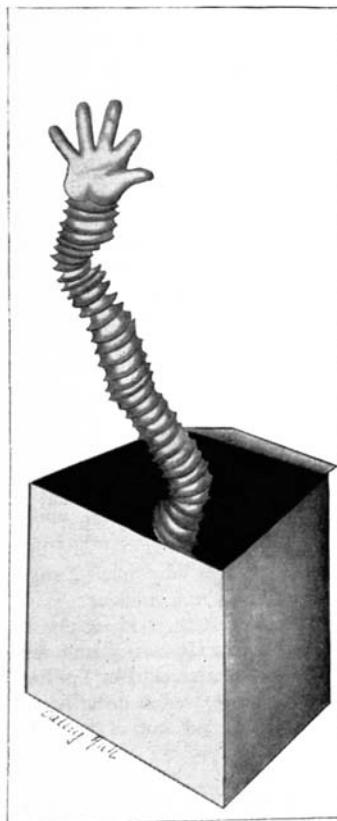


States of the Union

LETTER FROM AN EX-CON (I&II)

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS



There are no people who do not, in the depths of their being, want the same things that Consciousness III wants. There is no need, then, for any group of people in America to fight any other, for they are all fellow sufferers—businessmen, policemen, construction workers. There is no need even to fight the machine, for technology can be made a servant of man when Consciousness III creates a new society.

—From the *New Yorker* version of Charles A. Reich's *The Greening of America*

DEAR PROFESSOR REICH: I write to you from my penthouse cell at the Miami Hilton where, as you may recall, the National T-Group placed me after I foolishly rejected Consciousness III. That, of course, was 24 years ago; and while it has been pleasant here watching the eternal tides, it has also been lonely. As you know, Miami has been virtually abandoned ever since the Jefferson Airplane branded it a heresy.

Therefore, I take up pen in hopes that you might be persuaded to intercede for me with the au-

thorities—if, indeed, we still have authorities—and ask them to commute my sentence. I am, I assure you, a sincere repentant, not the callow bank clerk or the stubborn heretic of yesteryear. (How far away that now seems, that dreary BC III Era!) My beard is cut to the regulation shape, forming a modest peace sign at the adam's apple, and my hair would most assuredly be shoulder-length were it not for the fact that I am quite bald. In short, were I released today, I could merge instantly into any of the 12 million Do-Your-Own-Thing communes which grace America.

Looking back on those thrill-packed, bloodless days of The Great Evolution, I see clearly that everything happened precisely as you predicted. "What Consciousness III represents in the long-range terms of human evolution," you had written, "is the beginning of the development of new capacities in man. . ." How true, how true! "In Consciousness III," you continued, "we can see not a superficial moralistic improvement but a growth of understanding, sensibility, and the capacity for love. . . ."

Oddly enough, when the change came, I did not understand that something was right with me. Those sudden sharp pangs of sensibility I kept feeling, that peculiar green tinge around my jowls—what did this all signify? I telephoned Dr. Young for an appointment.

"Appointment schmointment," the Doctor said, "when you get the urge our heads will merge."

I went straight to his office on Park Avenue. Dr. Young—I vividly recall—was sitting cross-legged on the floor strumming a 12-string guitar. "What's the buzz?" he asked.

"I've been having these awful sensibility pangs," I answered. "And I'm afraid I'm developing a growth or two."

"What kind of growth? A growth in understanding maybe?"

"That's right," I said, admiring his acumen.

"And also perhaps a growth in your love-capacity?"

"Exactly," I said.

"Speaking in long-range terms," said the Doctor, "I'd say you've reached Consciousness III. Congratulations!"

"Is that good?" I asked.

"Good! It's the best. My friend, in the evolutionary con game, Con III is the last word. In Con I, as Professor Reich tells us, you were just a greedy, God-fearing rustic, a diamond-in-the-rough. In Con II you became an Organization Man, a buttoned-down IBMer. Now here you are in Con III, a bundle of sensibilities."

Professor Reich, I must be honest: It sounded terrible.

"Is there a cure?" I asked the Doctor.

"Of course not," he said. "There is never a cure for paradise." Then he read aloud from the good book: ". . . and the change to Consciousness III is not, as far as anybody knows, reversible. Once a person reaches Consciousness III, there is no returning to an earlier consciousness."

I thanked Dr. Young for the ses-

sion and tried to pay him the usual \$40 but he turned it down, saying, pointedly, "In Consciousness III, everything's free." Everything, as it turned out, but me, still here at the Hilton.

"God," "flag" and "The United States of America."

• A proposal for a new annual holiday, Encounter Group Day, during which Americans would form a gigantic circle and embrace their neighbor's left foot.

• An Omnibus Resolution of Censure repealing all previous laws, leaders and events.

It was, as my wife remarked that morning, a damn fine beginning. Why I took it into my head to go to work that day I'll never understand. Certainly nobody else went to work, then or since. But I had some credits and debits to finish, so I dutifully took the train in. New York was a spring festival. Policemen were hugging hippies; construction workers were donning felt fedoras; and businessmen were dying their blue chips green.

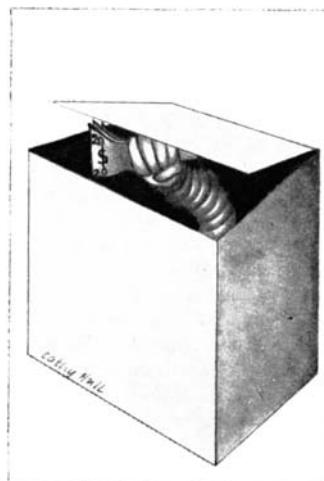
Well, I shouldered my way through the simpering multitudes till I got to the bank. The whole place was empty except for me. There was that huge room, The Well, with its desks and adding machines, where I had punched and totaled, totaled and punched, day after day for nineteen and a half years. I stood in the middle of the room staring at the machines and listening to the celebrating crowd outside. And suddenly I understood—or thought I did. It was all over. *I didn't have to come here any more.*

I suppose it was then that I started running up and down the aisles turning on all the machines. And while the machines were clicking and clacking away (what a beautiful noise!), I opened the vault and wallowed in all that money. I forgot how much I stole; it must have been millions.

Professor Reich, I know that in Consciousness III money isn't supposed to mean much. But I'm here to tell you: It does, it does. And if you help me get out of here, I'll split it with you.

PEACE,

A HOPEFUL EX-CON (I & II)



the next morning the whole blessed process—the greening of America from stem to stern—had been completed. I read all about it in the *New York Times*:

SENATORS CONSENT TO GREENING;
CON III DELIVERED TO ALL STATES
EXCEPT MISSISSIPPI; STENNIS LIVID

The story said that Congress had passed, and sent to the Green House for the President's signature, a raft of emergency measures designed to ease the transition from Con II to Con III. These provisions included:

• A bill eliminating from the Pledge of Allegiance the words