

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

BOOKS

Can the U.S. achieve peaceful capitalism?

THE PERMANENT WAR ECONOMY

By Seymour Melman
Simon & Schuster, 1974, \$10.
Paperback 1976, \$4.95

Here is a treasure-trove of facts for those who view ending the arms race as a step toward a new America. But it is written to appeal to readers who may desire only to preserve the old America that long has led the world in industrial know-how, efficiency and economic productivity.

Written by an insider (Seymour Melman is head of Columbia University's department of industrial engineering), the book is a guided tour by an expert through the workings of a prototype military firm and the hierarchical system by which the men in control—the "state managers"—operate to enlarge their power to the mutual benefit of themselves and the military industrialists.

Military industries are directly fed by pipeline from the U.S. Treasury. The spigot is easily turned on by appeals to "national security" and the need to preserve a system that provides many jobs. These firms operate free from the constraints that force ordinary businesses to minimize costs and seek more efficient operating methods.

To a military firm "higher costs mean more activity, more facilities, more employees, more cash flow, and a larger cost base for calculating profits." The result is a "pervasive pattern of inefficient operation at all levels," but virtually boundless subsidies make these firms "failure-proof." The evidence of this makes hilarious reading.

At the controls of the military economy, making the rules and coordinating what is "surely the largest industrial central office in the United States—probably in the entire world" is a set of appointive government officials headed by the Assistant and Deputy Secretaries of Defense. They "comprise a board of directors...with about 20,000 industrial divisions whose president is, functionally, the Secretary of Defense and whose chairman of the board is, functionally, the President of the United States."

For more than 30 years now, the U.S. has encouraged this military economy to grow alongside of and intertwined with its civilian sector, until now the military dominates. The U.S. is a military state capitalism; and as the chiefs of the military economy and of government are one, power over the economy and over domestic,

foreign and military policy is concentrated to a degree hitherto unknown in the U.S.

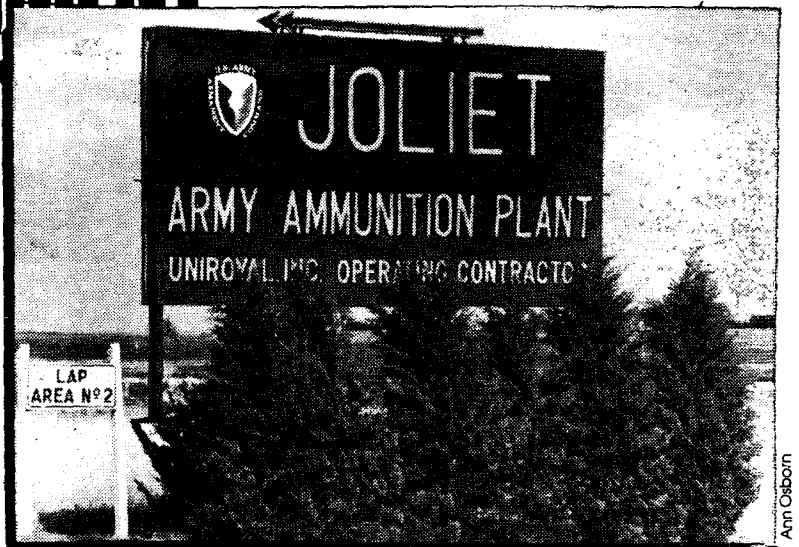
The very success of this American variant of capitalism has produced effects, largely unintended, that are calamitous. Melman's book, I believe, is the first to trace the process back, step by step, to its source.

It begins by debunking the myth that war brings prosperity—the prevailing ideology basic for commitment to a permanent war economy.

Generalizing from World War II, which ended the Great Depression, Americans have come to believe that a military panacea can work permanently, and have been blinded to what has been foregone by concentrating on war production: e.g., the forced neglect of the underpinnings of economic prosperity (transportation, communications systems and power production) and our failure to invest the research talent and capital needed for the continual upgrading of civilian productive efficiency.

American goods are losing out to those of Japan and Europe where civilian research and investment have been sustained. U.S. corporations have responded to more appealing growth prospects abroad with a flight of capital unprecedented in any nation's history. As many as 4,000,000 job opportunities have been exported to foreign workers during the same period that 4,000,000 Americans were registered as unemployed.

This also has contributed to a



developing trade deficit and to the collapse of the value of the dollar. In 1971, the U.S. government initiated a series of moves to speed up American productivity, making government patents public, underwriting new high-technology enterprises and pushing other similar programs. But in March 1973 this approach to the problem was deliberately abandoned. U.S. state managers chose instead to close the trade gap by selling arms and agricultural produce abroad, while pressing Japan to slow down its penetration into U.S. markets. This decision "traded off renewal of the main productive assets of the economy for the operation of the military system."

As a result, our major cities are in shambles, prices are soaring beyond reach, the young, old, sick, and poor are deprived of services they need.

War economy proponents argue that the massive arms budget insures the country's defense capability.

But the U.S. long ago passed the limits needed for defense. Military power has limits; and Melman devotes a chapter to refuting a long list of assumptions beneath the Pentagon's make-believe world in which "military superiority" still has meaning.

Melman wrote his book, he says, as a stimulus and a practical guide to change from a militarized to a civilian economy. His

last chapters analyze the economic problems involved in such a change, assessing the feasibility and difficulty of each step. This section should be a bible for those brave souls committed to economic conversion.

The author warns that he holds no rosy-hued view of America's future prospects. He does believe, however, that given public understanding of the major causes of our country's deterioration, it may be possible to force a political decision to renounce the war economy. We then might regain economic health by planned, locally controlled but federally assisted conversion to civilian production. Such an effort would require political-economic actions, large and small, on a heroic scale, a movement dedicated to "a new political economy based on democracy, rather than hierarchy, in the workplace and the rest of society."

The book avoids challenging the capitalist system as such, instead pointing out weaknesses the author finds in certain Marxian shibboleths. Nevertheless, one who rejects the profit motive as the mainspring of economic activity can find here a wealth of facts to buttress the case.

—Frances W. Herring

Frances W. Herring is the author of *The Development and Control of Nuclear Industry in California* and is active in the peace and ecology movements.

Whatever your pleasure—he's got a little list

SIMONS' LIST BOOK

By Howard Simons
Simon & Schuster, N.Y.,
paperback \$5.95

The cover of this outsize paperback sets out the publisher's claims: that it is a guide to the diversity of America and a compendium of lists of just about everything within it.

The author's introduction explains that the book grew out of a 9,500-mile, seven-week family vacation in a station wagon, most of it unplanned. The managing editor of the *Washington Post* (who assigned Woodward and Bernstein to investigate Watergate), his wife and three of their daughters zig-zagged across the continent visiting every point of interest they gleaned from reference books, Chamber of Commerce advertising and chats with the "locals." They also kept track of such things as birds, beers, brands of gasoline, box cars and battlefields—and a number of things that do not alliterate.

The suggestion is that families engaged in similar explorations can get as good or better results by carrying only *Simons' List Book*. It has a geographical index in which—to pick a random example—visitors to Kansas can find eight entries of state-wide interest, four specific references under Abilene, three each under Kansas City, Wichita and Manhattan, two under Lawrence, and one each under Osawatomie, Dodge City, Topeka and 11 other

cities. Running them all down may be the scenario for an interesting and fairly extended vacation in the Sunflower State. (There are, incidentally, lists that tell you the official nickname, flower, bird, and tree for all 50 states.)

For compulsive list-makers and record-keepers there is a further usefulness for this extraordinary collection of data. One can check (and also annotate in the margin) each experience or sighting under a number of headings. Bird-watchers will find the Simons' list exhaustive, if not exhausting.

There are also lists of Pulitzer prize-winners in all the categories for all the years the prizes have been given. There are lists of Simons' choice of the works of an impressive number of American writers, in case you're having difficulty selecting a library for reading on your vacation. There are lists of regional theaters, music festivals, horse shows, fly-fishing streams and famous buildings, restaurants and stores.

It is, obviously, tempting to make lists of what the Simons have or have not made lists of. (Mushrooms are missing.) Forseeing this, the author has provided a few "expandables" to be used by the reader. Our favorite is "Catchall America" which begins with the Black Hills and ends with the Wall Drug,—starting and ending this overview of the country in South Dakota. And why not?

—J.S.

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FILM

Plea for children's liberation

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE

Screenplay by Laird Koenig
(based on his novel)
Directed by Nicolas Gessner
With Jodie Foster, Martin Sheen,
Alexis Smith, Scott Jacoby
and Mort Shuman

Hollywood is periodically obsessed with the evil child concept. Films involving patricidal siblings, precocious devils, smiling innocently to conceal the blackness of their hearts have become a hot and profitable commodity. The theme is simple enough: possessed by some inexplicable and diabolical force, the child turns monster, terrorizing its poor parents until they (or some corresponding authority figure) resolve to destroy it. It is an occult version of the generation gap

with the child as the heavy.

But contrary to the promotional hype, *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* (adapted by Laird Koenig from his own book) is not another bad seed saga. Koenig has turned the concept on its head: the world of adults is the fiend in this plea for children's liberation, thinly disguised as a horror flick.

Jodie Foster, who gave such a remarkable performance as the child prostitute in *Taxi Driver*, gives another one as Wren Jacobs, an unusually self-sufficient 13-year-old, living in an isolated country house near a small New England town, presumably with her father, who is a poet and whom no one has seen since soon after the lease was signed.

Wren doesn't attend school ("School is stultifying"), stays

home a lot listening to Chopin and studying Hebrew. Groceries for the menage are ordered by phone and delivered. Her only contact with the village is an occasional trip to the bank to cash some travelers' checks.

This apparently placid pattern is shattered by a visit from Mrs. Hallitt (Alexis Smith), the owner of the house who is used to dropping in on her tenants uninvited. She is an anti-Semitic adult-chauvinist and mother of the film's other antagonist—the local child-molester, menacingly played by Martin Sheen.

Wren has two defenders in her war of resistance against the Hallitts: Mario (Scott Jacoby), a 17-year-old polio victim who is a self-taught magician; and Officer Miglioriti (Mort Shuman), a likeable, if not very effective cop who tries to protect Wren from the attentions of young Hallitt.

The plot is a bit incredible, but it makes its point: that ours is a society that views children as raw material to be processed through schooling and other forms of indoctrination into "finished" adults, rather than as persons of intrinsic dignity with attendant rights. Young people who rebel against the machinery of socialization are frequently labeled "incorrigible" or "emotionally disturbed" and shut away in juvenile prisons or psychiatric hospitals without even the formality of a trial.

Koenig's message hovers over the action like the music of Chopin, which is always on Wren's record player. Both provide obligations to what is ostensibly a mildly shocking film about "the unspeakable secret" of a little girl who lives down the lane all alone.

—George A. Dunn

George A. Dunn, a bakery porter in Florissant, Mo., blames the American educational system for the fact that he can't spell, and thanks Eugene V. Debs for the fact that he is literate.



Above: Jodie Foster as the little girl.

Below: Child-molester Martin Sheen on the brink of extinction.

I look forward to reading *In These Times* each week—it has articles and insights I can find nowhere else. Even though there are many new publications, I get a special kick out of this one.

—Studs Terkel

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