

tion of long generations of Evangelical belief ending in post-Darwinian doubt. But the mystery of human personality defies all explanations.

If we can agree to rest with a conclusion that is so chastening to our presumption as literary critics, and (let us admit it) so frustrating to our legitimate curiosity about the personality that created *Kim* and *The Jungle Books*, *Soldiers Three* and *The Just-So Stories* and *Puck of Pook's Hill*, at least we can tell ourselves that we are falling in with the declared wishes of the man who wrote:

*If I have given you delight  
By aught that I have done,  
Let me lie quiet in that night  
Which shall be yours anon:*

*And for the little, little span  
The dead are borne in mind,  
Seek not to question other than  
The books I leave behind.*

This is the voice of the decorous elderly Kipling, Horatian in verse as it was Jamesian in prose. The sobriety and dignity are genuine and impressive. But what we and our students need to rediscover is the belligerent, taunting, and accusing Kipling of 20, 30, 40 years before. □

**HAVEN IN A HEARTLESS WORLD: The Family Besieged, by Christopher Lasch.**  
**Basic Books, 230 pp., \$12.95.**

## *In loco parentis*

PETER SCHRAG

**T**HERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF hand-wringing and teeth-gnashing lately about the plight of the American family. Jimmy Carter wants to save it with tax reform, and Kenneth Keniston, who headed the Carnegie Commission on Children, wants to save it with a sort of consumerism by which the clients of social service hold the purveyors accountable. Their concern,

PETER SCHRAG is a Contributing Editor of *INQUIRY* magazine. His most recent book is *Mind Control*, published by Pantheon.

like that of hundreds of other writers, sociologists, and politicians, reflects a growing disenchantment with the bureaucracies and social institutions that, in the past two generations, have taken over many of the family's traditional functions in health, education, and welfare. Those agencies have al-

**In social service, as in Vietnam, past failures only justified escalation.**

ways claimed that they possessed a therapy to conjure away problems which were the inexorable consequences of industrialization, alienation, and the general condition of modern life; that they were simply picking up the pieces after the breakdown of the family in the face of invincible social forces; and that if they fell short of total success, it was only for lack of money, personnel, and authority. In social service, as in Vietnam, failure only proved that escalation was imperative.

It was always nonsense, and in his new book Christopher Lasch, the anatomist of *The Agony of the American Left*, works industriously to prove how pernicious that nonsense is. Far from picking up the pieces, he says, it was the professionals and the experts, outriders of corporate capitalism, who created the problems and the breakdown in the first place. "Historians of the family," he argues in *Haven in a Heartless World*, "have paid too little attention to the way in which public policy, sometimes conceived quite deliberately not as a defense of the family at all but as an invasion of it, contributed to the deterioration of domestic life. The family did not simply evolve in response to social and economic influences; it was deliberately transformed by the intervention of planners and policymakers." What scientific management did to de-skill the worker in the factory, social service did to destroy his confidence in raising his children and in living a self-sufficient family life.

On the surface Lasch's case is simple: The breakdown did not begin in the last few years. Rather, it goes back to the first decades of this century when

the professionals—educators, sociologists, doctors, social workers—discovered "preventive medicine" and evolved a theory in which the state became the ultimate parent of the child; when the school came to be regarded not merely as a purveyor of basic skills and knowledge but as a moral and psychological institution "charged with the . . . social training of the child"; and when social workers began to develop their contempt for the competence of families and parents:

With the rise of the "helping professions" in the first three decades of the twentieth century, society in the guise of a "nurturing mother" invaded the family . . . and took over many of its functions. The diffusion of the new ideology of social welfare had the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy. By persuading the housewife, and finally even her husband as well, to rely on outside technology and the advice of outside experts, the apparatus of mass tuition—the successor to the church in a secularized society—undermined the family's capacity to provide for itself and thereby justified the continuing expansion of health, education and welfare services.

Lasch contends that nothing that's man-made is inevitable, and that when sociologists describe the "necessary" results of "impersonal forces," they are often merely providing rationalizations for invasions of the family and for control over the individual. He then goes on to analyze the consequences of those developments in the rage they produce in the children of permissive parents (whose fantasies of parental discipline remain unmitigated by the exercise of real parental authority), in the replacement of intimacy with "psychic survival" as the goal of domestic life, in the confusion of psychic health with "an absence of inner restraints," in the substitution of "reality" for moral authority as the guideline for personal behavior, and in the subjection of "the citizen's entire existence" to social direction "unmediated by the family or other institutions."

**H**AVEN IN A HEARTLESS *World* is an important book, and much of it is elegantly written and elegantly argued. Yet finally it's frustrating—partly because it is important—the work of a man who seems to know more than he understands. Lasch devotes most of his energy to attacks on conventional sociology of the family (which is like shooting fish in a barrel) without providing the empirical data—the hard facts—which, quite correctly, he says the sociologists ignore. As a conse-

quence it's often hard to know exactly where he's going; to understand how and why and in what way the professionals and the experts took over; to judge whether they were really the agents of corporate capitalism (creating consumers of services as well as of goods) or just its apes and imitators; and to assess to what extent the things they did in fact reflected a small-town fear of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration rather than (as Lasch suggests) the imperious extension of capitalist control. Surely it's possible to argue that it was the professionals and experts who destroyed the small town and the "services" it informally provided—not only in the support it gave the individual and the family in matters of health, morals, and welfare, but in the rituals and order it established. One could argue further that if it had not been for the social service professionals, the skills and the confidence in coping which had existed in the small town could have been transferred to urban, industrial settings.

Lasch, however, doesn't attempt to make the case; his cosmology is composed of just two primary entities, the family itself, and the "heartless world" from which it was once supposedly a haven, and he virtually ignores the community which once enveloped the family—gave it shelter in a heartless world—and imposed certain standards in return. It is also at least possible to suggest that the "helping professions" were (and still are) the embodiment of traditional WASP standards, were (and are) agents sent by a white, Protestant society to teach manners and morals to the slobs just off the boat—later to blacks and Chicanos—and that they came to be viewed as usurpers only when they turned around and began to practice on the people who had originally hired them. In passing, Lasch mentions the fear of the sociologists and politicians of the 1920s that good American families weren't producing enough good American children. But he never suggests that that fear was itself part of a pervasive terror about race degeneration, mongrelization, and what was sometimes seen as the contamination of American society by the proliferating criminalistic, imbecile, lunatic offspring of millions of immigrant Greeks, Poles, Russians, and Italians. The techniques of factory efficiency became models for all sorts of social planners and theorists in the first decades of the twentieth century, but the vision they fostered usually came straight from a

Currier and Ives image of the small town of the nineteenth century.

**U**NFORTUNATELY LASCH doesn't understand that there's a difference between the "isolation" of the traditional family—which was subjected to the significant intrusion of the state and its experts—and the "isolation" of the contemporary middle-class suburban mother. Thus he misreads Philip Slater's criticism of "the idea of imprisoning each woman alone in a small, self-contained, and architecturally isolating dwelling" as a call to diminish "the intensity of the bond between parent and child." (To say "mother" or "woman" is not the same as saying "parent," and in that confusion lies a great deal that would have made Lasch's case more persuasive.) Slater, in *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, writes that "one has only to see a village community in which women work and socialize in groups with children playing nearby, also in groups, supervised by the older ones, or by some of the mothers on a haphazardly shared basis, to realize what is awkward about the domestic role in America." It is the very absence of such arrangements that creates the "isolation" which, in turn, opens the door to the "experts" and the attendant professionalization of child rearing and other social services. It is the presence of other adults around the home—friends, neighbors, fellow workers—and the existence, wherever possible, of real work and real interests rooted in the world outside that create the competence and confidence that he says—correctly—the contemporary family so badly lacks. Yet, finally, it's hard to know where Lasch stands on this issue. He seems to look upon Slater's ideal of community as the substitution of a "diffuse, easygoing, non-demanding warmth for the passion that fastens neurotically on a single individual," yet in another place Lasch himself seems to flirt with the idea. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* recently, he said:

In order to break the existing pattern of dependence and stop the erosion of competence, citizens must take the solution of their problems—the deterioration of child care, for example—into their own hands. They must create their own agencies of collective self-help, their own "communities of competence." This sounds utopian, but American society contains many traditions of localism, self-help, and community action, not yet defunct by any means, on which to base such a politics of decentralization.

If that "utopian" vision is not identical

to Slater's image of the women in the marketplace, it surely resembles a credible substitute. □

**CRISIS ON THE LEFT: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947–1954, by Mary Sperling McAuliffe. University of Massachusetts Press, 204 pp., \$12.50.**

## Liberal paralysis

---

RONALD RADOSH

---

**I**N 1948 OLIN DOWNES, THE cultural critic of the *New York Times*, predicted that "when the record is written, it will not be flattering to the 'liberal' intellectuals of America." According to Downes, the liberals had bought the Cold War and its implications, deciding that "it was safer to break the faith which they had long and politely professed." Now, some 30 years later, young scholars are beginning to assess the record of those years, and the conclusions they are reaching are strikingly similar to Downes's contemporary observation.

Mary S. McAuliffe begins *Crisis on the Left* by discussing the breakup of the wartime Popular Front left after World War II. The new liberalism—more in tune with the Cold War—was symbolized by Americans for Democratic Action, founded in 1947. The leaders of ADA both accepted the Truman administration's hard-line foreign policy, and waged an attack on the critics of that policy on the American left. Thus ADA distinguished itself by taking the lead in branding Henry Wallace's 1948 third party campaign as a totally Communist effort. Abandoning traditional liberal tenets, the new Cold War liberals espoused a doctrine of "realism." Abroad, McAuliffe writes, their realist doctrine "stressed readiness for conflict," while at home they favored a new consensus politics intended to quiet conflict. "Real-

---

RONALD RADOSH is the author of *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism*, published in paperback by Free Life Editions.

---