

"Defeating Extreme Poverty"

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by

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A Preliminary Observation:

The University is Worlds Apart from Extreme Poverty

Defeating extreme poverty is the theme that has brought us together for several hours of reflection and discussion. But why this theme, defeating extreme poverty?

Is the University of Paris a place where it would be useful to adopt an attitude of struggle against extreme poverty? Is it a place where this struggle can be carried out? Apparently not. The University and extreme poverty are, in principle, two worlds which cannot meet. The University, as such, is not an enemy of extreme poverty, but a fortress against it. At the base of its walls, the waves of the stream of poverty must flow the other way. In every way, the University is the antithesis of extreme poverty: security and tranquillity of spirit, completely turned away from the everyday human worries, completely turned toward the discovery of permanent realities which transcend the everyday. The University is the haven of ordered thought, the very opposite of the improvisation constantly required by existence in extreme poverty.

At the University, the security of knowledge and the prestige it confers encourages ambitious intellectual speculation. No one with a healthy mind risks such speculation as long as he or she is exposed to the violence of misery, to expulsion, to refusal of a job, to hunger, to placement of children; as long as he or she is exposed to humiliation, to fear and escape, to the unpredictability of support, to dependence on public or private charity.

The University is people mastering the laws of nature and the rules of all forms of human creativity. Extreme poverty is people mastered, oppressed by nature, by matter, and by other people. It is people not able to be masters of their own bodies, thoughts, or life. The University person is worlds apart from the person in extreme poverty. The one is for the other the world in reverse. How could they encounter one another?

In reality, there is not way that the two worlds can intermingle. And the universe illuminated by the University cannot penetrate the universe menaced, more or less directly, by extreme poverty. This apparently categorical proposition will astonish and even anger some people.

For can we ignore the innumerable university studies and research projects on extreme poverty, the numerous efforts to make connections between the sectors of extreme poverty, or at least poverty, and the academic sectors? I do not deny them. Neither do I deny certain efforts to make people in great poverty the

beneficiaries of academic thoughts and discoveries. But I do hold that these initiatives are often by individuals and always of short duration. We have individual hands, hearts, and minds extended toward to other. But we do not have one world opening itself to another.

It is this latter openness that is necessary, indispensable. For without proximity and permeability the men and women with a stake in the universities or who benefit directly from the goods they distribute undertake actions, and even struggles, which do not benefit the poorest. Often they launch campaigns to liberate the oppressed. But the past and present history of the world tells us one thing over and over again: these campaigns do not liberate those at the bottom of the social ladder.

Those at the bottom were not liberated by the French Revolution, not by the Commune. They are not liberated, or even made literate, by the revolution, connecting intellectuals, students, and salaried workers, which achieved a reversal of power in Nicaragua. Neither are they liberated in Poland, in Hungary, or Czechoslovakia. No doubt the exclusion of the poorest is not something that is intended, but it is a historical fact.

This exclusion is the real challenge to the revolutions of our time. The University and, I would add, humanity itself, have learned to bring about liberating revolutions for and with populations which are poor, but not too poor. The University, no more than humanity in general, has not learned how to conduct or even participate in fundamental change for populations mired in extreme poverty.

In recent times, our students have been reproached for seeking their own professional interests at the expense of the economic interests of the nation. But is this reproach altogether justified? It would be if we had bequeathed to our youth a historical legacy of struggles for humanity, a concrete experience of political struggles. But we have done nothing of the kind. The struggles for humanity that we know are ideological, not political. For, by definition, a political struggle for humanity must mobilize, and even privilege, the poorest of our country and the world. Since we have not learned how to conduct a political struggle, it follows that our campaigns remain partial, selective, and elitist.

I would go so far as to say that about the most revolutionary of revolutions, the change from bottom to top that would bring the poorest out of the shadows and place them on the front line of battle, we know neither the conditions or the strategies. The University has everything to learn about how to defeat extreme poverty. Moreover, it will not learn if it does not invent some new approaches.

I said earlier that opening is indispensable. Now I will go further: **opening would be, in itself, the defeat of extreme poverty.** This thesis is drawn from direct experience and sustained reflection shared with the teams of AD QUART MONDE in zones of the greatest poverty across the world. It is a thesis that I draw from my own childhood and my life lived in the midst of extreme poverty. I would like to examine it with you.

To say that the University, by opening its doors, by going out beyond its walls, overcomes extreme poverty is to attribute to the custodians of knowledge a crushing responsibility, not supportable by individuals, but only by a collectivity. That is why I have taken the initiative of coming to you. I address myself to this audience, symbol of a possible opening, because families of the Fourth World and those coming out of the most favored quarters find yourselves here side by side. Whether you wish it or not, you are, one and all,

representatives of collectivities. But in this hall, at this moment, you are the beginning of a new collectivity, a unit that fights for humanity, not just for individuals. It is this collectivity that I address: Fourth World families and representatives of those who possess knowledge.

I will speak first of the families of the Fourth World. What does it mean to live a world apart from knowledge? Once arrived there, is it possible to change direction?

Next, I will speak of those privileged ones who possess knowledge, those who have a place in the sun, on the good side of the world. First, I will ask to what extent they have diminished knowledge, deformed human reality, by ignoring the experience and thought of the poorest. How have they done a disservice to the poorest, and also to everyone? By taking as their only guides the progress of science and their own questions, how have they alienated humanity?

But those endowed with knowledge also have, at all times, tried to go in the opposite direction. Science in the service of humanity and science and technology in the service of the nation by the mediation of economic progress, **these are two stereotypes equally dangerous for the poorest.** Not every academic has been seduced by them. What lessons can be learned from those who have not been taken in by such abusive simplifications?

I can only present to you a summary line of inquiry on these points. It will be a matter only of indicating some lines of reflection. Nonetheless, we can draw from them some proposals for concrete projects that can be undertaken, starting now. And that is the essential thing about our meeting. This even could not be justified if it did not lead us to undertake concrete and specific projects which we can adopt here and now.

CHAPTER I

The Mauroux Family: The Underside of Life

What does it mean to live worlds apart from knowledge? This is our first question. But how shall we get into it? I am proposing to you the most direct approach, the simplest and the most honest, that of a man of the territory and a militant. I propose to arrange for you to meet a sub-proletarian family. I will speak to you of a man and a woman born at the bottom of the social ladder. I will speak to you of what their parents lived, what they live, and of what, still today, their children live.

I tell you right away that it is the direct approach of a man who knows the territory. This is also the best founded approach, the one preferred for a man of research. But I must say that it is the approach ignored, the missed rendezvous between the University and the Fourth World. And because the University is not there, neither are all those who are nourished by it and who, in one way or another, profit from it by taking it as a source of

training, as a reference and guide. It is the missed rendezvous of our era, of our universities and our whole society.

I propose to bring you close to a sub-proletarian family, so that you can see what is missed by those who have not walked this path. I want you to see what we still risk losing by not encountering this family. Whether we are men and women of action, militants; whether we are professors, researchers, or students; whether we are men and women of faith, believers, or simply citizens of good will; we will see that this encounter is essential, not to be missed at any price.

I will speak to you briefly of the Mauroux family. Madame Gabrielle Mauroux is a parisian. Not everyone is parisian in the same manner as she. Gabrielle Mauroux was born Gabrielle Ledanois in 1926 in the 15th arrondissement on one of those street around the Gate of Sevres where were found, as if stuck to the city, several hundreds of large and very poor families.

In fact, Gabrielle came into the world a child of "the outskirts," as the better placed parisians of the epoch would have put it. Her family belonged to the people of the outskirts, people between country and city, the poorest of whom moved a lot and lived in makeshift shelters in the Zone.

The Paris of yesterday, no more than the Paris of today, made no great effort to become well acquainted with these parisians. Depending on the side one took at the time of the Revolution, these people were either useful or dangerous: useful taking out the garbage or doing the laundry for city families; dangerous to pass after night fall for parisians coming back from the country. Who ever cared about knowing them, except for Dufourny de Villiers and some of his associates concerned for what they called the Fourth Estate, the Fourth Order, or the Fourth World?

Gabrielle Ledanois was born to this mysterious and sometimes mythical people who knew the society that hung over it only from below. She came into the world not far from the building where her mother, Agnes Poncin, was born in 1898. Agnes said it herself; "I am a girl of the Zone; I arrived in the Zone when I was seven-years-old."

Agnes' father was a hauler who, at the order of his boss, arrived at dawn every morning at the Central Market to pick up the garbage. He transported the rubbish outside the city by means of a small two-wheeled cart drawn by a horse. He made the return trip walking beside the horse so as not to risk falling into the garbage or making the horse fall from exhaustion. Of the Ledanois grandparents we do not know much more. Like many neighboring families, they lived, probably with numerous children, in a house on wheels. We would say today that they lived by their wits, but at the time they were part of an organized system of life by which successive generations of the poorest in France hung on to existence. For all of urban France knew this form of survival, based solely on the will to survive, maintained by the people of the outskirts and the Zones.

Agnes Poncin, child of the Zone, soon became wife and mother of the Zone. Still young, with hollow cheeks and a thin but strong body, she took for a husband the son of a neighbor, Michel Ledanois, a burly young man of strong character and strong language. Of her first married years, Agnes says: "At first we lived in the Zone, at the Gate of Versailles. We had a shack. . . . There were lots of them back then. They could be taken apart, made of wood with a tarpaulin for a roof. . . . We had to bring in water from the fountains. We had no electricity, but we did have gas." How did the young Ledanois family make a living? "I went about all day long with my husband; we bought and sold used things. My children had to be on their own. The older ones, the boys, made breakfast for the little ones before leaving for school."

This is something new in the Zone, namely, that while the parents who never went to school bought and sold second hand, the oldest children, three boys, go to school. Mind you, not for very long, nor to learn very much. But the father who sorted through garbage wanted his oldest sons to make something in life. He still had this ambition when the family moved to the 15th arrondissement where Agnes had been born. The family still earned its bread by salvaging rags and iron, now in a neighborhood where whole streets did the same thing. But when the three oldest left school, the father placed them as apprentices, one to a pastry maker and another to a cabinet maker.

The father's ambition for the academic and professional development of his children began to fray as the years passed and more babies came. One could think that society had given to this man, to the Zone, to the outskirts, an ambition without giving him the means to satisfy it. In all thirteen children were born, and there was nothing astonishing about that in a neighborhood with lots of large families. And as the number of mouths to feed increased, the dream of a better situation evaporated. Gabrielle Ledanois, whose married name became Mauroux, says this about her childhood: "I went to work at age twelve in a dress factory. My father said we had to go to work right away, no matter what our age. . . . I wanted to be a hairdresser, but father did not agree. It was natural, for I was the fourth child. The first three were given a chance, but for the fourth it was too much."

By a cruel reversal of fortune, Michel Ledanois not only saw his hopes vanish. Denied the future that an increasingly academically oriented society had held out to his family, he began acting contrary to his hopes. He couldn't give his children the time and solitude necessary for their studies. Disappointed and frustrated, he gave them just the opposite; he knocked them around. He even hit his wife when she was pregnant. He was a living contradiction, for he also wanted to protect her and showed it by making his very young children carry buckets of water from the fountain, do the shopping, and get up before dawn to go with him to "pick up the garbage."

After Gabrielle, nine brothers and sisters will be born to grow up in this situation. Three or four of them seem to have died at an early age. Of the last one, Gabrielle says, "It fell to me to prepare a box to bury him. He was new born. I was twelve."

At age twelve, Gabrielle herself was susceptible to disease. She had meningitis, convulsions, and rickets as well by the appearance of her legs in adult life. Nonetheless, she went to the factory, "to the dressmakers," as she put it. She weakened her vision by stitching the garments. "It's there that I lost my sight. I needed glasses, but I didn't like them much and never has the prescription renewed."

At the time that I came to know Gabrielle Mauroux, nee Ledanois, her dim vision and the fact of not having her glasses at hand gave her an excuse for not writing in the presence of strangers. But she did not hide from us the truth that she could only write words phonetically, and that not very well. She said to us in excuse: "I didn't have much school, but I get along." Moreover, during her entire adult life, she did poorly with numbers. A mother always short of money, she told me, "I don't understand prices at all."

All the same, she had to cover the price of a household's survival between the two world wars, and then during the occupation. After two years in the dress factory, we find Gabrielle in another enterprise, this time putting covers on boxes of wax. Next she rejoins her mother in a laundry, traditional work for sub-proletarian women up until the 60s.

But Gabrielle was sixteen and seeing herself already getting old, working like her mother, among women as old as her mother, made her despair. Standing on those legs afflicted with eczema, staying at work despite a first stage of pleurisy was just too much to take at her tender age. Gabrielle ventured into prostitution or what passed for it in the life of a young woman who had no other means of escaping a family and work situation too crushing for her fragile health.

Later, she will say that her father sent her away from home because she tried to defend her mother from his anger and blows. In fact, her father forbade her to come back home the day he discovered what she was up to. These were terrible years, unrolling during the German occupation. "I lived wherever. At night the police would take me to the station. To wash, I would go to the hospital for a shower. . . ."

Sometimes on the street, sometimes at the police station, sometimes at the hospital or "with the nuns," it was on the street that Gabrielle Ledanois met Daniel Mauroux. It was just after the end of the war; she was nineteen, he thirty-five. "He was kind to me," she said, "I was on the street, and he gave me a roof over my head."

But what was he doing on the streets of Paris, this thirty-five-year-old guy from the provinces? He wasn't sure, any more than he was sure about what his father was doing in the Seine Maritime province when he was born in 1910. "My father dug ditches for the railway, or maybe it was for the gas company." In any case, he hardly knew his father since he left for the war in 1914 and was buried on the battlefield. His mother died soon after while giving birth to a little girl, who died as well.

To Daniel it seemed as if his whole family had died at once. That's how he tells his story, for when his parents died he was cut off from one or two brothers. Having become orphans and wards of the state, the children were separated. Daniel was taken in by a grandmother who lived in the country. She was very poor and scarcely able to welcome even one of her grandchildren. She sent him to the village school, but often she sent him to work on neighboring farms. From the time he was ten years old he did hard labor, in the fields or the stables, which left him with scoliosis.

Bright, and loving to read, he nonetheless completed grade school, much to the joy of his teacher who promised him a good future. This future never arrived because the grandmother died shortly afterward, and Daniel became a permanent ward of the state. And the state, truly at that time a cruel step-mother for poor children, placed him in a school, not as a student, but as a servant, a little flunkey sweeping the halls and the playground instead of sitting in class beside children his own age. He also had to work in the garden, but, he says, "in the evening I made time for reading."

But why should he keep on reading when he knows that in any case his life will be consist in painful manual labor? At fifteen Daniel broke away from the school, and also with his tutor, the state. He signed on to a fishing boat, turning his back forever on the student that he had dreamt of being. Once at sea, traveling sometimes by sail and sometimes by steam engine, he wasn't made a deck boy. He was sent to the hold to be a wretched assistant-stoker. Today he still carries huge scars from the burns he received on his legs and feet. And those aren't the only consequences he carries from those years. His sclerosis and limp were made worse by the heavy coal. He should have worn a belt, but didn't. He began to experience stomach pains.

During the occupation, he stayed on land, "getting along," he said, with work on metal factories, farms, and butcher shops. After the war, he tried to sail again. "But," he said, "there were too many sailors and not enough ships. . . . The policy was to hire only young men; at the end of the war I was thirty-five; I was old." So, already old, he went up to Paris, got a furnished hotel room, and started doing manual work in a factory. Alone after work, he walked the streets. One night he met Gabrielle Ledanois and never left her.

Daniel and Gabrielle didn't marry right away and as time went on they came to see marriage as more and more risky. Trying to work in bad health, Daniel lost his job. A first child was born in 1946 and died none months later. Another son came in 1948, but he died, too, before reaching his first birthday. A girl was born in 1949, but she was quickly taken away by Social Service.

Meanwhile, the couple was evicted from the hotel and took refuge in one shack after another. Daniel Mauroux failed to find steady work that he was able to do with his fragile health. Here and there he found short-term jobs in excavation or demotion. Following the example of his in-laws, he turned to scavenging, picking up garbage and rubbish in the area around the 15th arrondissement. After the birth of their fourth child, the first to live and remain under their care, they were married at city hall. "It is for the children that we got

married," said Gabrielle. Undoubtedly, she also married because of her husband. All her life she kept saying, "It is hard, it was hard. But I am happy to have found him. He was good for me."

If Daniel was good for his young wife, still he was unable to place her and his ever enlarging household on the track of post-war France which was increasingly entering the era of consumerism. His misfortune was not simply that he had been deprived of education. The school of life gave him negative knowledge about his social environment, one that diminished him rather than expanding him. In a world where careers more and more required credentials and specialization, he knew "a little bit of everything." Stoker's aid, butcher, farm laborer, cleaner, demolition worker, "I know it all." But he knew only occupations with no future and ones that, in any case, he could not pursue because of his weakened body. In a society moving toward consumption and waste, he had to salvage and recuperate. In a country beginning to think about family planning, he learned the total unpredictability of family size. Would the children live? Will the authorities allow them to stay with their parents?

In an economy where the informal market was shrinking and job qualifications were more and more rigorously defined in order to assure fair opportunity, Daniel Mauroux had only makeshift jobs which weren't regularly reported and which didn't last long enough for him to qualify for social benefits. As for free and mandatory education, from which he and his wife did not benefit, he learned little by little that it did not help his children who grew up in bad housing and undernourished with parents who knew the world from the under side.

Chapter II

The Underprivileged Family: An Other Knowledge, An Other Logic

But up-to-date knowledge, knowledge that was suited for useful participation in the world, was inaccessible to the Mauroux family for another reason.

We have come to see that the Mauroux family is not an isolated case. They are part of a whole population layer, the poorest in France. The housing stock is in a deplorable state. If other citizens are badly housed, the poorest are not housed at all. Many of them are veterans of the Foreign Legion, a traditional refuge for France's poor. On returning from Indochina and Algeria, they are physically weakened by fever, chronic illness, or alcoholism. Among those who remained in France many were sent to Germany for forced labor. That would have happened to Daniel Mauroux had he not hidden himself first on a farm and then in a forest near the western seacoast. The poorest, less resistant at the outset, suffered more than other workers from expatriation, forced labor, and malnutrition.

In post-war France, added to all these misfortunes of the poorest was chronic under-employment, while the rest of France entered an era of new production.

But who knows this history of the poorest? Where are the historians, the academics, who are interested in them? They didn't exist before, and they don't exist today. Therefore, the Fourth World Movement sensed the necessity of making itself the historian of the Fourth World of our time.

In recent times, the poorest of France made perhaps its last effort to get our attention before French society definitively turns away from them. It was in 1954, and their call came through the mouth of Father Pierre. What we saw then, at the gates of Paris, was only the tip of the iceberg. And of the condition of the poorest, we saw only the lack of housing. At that time, we surely did not lack feeling, good will, and generosity. But we did lack a serious effort to understand. France undoubtedly heard the call, but did not have its university to explain the reality of misery.

Instead, the university for a long time immersed itself in non-knowledge which led to false knowledge, false explanations which yielded false knowledge about the very bottom of society where misery persisted.

Sociologists didn't research the history or the present of the exclusion of the poorest, choosing instead to limit themselves to the world of the exploited, but not excluded, worker. The one exception was Jean LABBENS who, at the university level, acknowledged the validity of the concept of a Fourth World announced by ordinary citizens.

Meanwhile, toward the end of the fifties, the former inhabitants of the outskirts and the "zones" came back to where they started. We ourselves found the Mauroux family at the shanty-town Noisy-le-Grand after they had lived in a basement and then under a tent. "It's the Zone," sighed Gabrielle Mauroux, remembering the stories her mother told her when she was a child. "It's the Zone; I've come back; you can't know what it was like," said grandmother Ledanois when she came from her dilapidated building in Malakoff to visit her daughter.

But whereas the Zone was reconstituted in the form of shanty-towns and emergency shelters, the surrounding world had changed completely. Pulling a garbage wagon, dressed in mismatched shoes and a shabby overcoat that is too big, is simply not done any more. Neither is being illiterate and not seeing to it that your children go to school.

The history of the working classes divided in the nineteenth-century, those called the laborers separating from the sub-proletarians. In the 1950s France definitively distanced itself from misery, to the point of not even recognizing its existence.

Madame Ledanois, as housewife and mother, was familiar with parasites of the skin and scalp, with tuberculosis and rickets. She, her family, and her neighbors were bothered by

them, but not shamed. At the Noisy camp and in the emergency and transitional shelters, these scourges persisted. But now the victims were regarded as guilty, since the other French had been able to get rid of them. From that is born a hidden but bitter struggle between a society that thinks it knows what is good for the poor and a sub-proletarian population that knows it as well, but differently.

In France, and in all of Western Europe as well, two knowledges are in opposition, unable to comprehend each other or to mutually enrich each other. They are, on the one hand, the knowledge of the Fourth World and, on the other, the knowledge of a society gifted with schools, universities, of technology, of security and prospects for the future. How does this struggle of two knowledges translate into the existence of the Mauroux?

The Mauroux family was among the first to hear the call of Father Pierre. One of the poorest among the homeless, it did not move on to a transitional shelter. It remained stuck for more than ten years in one of the 252 igloos, built in the form of a half-moon, at the Noisy-le-Grand camp. Their living space, for two parents and three children, consisted of 45 square yards of earthen floor. Six more children were born there, of which four survived. The arrival of each child was one more reason not to recommend better housing for the family.

What else was there for them than to be installed in this camp at the end of the world?

But how installed? By arranging and maintaining this semblance of lodging, and--why not?--cultivating the few yards of "garden" set aside for each family? Or by installing themselves without hope, admitting defeat? The Mauroux family for ten years fiercely refused the latter and chose the former.

For ten years the Mauroux were, with perseverance, the contrary of what the world expected of them. They did not seek defeat, but neither did they have the resource to avoid it. In the opinion of the social services, they did everything the wrong way. They didn't, as people in modest circumstances were supposed to, grow potatoes; they didn't enroll with any agency. They didn't send their children to school regularly, as good parents should. They did everything backwards and survived, safeguarding two values which to them were essential, but which the surrounding society minimized: personal dignity and family.

Giving high priority to dignity for years obstructed the little bit of dialogue that went on between the family and the wider society. Gabrielle Mauroux had learned how to survive with minimal but constant aid. She found housing because neighbors in the Zone would pass on addresses of shacks, uninhabited buildings under construction, or affordable furnished hotel rooms. Now she suddenly found herself taken over by do gooders, by assistance coming from the outside for which she counted as nothing. Too poor to refuse the help, she constantly tried to keep her distance by proclaiming the honorability of her origins. She would say to everyone within earshot, "My sister is rich. My sister and my brother-in-law make lots of money. They are in business. All my brothers and sisters live in Paris and have good jobs. However, we had a quarrel and don't see each other any more. It is only my

mother who supports me a little bit. In fact, she had Christmas packages for us, but since they were so big I couldn't transport them."

Is Gabrielle making up her life, creating a facade? Perhaps there is some of that, but much more important, she is telling us her history and the history of the poorest of Paris, seen and lived by her. Seen from this new Zone, the camp of Noisy, her brothers and sisters are in fact honorably housed in the city. Most of them live in dingy apartments without plumbing, but "in real buildings," as those living in the igloos put it. It is true, also, that some of her brothers are in business, because they "work the fairs." One of them, the former confectioners apprentice, never became a confectioner, but he goes to the markets in a van, selling preserved goods at bargain prices. Madame Ledanois, her mother, lives in a real shack in Malakoff, but it is true that she makes packages for her daughter. They consist of clothing and other things picked up by one of her sons, a junk gatherer.

So, after all, Gabrielle Mauroux tells the truth. She communicates to us a new perspective, original knowledge, on the family trees of the poorest, who have dwelt for several generations at the gates of Paris. Today, these families find themselves more dispersed, some of them thrown into a larger and more distant belt of poverty which encircles an ever more gigantic Paris. In the 1960s the Mauroux brothers still lived in the areas around the Portes de Vanves and de Versailles, and the dilapidated apartment of the grandmother at Malakoff served as a refuge for her daughter. Gabrielle borrowed busfare from her friends and took the children to Paris when things weren't going well in the igloo at Noisy.

So we have this story and lesson in dignity given unceasingly by a mother. But who listens, who takes it down, who understands? We asked a social assistant at City Hall and were told that social services "are not there for that." Since her family is well off, why doesn't she stop asking for help from the City?"

In fact, Madame Mauroux asks less of public assistance and shows more independence than many of her neighbors who come from towns in the provinces. They too have dignity, but they are more used to welfare than the families from the misery belt around Paris.

In the 50s and 60s the whole ensemble of Madame Mauroux, her neighbors, and the so-called "Chateau of France" at Noisy are a sustained history lesson. The people lived and expressed themselves in terms of history. The surrounding world saw them and responded to them in "social" terms. Professor BADIN of the Catholic Institute, after an investigation, confirmed the general opinion when he stated that these families represent "social cases," a chance assemblage of men and women weak in spirit. After all, in the France of the 60s, if you lived in such misery, wasn't it clear that you were an imbecile, mentally ill, or of bad character?

It is noteworthy that no university scholars or researchers at the time, with their long questionnaires and ball point pens, reported that Madame Mauroux was barely able to write

and that many of her neighbors were illiterate. The hypothesis of a large illiterate French population never occurred to them, and no scientific researcher pointed this out to the social workers who reproached the parents for not even from time to time sending a letter to their children placed in the "depot" or in the welfare institutions for children.

Daniel Mauroux knew the abysmally low level of schooling of the families in the Camp and of his own wife. And he could very well explain this by telling the history lived by the people. No one, however, asked him to communicate this knowledge; no one suspected that there was something to be learned from this man.

On the other hand, one could have suspected it by observing the way in which this family man reaffirmed, over the years, his dignity and his value. For, lacking work, health, and physical strength, he based his dignity on his learning and his book knowledge. A courteous and sensitive man, he never made his neighbors ashamed by flaunting his diploma. But his work as a junk dealer allowed him to acquire large quantities of old newspapers, entire collections of issues of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and of *Historia*, and geographical magazines. He literally piled them up in the sparsely furnished igloo, along the walls and under the beds. Most of the time out of work, nearly always sick, although the medical services didn't notice, he stayed in bed, a magazine in his hand, and read. One of his sons would say, "For Papa, the newspapers are sacred." He himself said, "I read whatever can be useful."

Useful for what? What use is it to read *Historia* when you are a manual worker without a job, father of a big homeless family? It was too much for the social workers: Who is this man who pretends to be an intellectual, without work and in bed, while his children don't have food to put in their stomachs? This man is Daniel Mauroux who calls himself a good man because he is a learned man in spite of his misery. "When I don't know something, I look it up in the dictionary, as you are supposed to do," he says with some pride.

"As you are supposed to do," in other words, 'I know how to live; I know how to instruct myself.' And Daniel Mauroux would never agree that *Historia* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* are to be read only by those who are well off. Knowing the houses of intellectuals from their basements and their attics, he recovered ten-year-old magazines and exclaimed over the waste of knowledge and its unjust distribution. He announced the right of a Mauroux, former farm boy, former fireman's helper on a ship, to learn. He held that the dignity of a man rested on his knowledge, and that every person is capable of learning.

If Madame Mauroux is a permanent history lesson, the life of Mr. Mauroux is a permanent declaration of Human Rights. An uncomprehended declaration, however, one not even perceived by the social workers or the social science researcher who passed by.

Seeing a man lying in an igloo surrounded by newspapers, they would think that he is goofing off and that he is a bad father. According to the social norms, they would be right. For Daniel Mauroux could not make his reading beneficial for his family. He didn't have the

means to select, organize and make connections among the things he knew. They actually weighed him down rather than illuminating his mind and his life. In his memory he stored unrelated facts, without details or consequences, which were useless to him. Except those which might impress his acquaintances: "Among those who took the Bastille there was a Mauroux; perhaps he was my ancestor." Unfortunately, his audience was not impressed; they knew him too well. "He is no more clever than anyone else," they said. They right, Daniel knew it, and he was humiliated.

With all his reading, he did not know how to become wise. Little by little he gave himself away. "I know some things, but my neighbors and my wife are stupid." With age he became more and more contemptuous. In that he was just like the men and women around him. Without knowledge, master of nothing, feeling dumb, and even being taken for an imbecile, is a permanent humiliation inflicted on a whole layer of the population.

"You're not smart," "He is dumb," are the true blows that are given out in the emergency shelters when someone really want to hurt another. To defend oneself, and in order not to live in permanent intellectual insecurity, everyone memorizes a few maxims that are repeated unceasingly.

Thus the mind gets clouded in the course of the years. Daniel Mauroux, by reading *Historia*, was robbed in more than one way. For he already had a historical knowledge, but nothing in his reading helped him to see this or to evaluate it. He knew the life of a poor orphan in the countryside of Seine-Maritime between the two world wars. He knew very well the furnished hotels of Paris between 1954 and 1956. He knew the life of the inhabitants and how they slept outside every seventh night because the owner refused to rent to them by the week.

It was an original knowledge like that of his wife about the descendants of the Zone, but it remained undeveloped, unorganized. Above all it remained unrecognized and that is the worst of the robberies. The sub-proletarians were alienated from themselves, their life experience was held in contempt, their knowledge, although unique, counted for nothing.

From this general contempt came also the idea that the sub-proletarians could not establish viable families. They are bad parents, but they are, above all, ignorant and stupid parents. Nevertheless, if the Mauroux family exists, if the children are still there, it is thanks to the parents. "The children are what counts," said Gabrielle. Social services said the same but, unfortunately, they did not mean the same thing.

'It was for the children that we married," said Mrs. Mauroux in 1953. The first of her children to survive was taken away immediately on the pretext that the household was not legally constituted. But that would not happen a second time: "We don't bring children into the world in order to abandon them; it is to keep them with us. Even living in misery and all is no reason to abandon them. As for my daughter, Marie, in 1949, I wasn't thinking, wasn't

paying attention. I thought that she went to the hospital at Denfert Rochereau. Now I realize that they swiped my child from me."

To keep her family intact, she would resist, try anything, and endure all. Even though she had a weak heart, she welcomed each newborn with pride. Even though she had pleurisy, she got out of bed to do laundry for the neighbors in order to earn a little money. With legs covered with eczema and then with swelling, she would hurry to the bus with her swarm of children all dressed up, escaping to her mother whenever there was the threat of an inspection by a social worker. This threat came whenever her husband was fired, whenever she asked for help; and these came more frequently as the years passed. And they came, above all in winter, when the children were older and often missed school.

The social worker said, "Ma'am, you would do better to give up for adoption at least the little ones; at least they would be well nourished and sent to school. For now, if you put them back in school, you will be given supplementary aid next month." For Mrs. Mauroux this reasoning was not logical. "Do you want me to send my kid to school with an empty stomach? I need the increased aid before hand. Besides, Gerald doesn't have any shoes. You wouldn't want me to send him to school without shoes, would you?"

Of these two women without understanding each other, which one is right? Each one sticks with her position. And when the help does not arrive and the welfare payment is suspended because of the unjustified unemployment of the father, the igloo windows are covered with cardboard and newspapers, the door is bolted from the inside, the last serving of pasta is given to the children and everyone stays in bed. The 1964-65 academic year was particularly bleak, for the children hardly went to school at all. As punishment the welfare payments were cut off for months at a time. The children got thin and the parents were hardly more than shadows.

It is unnecessary to add that, for Daniel Mauroux the periods of supposedly unjustified unemployment were frequent. Nevertheless, he too, for the children, tried everything, submitting in silence to insults. Plagued by gastric pains, his body weaker and weaker, still he worked as a stevedore, truck unloader, and radiator transporter. These jobs never lasted long, and because he worked only for small businesses his work often was not recorded with Social Security. Consequently, as he himself put it, "better not even think of requesting unemployment compensation."

Curiously, the less aid the government gave to a large family, the more investigations it made. The public agencies never stopped setting up, requiring, and sending back and forth heavy, even overwhelming, files. Wouldn't it have been more economical to give Daniel Mauroux a pension, since the Employment Bureau at the time classified him as "not placable" because of "age, the reputation of being lazy, the kind of job he desired, and his place of habitation"? The Government never thought of that. Close-fisted with support payments, it was not stingy when it came to administrative files. But whether it was an investigation or a home inspection, an admonishment or a snub, Daniel Mauroux rarely

complained. He remained silent and when he could no longer endure the indignity, he would retreat to the darkness of his igloo, get on his sheetless bed, and plunge into the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

One evening he stayed in my office for a long time. "If it had been just myself, I would not have accepted it," he sighed, "but I took it because it was for my sons and my little girl."

For them as well, this man who wished to pursue his studies, at five o'clock in the morning got up to push an old baby buggy. On his return he would sort the rags with his oldest son. "It gave us something to wear; it was used, but still it kept them warm."

At the Monfermeil hospital the nurses did not appreciate these make-do clothes. To a Movement member who accompanied the youngest son, a nurse's aide said: "These children from the Camp get no matter what put on their back. They should be placed. What are the parents waiting for?" In response, we ask ourselves, rather: "What inventions, what endurance, what wiliness must be shown by the Mauroux and others in order to escape from the systematic efforts of destruction instituted against their families?"

The Mauroux family is a witness that it as and still is a matter of destroying these families who live in indecent misery whose logic seems to drown our reasonings and resist our knowledge. The public service agencies and the medical system destroy them by taking away their children and interrupting their pregnancies. Politicians smother them by their silence because they would get in the way of the discussion among the parties. Professors and economic and social science researchers deny their unique historical identity, because their sociological analyses have no room for it. All the dispensers of instruction, in one way or another, absorb them into their own knowledge, without expecting any reciprocity, since the sub-proletarian knowledge counts for nothing.

In all of this, the most serious thing is the lack of reciprocity. To be considered totally inferior, even when it is a matter of knowing and analyzing their own existence, destroys the Fourth World families more than malnutrition and illness destroy them.

Chapter III

Modes of Thought Which Exclude the Poorest

We are not done talking about the life of the Mauroux family and the milieu that they belong to. But at this point in the recital of its history I would like to pause for a moment over the question of how the Mauroux, the families of the Fourth World, and more than two million Frenchmen have been able to remain in this state of powerlessness in which one is

totally absorbed in defending self and family against the destructive assaults of an entire society.

How have they been able to remain totally powerless, chained to the foot of the social ladder, while others, poor as well, grab hold of the rungs, climb them, and become recognized partners and the economic and political life of our time?

You will tell me perhaps that our capitalist systems of production exclude them or keep them artfully in reserve, replacement workers at the mercy of employers, in case of strike or revolt. That is false, at least as to the idea of the placing in reserve of workers.

Only someone who has not seen the bodies of sub-proletarians often emaciated, weakened by sickness, crippled by rheumatism, only someone who has not encountered their look, sometimes absent, sometimes suspicious or fearful, can imagine seeing in these men and women a reserve army in the pay of capitalism. Capitalism has stronger arms than these to put on line.

To the contrary, through his unhappiness, the sub-proletarian of modern history is certainly in reserve for dictatorship, ready to sign up with a strong man, whether he be called Hitler or Fidel Castro, the name doesn't matter. For the one whose personal efforts are always futile and who for his entire life is surrounded by powerless neighbors like himself, liberation, happiness are a lucky break provided by a powerful man. Being enrolled in a cause promising happiness, putting oneself under the orders of a man incarnating power, seems like a great opportunity.

Thus, we can find sub-proletarians as well in the fascist ranks as in the opposing ones. Such alliances, more or less fragile and ephemeral, have been known in past history, for example when nobles or the bourgeoisie sign up the poor peasantry for their cause. These situations tell us where misery can lead, not where it comes from.

In any case, to come back to our time, we ask whether strictly economic structures suffice to explain our society's tolerance for misery, which hovers like a phantom at the edge of our modern urban and rural communities. We are not blind; many of us know the deplorable sight of families living in the streets, the courtyards (?), the sub-proletarian quarters. Neither are we a generation with hearts of stone, as some would make us think. Our understanding of Human Rights and our sense of what is due to all persons have progressed.

Economic structure can explain injustice. They can no longer explain the injustice that is passed over in silence by all of today's political parties and interest groups. Then, what glasses do we have on, what ideas color our regard, leaving us insensitive to the misery on our doorstep? What misunderstanding, what error of thought presides over this inexplicable situation? The Sorbonne, citadel of thought, is the ideal place to reflect on this question.

When we imagine possible errors in thinking, one comes immediately to mind. For it seems always to have existed throughout the long ages of our civilization, the astonishing idea that "every society has its garbage." This idea has always existed along with others, such as man the son of God, man the holder of absolute rights, and man the subject of the Declaration of Human Rights. Crushing applied across the centuries to the poorest, regarded as the "undeserving poor," we can see that the idea of human inequality has firmly maintained them in a state of extreme inequality.

We can see how the notion of "human garbage" puts its stamp on all the explanations of misery which attribute it to the character or mental weaknesses of the victims. To say, "It's not their fault; they are not very smart," or "That mother didn't have a chance because her husband is weak and doesn't work." is to imply that misery is bad luck, which comes to those who are born in the wrong place, unsuccessful, or twisted in one way or another. And this idea is embodied in the most diverse initiatives through the ages.

It gave rise, in the Middle Ages, to the affectation of a priest or bishop who preached the annual /sermon to the Poor, addressed to those too miserable to be on the census rolls and admitted to the town hospital. It gave rise, later, to "poor houses" and "work houses," and other forms of miserable confinement invented by our western societies in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

Today, we find this idea incorporated into the housing developments in Western Germany, Holland, and France which are supposed to provide an "educational transition." The idea is basically the same: the poor must be preached to, educated, taken firmly by the hand, so as to be led back on to the right path.

Perhaps we should point out that the misunderstanding represented by the idea of the "undeserving poor" does not follow necessarily from the idea of humanity being punished by God. Fourth World families teach us not hastily to attribute this misunderstanding to one or another of the religions.

No doubt Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism teach about humanity tested and called to repentance and purification, but also participating in God's providence by entering into a holy state. It seems to us that the treatment inflicted on the sub-proletarian families and the poorest of other times arises from a completely different mindset, an experience, bitterness, and anger which is completely temporal.

Misery is by definition a condition that disfigures its victims so much that they are incomprehensible to their contemporaries. In distinction to simple poverty, which requires an austere existence ruled by rigorous discipline, misery is impervious to all remedies and austerity. Faced with inordinate privations, oppressions, and humiliations, the person in misery is ineluctably led to inordinate reactions. Reactions which at the very least are out of line to those who see them.

The social worker thinks that it is out of line for Mr. Mauroux to be in bed reading a magazine in the middle of the day while his son is not in school because he has no shoes. Everything appears excessive. The neighbor who has just cashed three months worth of back welfare payments goes to the supermarket and buys steaks, strawberries out of season, and a good wine. The family has "to catch up" says his wife. Of course, one catches up in order to make up for three months of scarcity, three months of staying inside because you don't want to stick your nose outside when you have no money in your pocket. You also have to make up for the humiliation of the help received from neighbors. But some will be sure to say, "You get your welfare check and then entertain everyone in sight as if they were royalty!"

All that is just the opposite of good conduct, justifiable behavior, meritorious existence. If, on top of that, the children steal, the teenagers drive without a license or registration, and the parents fall into the trap of drinking, the verdict is ineluctable: "These people are too much, incorrigible; you can't do anything with them."

Such an attitude has nothing to do with the idea of repentance, with respecting a person in touch with God. Rather, it is one citizen judging other citizens, a human being usurping the role of God.

There is yet another perennial narrowness of thought which affects our view of the life of the poorest. It may derive from the same misunderstanding we have been considering. It consists of reading history and analyzing society exclusively in terms of power in such a way as to ignore what becomes of the totally powerless. When he made his analyses Karl MARX joined a long line of philosophers and historians. He took over and deepened an ancestral way in which humans have viewed each other.

Hasn't the focus of western historiography always been the analysis of the clash of great powers. Hasn't the history of poor rural masses, the peasants of France, Germany, Holland, and Ireland, been told to us in terms of the violence of battle, oppression, and revolt? Haven't its landmarks been great tribulations involving human or natural violence.?

Whether chroniclers and historians have left it at that or whether they have diversified the picture, the poorest generally appear at the crest of the wave, when carried by the current, they erupt into the history of the elites. From where do they come, where do they go, what becomes of them once they are submerged again? Curiously, the poorest appear not to have their own history, surging into the history of the others only when their existence leads to violence calling for violent measures in return. Otherwise, silence reigns over them, and the Mauroux and Ledanois families are examples of this historic silence.

Perhaps we can see the faces of the Mauroux for a brief moment on the barricades of the Commune. But once the survivors from the outskirts have gone back home they no longer figure in our chronicles. They disappear under the expressions spoken from above about the lower people: "the people of Paris," "the Poor of Paris," "the common people," "the

working masses." All of these expressions are abusive generalizations, discouraging any effort to discern the condition of yesterday's poorest and--who knows--understand a little better the poorest of today.

Karl Marx, as I said earlier, contributed by predicting the silences to come. He describes for us concretely and--for his time--with a great deal of finesse a motley crowd, below the recognized working population, hanging on to the bottom rung of the social ladder. He tried to give an account of these inhabitants "beyond" the population which participates in the process of production. Since he gave such a good account, he allows us to see that his theories were blind to a kind of exclusion which can no longer be called exploitation of some people by others. He give us the instrument with which we can criticize him, or rather, he points us toward those who are excluded from his theory and who, therefore, are witnesses to the fundamental error of his analysis. Karl Marx undoubtedly does not follow Vincent de Paul who announced that the poor are our masters. But at least he left us with a description, confused but significant, of a stagnant population, floating at the periphery of a rising industrial society; of a population stalked by the hell of pauperism or already absorbed by it; of a population at the limit of which is found those without fire or recognition: human garbage.

Today as yesterday, we still distinguish true humanity from a supposed "natural garbage," and we still, in one way or another, read human political and social history in terms of power relations and of battles in which the discarded ones never have a part.

How will the Mauroux, the Ledanois, and the other sub-proletarians, hit with the double misunderstanding, the double exclusion, that we have presented make for themselves a path toward our history, our political scene, our democratic institutions? Born from human waste, they are not expected to possess a useful knowledge. And, apparently having no knowledge to exchange, nothing to teach us, no other attribute of power, no door is open to them which would give access to our fields of interest, our struggles, or our projects for the future.

Chapter IV

^ The University on the Side of the Oppressors?

Do I need to explain to you once again the reasons for not following the beaten paths and using the traditional tools for analyzing extreme poverty? Other can tell much better than me of the complexities that keep the systems of production at a distance from the workers of the Fourth World. Others can spell out the mechanisms of the distribution of revenues which exclude Fourth World families from consuming and saving. Obviously, these approaches are necessary for comprehending the matter, as are all the other approaches coming from the social and political sciences.

Extreme poverty is a comprehensive evil, a vicious circle affecting the lives of the victims, of course, but also of all the other citizens involved in a society that secretes and maintains misery. A vicious circle, this evil reproduces itself by a set of chain reactions which touch all aspects of personal and collective life.

Since these chain reactions extend across generations, we cannot pretend today to put our finger on a first cause. Moreover, that would not make any sense, since the beginning of misery is hidden in history. We will not go back in time to destroy this origin. Rather than putting our finger on causes, we should enter into the chain of events, consequently, into a history. Everyone can take this step, according to their situation and their abilities. Everyone can enter into this history, and all points of entry are valid.

For today, I have chosen to open up the reality of misery by focusing on certain of our ways of thinking, ones which tend to make sub-proletarian families prisoners of their condition. This choice seems appropriate because of the university setting of our encounter. But there is something more important than that. Examining a certain way of thinking about poverty allows us to highlight the injustice from which the poorest families suffer the most: that of being regarded as ignorant and incapable of learning.

This greatest injustice of being regarded as inferior and of no account prevents you, families of the Fourth World, from living with self-respect and the respect of your friends and neighbors. We are gathered here today, you, me, and our friends from all quarters, to declare this injustice and to engage, each one of us, to stoop it.

Normally, families of the Fourth World, the doors of the university are closed to you. And beyond these doors, you are closed off from all the realms of life and action influenced by the university. As a result, doors opening up for the lives of other citizens for you are marked, Do Not Enter. For the university, the place where knowledge is constructed and shared, has influence wherever even a bit of knowledge exists, including primary school and basic education, as well as the world of manual work which is part of modern economic life. And everywhere that university knowledge holds sway, the knowledge and speech of the Fourth World are excluded. The empire of university thought and logic extends everywhere, even if its influence is not equally warm and illuminating in all domains of life or for all segments of the population. From the moment of entry into nursery school, the child begins to catch the reflections of the light from the university. But you, families of the Fourth World, have a very hard time catching even a little reflection for your children. The university and what derives from it remain far from you. Can the university do better; has it done better in the past? It is always good to question the past, in order to know where we can go today and tomorrow. Has the university been the friend of the poor in other epochs? Only the university historians, specialists, can give the answer. But the Fourth World Movement which, with the families, is trying to be the historian of extreme poverty, can at least ask good questions. And especially, the Movement can have some ideas about the difficulties faced by a university in search of the poorest. About these difficulties, I would like to make some very brief remarks.

Let us look for a moment at the university with the eyes of the poorest. How can it be their friend? It can be by accepting as students, and eventually as teachers, men and women of the Fourth World. It can be by building up a significant knowledge of extreme poverty, exclusion, and their victims. It can, finally, by making sure that its knowledge and discoveries benefit the poorest of its time. These are three possible paths. Have those who lead the universities taken them?

It was the goal of Robert de Sorbon that there be poor students at the Sorbonne. But were the "pauperes studentes" of the 13th century truly poor, sons of poor families? In all probability, they were students with no money in their pocket, but for the most part they did not come from poverty. The university itself and certain of its students were without money because in the Middle Ages the nobles whose main activity was warfare and prosperous families who made their fortunes through trade (?), did not have the practice of richly endowing those of their children who wished to get an education without entering one of the orders. Neither the wealthy families nor the kings had a policy of supporting the faculties offering instruction outside the institutions of the Church. Church education was not rich and lay education in general was relatively poor.

The 13th century was in a way a heroic time in which certain men of substance, young people of learning, imposed on their society a new type, a new class of men: intellectuals, learned men, specialists, no longer as an exception, but as a class of men. Some of them came from the rural areas and a good number came from other countries. A look at the truly poor peasantry of the time would be sufficient to conclude that they did not belong to that group. What child of poor peasants, of day workers, or farm domestics could conceive of the ambition or even the very idea of an intellectual career? Particularly since in order to be educated required a long trip. How could the rural poor have conceived the notion of a trip. For them moving about consisted of search for work and escape from famine, sickness, and the devastation of their land by war, if not escape from a merciless creditor.

One must not dream or ever put forth easy affirmation concerning the poor of any epoch. Those of the Middle Ages were not in the mind of Robert de Sorbon when he founded his new college in which the poor intellectuals were to be educated while "remaining in contact with the people." Is it necessary to add that even if those from very poor milieux had been able to study at Paris, their place of origin would not have profited from the knowledge acquired. The diplomas earned do not lead to beginning a career in the impoverished countryside. The lawyer, the doctor, the professor, the man of letters all had business elsewhere, in the service of the elites not the poor. Robert de Sorbon's hope for an intelligentsia "remaining in contact" with the people of the king to which he addressed his demands for "kindness" had to do only with the monks.

For a long time the clergy and the members of religious orders were the only "poor" educated in order to share their knowledge with the poor of France. By becoming laicized, in

all probability the university went in the opposite direction. This is because the young University of Paris, and the other universities, at the end of the Middle Ages, having had to fight for recognition had already become corporate institutions. The teachers, students, and administrators organized themselves to defend their status, their prestige, their scholarships and endowments, and their right to occupy comfortable settings. And being a corporation-- isn't it time, after so many centuries of experience, to say it openly?--is incompatible with authentic solidarity with the poorest.

In the presence of other groups in the population, or other milieux, having at least some chance of entering the corporation or profiting from it, the privileges of the university can always be presented as a good that can serve the whole nation. In the presence of the poorest, excluded from access and from any benefit from knowledge, these privileges turn out to be perfectly exclusive, a means of installing oneself in knowledge, to reserve for oneself its benefits, and to turn it into a means of oppressing the excluded. With the regard to the poorest university corporatism reinforces technocracy. And technocracy is compatible with class solidarity, not with solidarity among all.

Doesn't this make genuinely ambiguous all the university struggles for Human Rights, all the enthusiasms, surely sincere, of students for the liberation of the poor? At least they can raise consciousness in the milieux where they have influence. One has to hope so. But we must not ignore the confusion and ambiguity that consciousness are led into when they are stimulated by corporations. To truly teach freedom, Human Rights for all, corporations, faced with the poorest, should cease being corporations. Members of the university, in order to be Human Rights leaders, must divest themselves of their privileges and of the power given by their knowledge. They should be silent so that finally the voice of the poorest can rise up. They are not doing it. Have they ever done it?

You will probably reproach me for using an unfair shortcut. Allow me to say, nevertheless, that between the first university crises which pitted the secular teachers against the traditional ones who practiced poverty and charity, between the beginning times of an intellectual corporation in the Paris of the 13th century and the present time, there are resemblances, even, I would say, a remarkable coherence. Take 1252, for example. The secular teachers reproached the mendicant orders for breaking solidarity by refusing to support their demands. For them science was no longer a gift that God gave to humanity. Instead, it was the fruit of human labor and, consequently, was the basis for retribution and for privileges. Didn't the beginning of the University of Paris have to do with the privilege of the elites, actually the double privilege of both receiving knowledge and the payment for knowledge. Why should be astonished to find at the end of the road, in our time, this same University pampered by the nation and nonetheless complaining that its resources are insufficient?

This University was right to sign petitions for Andrei Sakharof and for the dissident intellectuals of Prague. But was it right to do so without at the same time showing concern for the literacy of the poorest in Nicaragua? For, contrary to the officially disseminated

information, the poorest in Nicaragua are not literate. No more than are the poorest in France and Europe fully literate. Nor the poorest children in Poland. The KOR, organization of dissident Polish intellectuals, offers support to the "Solidarity" workers of its country without ever demanding that manual laborers have the right to profit from the university.

So, the university is the bastion for whose rights? Is it clear with itself on this question? Is it sure to do everything to eliminate confusion within its walls and in public opinion? Does the university even know whether, since 1252, it has become more liberative for the poor? The families of the Fourth World ask this question and, also, about the quality of the knowledge acquired by the university about poverty and the poor. We ask ourselves whether, across its history, this university has gotten to know the poor or gathered knowledge of poverty and misery. Studies, books, courses are not lacking. But of what quality? The elements of an answer at the disposal of the families and of the Movement are not all reassuring. Nor are their encounters with those who possess this university knowledge reassuring.

Do I dare once more permit myself to sketch a hypothesis which merits both a more solid foundation and careful verification. For now I simply ask you how valid is a knowledge or a comprehension of poverty, an age-old evil of the world, when the history of the poorest has never seen the light of day? What can a university know which has never, anywhere in the world, had the mission of learning about the poorest throughout out time. The universities of France and the United States provide sad examples of drips and drabs of knowledge, the results of research, of good will, of personal curiosity following one another, being interrupted, lurching across the ages.

The university has not claimed, as part of the Declaration of Human Rights, the right of each person to be the subject of history. The poor, who, in one way or another decorate the history of the elites, have the right to a place in the history of others. The poor, who have become important after the fact, deserve their own history. This is why we have the chance to see unearthed the history of the workers of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is not too early, but we thereby unearth, with more or less success, a history which a shortsighted society and university had not guaranteed would be recorded in time. How will we be able to discern in that same 19th century where some many poor people criss-crossed, the history of the ones and the others?

Earlier we alluded to abusive generalizations such as "the poor" and "the people." The university does not agglomerate so carelessly more fortunate sectors of the population. The poor, the poorest, the Mauroux and Ledanois families and many others obviously cannot defend themselves from this abuse. The veil thrown over their history deprives them of their historical identity and, consequently, of their just political representation today. And the university which is silent about them contributes, consciously or not, to their subjection. This should make the university think about how it denounces the transgression of human rights committed by others.

As for ourselves, we are obliged to ask whether a knowledge of poverty, made up of scattered and varied investigations, left to the good will of individual researchers, without guarantee of duration or serious periodic evaluation, is of questionable value and must be questioned. An inquiry on poverty situated as if outside history is an aberration. And so are certain works on poverty appearing recently in France which ignore and even have contempt for the history of the Fourth World.

Before we leave this topic, isn't the quality of university knowledge fragile for still another reason? For in a world where the specialist is king, whoever can claim to have a knowledge of a population powerless to control or contradict it, has in hand a formidable power. The university is formidable for the poorest because it represents the foundation of the technocracy which oppresses them.

There remains a third question from the families of the Fourth World: Does the university see to it that its knowledge and the fruit of its discoveries benefit the poorest? The just distribution of the benefits of science obviously is not the sole responsibility of the university. It is the business of society as a whole. But the university and society have a shared destiny. We never know for sure where one begins and the other ends, nor which of the two holds back the other or makes it move forward. For the deficiencies that I have just noted, both are co-responsible. They are both also responsible for the distribution of knowledge and its benefits. A distribution which the families of the Fourth World denounce as iniquitous and for which it would be excessive to accuse a single institution! The question from the Fourth World is simply this: "Members of the university, custodians of knowledge, have you done all that you can to be of service to the poorest?"

Obviously, if the answer is Yes it will have to be justified. It is curious that, in face of the poorest, the university appears scatter-brained. It talks, it produces books, it stores and distributes intellectual and cultural riches without ever stopping to count them; not keeping track of time, it lets the years and the centuries pass by as it devotes itself to teaching and research without knowing very well where the fruits of this effort go. Can this university claim that it has done all in its power for its knowledge to serve the poorest? Certainly, the university should not, nor could it, get mixed up in everything or be everywhere to watch over an equal distribution. Obviously, it is not guilty for the stomach ulcers of Daniel Mauroux, the pleurisies and ----- of his wife in a time when these ailments are easily treated. It is not solely or even directly responsible for the school which teaches the children poorly. But hasn't it failed in its duty, which was and still remains, to deny that a human being can be garbage? Hasn't it failed in its responsibility restore to the poorest their honorable identity, to bring them on to the stage of history, to make them known? It has not built a true knowledge about them or with them. Not having done that, not having given existence to the Fourth World, hasn't it directly contributed to its being abandoned and forgotten

But for all of that must we think that the university is, by choice and definitively, on the side of the oppressors? Let us, one more time, allow the Fourth World to speak.

Chapter VI

The Rendezvous not to be Missed

We have said that there is a whole world between university knowledge and sub-proletarian knowledge. The one is the polar opposite of the other, and society is the polar opposite of the sub-proletariat, since university and society are connected by the same logics, the same modes of thought, and the same mental attitudes. We have presented just two examples of this fundamental community of thought: the idea of human garbage and that of the uselessness of the history of the poorest across the ages. We could have cited others, but it appears to us that these are determinative for the lot of the Fourth World.

Paradoxically, of the two opposed knowledges, that of the sub-proletarians is incontestable whereas the non-verified historical theories, the ideologies, the partial and episodic university investigations, and other instances of research can appear as an ensemble of knowledges whose reliability is always vulnerable to a lucid scrutiny. What the most disfavored families have is characterized as non-knowledge or false knowledge, and the Mauroux parents have experienced the destructive effects of this characterization. And the destruction continues into the lives of the children. For what has become of this family?

The parents, after many ups and down, finally came to rest in Aube in a dilapidated house in run-down condition. To pay the rent, they expect a housing allowance. But to complete their application, the social worker unfortunately asks for rent receipts. Once again, the logic of a strictly regulated society runs up against the logic of extreme poverty. This same society, to protect his final years, also needs a complete account of the work career of Mr. Mauroux, the life-long handy man. This is a rule established by an administration ignorant of the chaotic career of the sub-proletarians. Daniel Mauroux once more see counted as nothing a great number of jobs of which he remembers all the pain, but for which he cannot produce the required documentation. "Nonetheless, when I was twelve I packaged beer," he said not without vexation (?).

From three different funds, Mr. Mauroux drew in 1982 a total sum of 18,500 francs (\$3,750). With a student stipend for the youngest son and a regularly interrupted allowance for another son who was frequently out of work, two parents and two children of 15 and 18 had to live on about 450 francs (\$90) per month per person. The parents, both sickly since their youth, didn't complain too much. They can feed themselves, and that wasn't always the case in the past. Their condition bothers them, but does not astonish them. They know the families nearby. They have been surrounded for their whole lives by households who share the same privations. Moreover, they feared pushing their demands too hard. "If we go to the National Solidarity Board, they will take away our children." That would be one more

humiliation added to many others. For the children didn't seem to be doing much better than their parents.

Of the four sons and one daughter who have left the house, not one has a skilled job. They all do manual work typical for sub-proletarians: spray painter, packer, deliverer, handy-man in a small machine tool enterprise, handy-man, not an apprentice, for a garage mechanic. Worse, they all left school before obtaining a sufficient basis on which to build more education, training for young workers, or retraining of any sort. They don't have sufficient intellectual baggage, haven't learned a rhythm of life or a way of thinking suited to the modern worker. They don't know how to calculate nor to plan an existence. One or two are already unemployed.

At work or leisure, they spend time with other sub-proletarians, not workers coming from the labor class. They go to bistros rather than bars or discotheques. They ride mopeds with well-used motors, while their counterparts from the working class are better equipped with more prestigious vehicles. Thus, on the margins of the workers condition, they remain ignorant of the worker's world. They know how to get along in the sub-proletarian milieu; they have no compass for orienting themselves to the wider world.

Evelyn, the only girl of the household, first set up house with, then married, a young man who also changed jobs frequently. The couple lives with a first baby in a moderate/low (?) income apartment building, occupying a sort of basement unity that never get sunlight. Because of nonpayment of bills, the heat was cut off for their whole section. For Evelyn and her neighbors to have heat in a low-income building is a luxury, even when they have a young child.

So, a new sub-proletarian generation has set out on life's path. The two other Mauroux sons will take the same path next year. One will leave primary school at age sixteen, four years late; the other will have completed his military service at twenty, after holding only two temporary manual labor jobs between the ages of 16 and 18. Concerning the younger, still in school but way behind his class, Daniel Mauroux will throw at us a final challenge or--who knows?--give us a final rendezvous. "Before he went into the military, I wanted my son to be a butcher (!:)). If he had listened to me, the butcher on the main street would have taken him on as an apprentice. My youngest son, Paul, should go into electronics. Electronics is the only place!"

You could think that a Declaration of Human Rights remains inscribed in Daniel Mauroux and that his wife is a walking handbook of the history of the poorest of her era. She carries with her ancestral fears of sickness: "He will get sick from touching harmful dyes. Because he works in cold drafts he will get pneumonia." She hasn't left the time in which the poor could neither heal nor protect themselves. Her husband, because of reading newspapers he has picked up from trash cans and basements, thinks in terms of a future which is, in truth, a future for the elites. "My son should go into electronics."

And why not? Wouldn't that finally be justice? Daniel Mauroux, expert in misery, hasn't he in these few words summed up a politics ultimately based on Human Rights, one which offers electronics to the sub-proletarians as their means of liberation? Daniel Mauroux does not understand that society offers to his sons no means whatever of entry to the work force. Electronics, for him, are a prolongation of what he has found in the journals Historia and Selection. With the reading of children's and adult books found from rummaging, he has enriched the life and mind of his children. He made them read, but the society around him did not follow up with its part. All of his sons are able to read, but they can't do the sort of reading necessary to enter into the world of their time. Today, one must know how to read the signs on a computer screen and write by making ones finger fly over an electronic keyboard. Daniel Mauroux does not know the details, but he knows the essential point, namely, the participation in the world of knowledge is through electronics. The computer is not an end in itself; it allows one to enter into the thought of others. On the buffet in his rundown lodging where the waste line has been stopped up for eight years, lies a little electronic game, a "gadget" like one sees for sale in certain supermarkets. Paul's parents bought it for him with some of his school stipend. The object of game is keep from slipping on banana peels.

With this purchase, the Mauroux parents sent a signal, performed an act of protest, addressed an appeal, gave a rendezvous to the school, the university, and the surrounding world. Will the university, in spite of its history, not miss the rendezvous this time? In spite of its history or, perhaps, because of it? For this history of corporatism, this history of monopolizing knowledge and the power it confers, we have said, is also a history of generosity, of the desire freely to make knowledge available. Despite its confusions and its errors along the way, along with its ignorance and blindness, the university has carried, across the ages, an ideal contradictory to its own behavior. To wit, the ideal of knowledge received as a gift to transmit freely. Could not this ideal lead it to a rendezvous not to be missed?

Chapter VI

Reciprocity

Knowledge is a goal to pursue without limit, a good in itself, a good of humanity. So says the university when it criticizes science that is reduced to being only a tool at the service of economic production. So say researchers when public funds are directed toward investigations that might essentially lead to profitable industrial applications. They are right to defend the cause of knowledge which should enlarge minds rather than primarily consolidate the progress of material well-being. But the Fourth World invites them to go all the way with their logic.

Knowledge is a good in itself if it guarantees the advancement of the intellectual and spiritual life of all persons, and not only of certain persons at the price of the very great

dependence of others. It can, with perfect justice, be pursued with national support if it is a common good not only in theory, but a good made common by precise, tangible, and clearly identifiable efforts. In the course of the centuries, some such efforts have been made in good faith and not without results.

History shows in fact that knowledge has learned little by little to descend the social ladder. It has learned to aid some layers of the population to appropriate a part of it more consistently. History does not reveal, we have seen, that the progress is achieved at the price of an ever more suffocating oppression of the poorest who remain without instruction. It doesn't tell this because it is cut off from the history of the poorest. It is part of a false university knowledge--we have said--because it is deprived of an essential explicative part. If the history of the poorest were told, the nation would know that the families of the outskirts and the Zone of sixty years ago could have given birth to and reared children, even if the parents were illiterate and ignorant of vaccinations and basic child care. The nation would know that in these same families the children are today like hostages in the hands of the administration: "If you don't replace this old mattress with a clean crib, we will place your child with the Child Services Agency." The right to health of some has become the obligation of health of others, the greatest knowledge of the non-poor has become the humiliation the constant deprivation of the very poor.

The families of the Fourth World have paid dearly, and more and more dearly, for the progressive democratization of instruction. On descending the social ladder, the knowledge of the others lies with an ever more crushing weight on one layer of the population, one that is more oppressed because it is in the minority, too numerous, and without any weight on the political scales. Against this knowledge that gives justice with one hand only to take it away with the other, against this knowledge introduced "from on high," there is only one remedy. It is knowledge introduced from the lowest level, knowledge rising in society like an oxygen balloon, knowledge to be emulated, knowledge of equal chances. Do we have there a beautiful image, all the more satisfying because it is abstract, without concrete demands for the life of each of us?

First of all, it is not an image, but an equation, that of equal chances. We have talked too much of continuing to offer these chances for the common good to each in proportion to their contribution. In order to equalize the chances, it is necessary to invert the proportions, to invest more and better, there where is less baggage at the start. This is a question of elementary arithmetic, and even the university has not tried to clarify the exact meaning of what has remained a slogan, that of equalizing the chances at the starting line.

This is a call for knowledge as a free gift and not a merit remunerated according to the laws of a carefully regulated economic technocracy, for knowledge invested first of all where it is absent and not where it exists already. If the university meets its rendezvous with the Fourth World, does it do anything other than have a rendezvous with its own ideals? If there will be something new to learn--and there is always something unexpected in an encounter with the excluded--it is reciprocity. The Fourth World, source of a unique

knowledge; the sub-proletarian worker, holder of a knowledge needed by the university if it is to move ahead; there is the true reversal, the only chance for a fundamental change in the assignment of roles. And this unique chance for change the university holds between its hands.

The political parties, labor and family organizations, democratic representative institutions, and all institutions that french society and the European Community rest on have to rethink their constitution, their sources of inspiration, their manner of nourishing their thought and analyses. Who are the citizens whose speech not only gives testimony but also gives direction? Who are the citizens whose situation will be the measure of our justice? The university has an essential responsibility in this. Its received privileges, the prestige accorded to its members from the sole fact that they are privileged, obligates it the set an example. It owes it to the Fourth World to lead a genuine movement, placing its prestige on the line. It owes to the society that gives it life to get the moral, social, economic, and political sciences back on their feet. It should put its sociological analyses and historical knowledge in order.

Moral and political responsibility as well as scientific rigor obligate the university to turn itself toward the Fourth World, not first of all to teach it, but to dialog and learn. And when we say the university we mean the university with all of its institutions and ramifications. For example, the university includes all the citizens who in one way or another possess a portion of the common knowledge. It is time for the reciprocity of knowledge, that is to say, reciprocity between all those who know and those who are excluded. And this reciprocity is a concrete and hard demand. It is not a question of lending a friendly ear, of practicing a semblance of listening in the form of psychological therapy. It is a question of asking the population at the bottom of the social ladder to reveal to us its thought and what it knows; to ask it to take us seriously and to trust us. We must understand exactly what is being asked. We are proposing that a population plunged into insecurity for generations to take new risks with us.

For who will be able to tell the poorest that they are not exposing themselves to new humiliations, to more hard blows. Haven't we always told them that they are incapable and ineffective? Haven't we thereby deprived them of all autonomy, even the power of speech? We must, in all truth, be convincing, and we will not be so with nice words alone. We must also act. Jules Ferry knew the necessity of convincing the poor that the time of school for all had arrived. It did not suffice to open the schools. It was also necessary to have teachers who embodied the will to teach and who took up residence in the poor neighborhoods and villages as leaders desperate to teach. And it was necessary for the families to know that these teachers and their children as students were carried by a movement of opinion, by a national current of confidence in the capacity of the children to learn. Jules Ferry's real struggle was there, in creating a climate favorable to the poor. He was opposed not for having opened the schools, but for having created a climate favorable to a people by making the schools available to them. ??

Do we not have to do the same? To set forth precise and visible actions, not only as an end in itself, but with a view to creating a new climate. Students in the street to exchange what they know; students in the street, not only in the name of youth and good will, but in the name of the university and of society, supported by their professors. Scholars in the street, not to do research, not to stockpile information for themselves, but to let themselves be taught, to be corrected, ready to call into question not only their knowledge, but the foundations, the method, and the meaning of knowledge. Educated people in the street ready to question the use made of their education, the manner of being and living based on education. That is the reversal I am proposing to you.

The means for doing it are simple, but they must be put to work in a convincing fashion and publicly: street libraries, cultural centers, knowledge clubs," Human Rights houses, places of all sorts, promoting the exercise of thinking in common, public speech, and the exchange of knowledge. Any idea of gleaning a knowledge without reciprocity is excluded here. Workers and Fourth World families will neither teach us nor learn from us if it is not in an exchange where each one advances thanks to others. Any other equality is a fiction, and the sub-proletarians will not be fooled.

Hasn't the hour arrived for us to no longer fool ourselves about equality? To go to our polar opposite, to know to go where Human Rights await us, to be finally at the rendezvous, isn't that the opportunity offered to our time? How will our generation be credible in the eyes of history if it does not seize this opportunity, here and now?