the big corporations) is failing in its extensive campaign to "put over" the message of "free enterprise" to the American public.

In brief, the authors' diagnosis is that business in its heavy reliance on mass technique, expertism and "social engineering," has lost contact with the human being.

All this comes under the frowning scrutiny of the Fortune editors and is aiding, they say, the trend toward "groupthink." This 1984-type coinage, as it suggests, means emphasizing system, participation, adjustment, group harmony, as an end-all, at the expense of individual values.

But there they leave us, hanging over the cliff. They do at the very end rather lamely propose that "a new respect for the individual must be kindled" — and warn us that it "cannot easily be worked out."

There seemed to me to be a between-the-lines message in the clever probing of *Is Anybody Listening?* Do American businessmen themselves believe the message of free enterprise that they are so earnestly endeavoring to impart? Or has it merely become the right, the official, the institutional thing to put forward? And is there behind-the-scenes skepticism even on very high levels?

If this is so—and there is plenty of evidence to support it—then a new *how* and *why* is in order.

Our economy based on a grab for monopoly and privilege, institutionalized by big labor, big business and big government, is tough on everybody, those at the top, the middle and the bottom. Problems become more than individuals should have to face, so it's no wonder they look for a "system" to do the solving.

Somehow the situation reminds me of the latter days of the Roman Empire when the old sources of prosperity were drying up and people were trying to make the old ways continue working.

There's a better way. It's contained in the pages of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*. Is anybody listening?