

# resurgence

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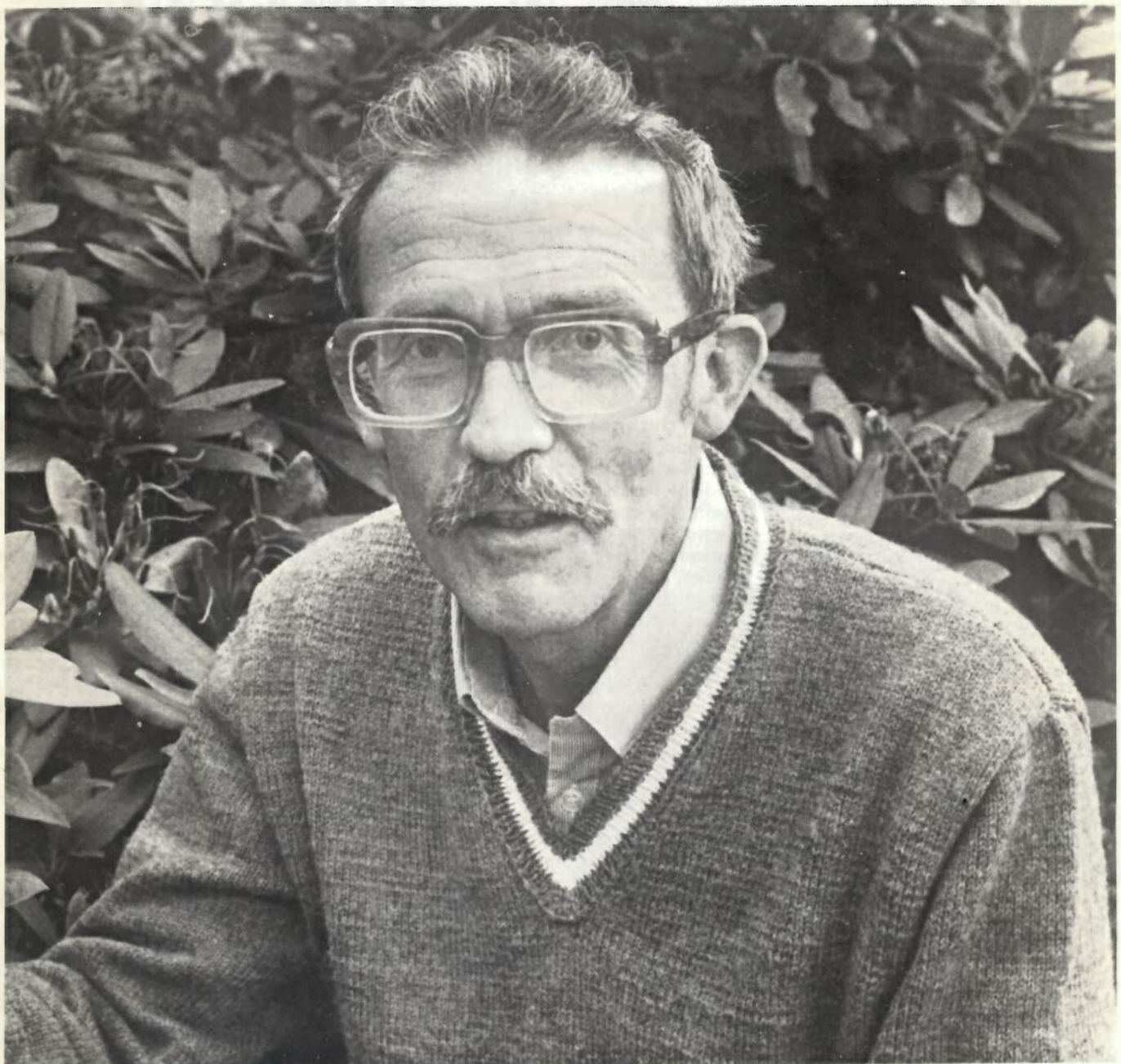
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# The Other America

The other America says loud and clear, we will not be managed, we will not be trained, we will not be helped, we will not be facilitated, we are the centre, we are not your consumers, we are not your clients, we are not your markets, we are competent citizens in our community.

I remember my Great Grandmother who died when she was 102 sitting around talking. She had a very clear idea about leaders. In her era the national leader was Franklin Roosevelt and she never thought much of him because she always compared him to the leader that was her leader, Abraham Lincoln. She had seen Abraham Lincoln. And she spoke to me about Mr Lincoln in a way that was real and vital. And she'd tell a story about how he came from New Salem and how he knew what it was that this country had to do. Now, I must confess that her father was an abolitionist and he was killed in a battle in the Civil War in Virginia. But she was very sure that Mr Lincoln was the real leader. He knew what to do. He led the country toward doing that.

I've thought about leadership and about what she was telling me, she was telling me that a real leader is somebody who knows what to do and how to do it. And in a way I think America keeps looking for Mr Lincoln. My guess is that it is impossible today to have a leader like Mr Lincoln, because 'the what to do and the how to do it' no longer resides in a person and therefore we're engaged in a futile search trying to find a person like Mr Lincoln.

What is to be done and how it is to be done has been relocated in our society. It has been relocated in two new classes of people — the managers and the professionals. In our society what is to be done is the responsibility of the professional. And how it is to be done is the managerial function. We don't have presidents who are leaders because the very essence of leadership is relocated, it is now held by the classes of people who carry these labels. There has been a reincarnation of leadership in these two classes.

Another way of thinking about that is something I saw happen in my home town, in Ohio. There was one hospital in that town, it was called St Mary's and the leader of that hospital, when I was young, was a nun named Mother Cicely. I recently went back there and had a chance to talk with her. Now, Mother Cicely was a nice old lady who

## JOHN McKNIGHT



hospital was controlled by the medical staff and the hospital administrator. From a person these two classes have taken the leadership by saying, "we know what to do and we know how to do it. And it's we, a class, who lead."

If you think a little more about these classes, what is it that they do? The managerial class, does four things: it says, in order to do our job, we need to control the structure of an organization; we need to control its budget; we need to control its personnel; and we need to control its technology. And if you look at the professionals and see what it is that they do, they do three things: the first is that they decide what the problem is, they decide what to do about the problem, and finally they decide whether the doing worked. In a sense, the professional claims power over substance and the manager claims power over process.

will relate to other people, tell you how to spend the national wealth, tell you who should do what. What dictator ever placed a greater claim on the economic, physical, social and psychological resources of the society than those claims? I suspect that no king, emperor or dictator ever claimed that much. It's like a collective dictatorship. But these new classes tell us that they are appropriate leaders of a democratic society, they are there to give us choices, and services and what would a democratic society want more than choice and service?

For the last twelve years the Harris public opinion Poll group have asked a sample of the American people, "do you have confidence in the leaders of the following institutions — the military, colleges, medicine, organized religion, major companies, organized labour and the press? They began that in 1966 and have asked each year since. They found that the American people believe there is no American institution and its leaders who are more credible. This is an impressive report card to me because this is a reflection on the most powerful people this society has ever known. This is a reflection on how the American people feel about this class that says we will tell you how to relate to others, tell you how to spend the national wealth, tell you who should do what, tell you what tools to use, tell you what the problems are, deal with the problems ourselves and evaluate whether or not our solutions work. The power of leadership has been located in these classes but the American people don't believe in them.

Now how do we explain that? When I raised this question with representatives of this new class, their answer is, incredibly enough, that, the reason that people don't believe in us is because we don't have enough. Our budget is too small, we don't have the newest machines, the workers screw things up. Give us more power, and we'll change that trend. There is no class that has ever had as much power as this class in the history of human beings. There is no individual who has





illustration: Alastair Taylor

I think there is another reason for the lack of credibility: this class is in an unalterable conflict with what people know and feel and they know and feel, finally, on the basis of where they come from, rather than on the basis of the world defined by these powers and the institutions in which they are embodied. That place where people know and feel another way is what I'm calling the *local*. It's the other reference point. It's another land. The professionals and the Managers don't lead in this other land. The land of the *local* is the other America. Who lives in the other America? Families live there. The other America is the place of the neighbour. The location of the local enterprise. It's the place where parenting or guardening is done. It's the place of belief where the synagogue and church resides. It's the place of personal history where race and ethnicity have meaning. It's the place

is no more, the place of the political party. If it ever again becomes the place of the political party, America will be able to find a leader. Nowadays the place of the political party is a twenty one inch mechanical piece of glass called T.V. For the professional and the manager, the local is the end of a system. It's at the bottom. But for Americans it is the vital centre. It is the real, the authentic America. The systems and institutions that the professionals lead is the illusory America. We believe in an illusion, and that's easy.

About a year ago I went to Los Angeles and somebody persuaded me, against my better judgement, that I ought to go to Disneyland. And so I went. It's a fantastic place. When I left I was trying to understand why do I feel so funny about it. I realized all of a sudden what it was. It was a

The other America is the authentic America. It is not legitimate, it's authentic. The characteristic of the local America, is that it is the place of the many, the institutional America is the place of the few. The most eminent voice of our time, Dr Martin Luther King — knew the local America and worked with it. Dr King couldn't facilitate four people getting in a car to go downtown. Dr King had no position given to him by anybody, but he was a leader because he gave voice to a people. The voice of the people is local. It comes from the other America. The idea of facilitating, manipulating, helping, that is all something that comes from the institutional people's heads.

Unfortunately, the institutions have, in the last few years, discovered the other America. Harvard M.I.T. has just put out a study that looked at every business in the United States in



created. They've found that between the years of 1968 and 1976, sixty percent of all the new jobs in America were created by enterprises with under 20 people. Not by General Motors or any other big corporations. The people in the other America knew that but now that Harvard knows it, we are in trouble. Police chiefs, school superintendents, psychologists, social workers have all suddenly discovered neighbourhoods and they're descending on them like a plague. Similarly people from corporations are marching hand in hand into the neighbourhoods. When they march into the neighbourhood they bring the ideas of their institutional world. They say to a neighbourhood organization, "what's your MBO?" In my other America we don't know MBO from BO. We don't want your MBO. We need resources, we don't need your ideas, your ideas have failed. They don't work.

The White House has discovered the other America too. There is going to be a White House Conference on the family. God forbid. The discovery of the other America by institutional, professional, managerial America will inevitably result in an effort to assert managerial and professional principles upon the ways of people. The harsh reality is that managerial professional leadership cannot help the other America with these tools. It can

dispossess the other America, it can control the other America, it can make the other America even more a place to consume rather than to make. Inevitably this America will replace local competence with expert power, will absorb local capacity into systems, will rob the authentic leaders of their authority by intervening with the tools of management and professional leadership.

What is to be done, then, by professionals and managers in relationship to the other America? I'm talking here to professionals and managers of profit and not-for-profit voluntary organizations. From the view of the other America both are the same. They may have a different label but both of them are dominated by the ideology of management and professionalization. What is to be done by those who are in this class and hold these powers, is to move back. They take up too much space and are invading the other America. I urge them: don't do more, don't steal authority, don't steal all the resources, recognize that you are the most dangerous people in the world, a new class with the capacity to steal the only real legitimate leadership left in the country from the communities. What should we do? I think we should act on the premise that the local in us is the most important thing in the world.

I went to a conference of the La Leche League, a group of women set it up, to help women breastfeed and to think about nurturing their husbands. And this was in the Atlanta Hilton, six thousand people, two thousand of them under one year of age. I just exploded with joy because the other America had invaded the institutional America, it was so good. It's in the voice of the community, it's the local level in the other America, that I can hear America singing. And the song there is a song about justice, not about markets. The song there is about neighbours, not about management. The song there is about responsibility, not certification. The song is about diversity, a thousand songs, not about uniqueness, monocromatic and standards. The song there is also a song about death, not about technological breakthroughs that will make us eternal. In the institutional America we can't hear America singing in spite of the managerial megaphone that keeps saying consume, consume, consume, be a client, be a client, be a client. The music of the other America says loud and clear, we will not be managed, we will not be trained, we will not be helped, we will not be facilitated, we are the centre, we are not your consumers, we are not your clients, we are not your markets, we are competent citizens in our community. ●

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