Ignorance and the idiot box...

(Continued from page 4) "keeping up." In short, you're an ignorant idiot.

You may say, "I realize that I can't possibly know more than an infinitesimal fraction of what is going on in the world, but so what? How much of it concerns me? I know all that I need to know." That may have been true when you were in the coven, brother, but it ain't so now. Back then you only needed to know about the tribe, the weather, the hunting and perhaps the terrain over the hill. That was what mattered to you, all that affected your life. Today, however, many more things influence your life. The Federal tax laws affect your life, industrial pollution threatens it, traffic congestion aggravates it. Richard Nixon inflicts upon it, oh, you've got lots to worry about-those folks in Roxbury, your local revolutionary, your neighbor in the KKK, furtive hacks at desks in Washington, your next war. And yet nearly everyone presumes to make opinions about the world on the basis of such minimal knowledge. Worse: very few of us have any way of knowing whether we're getting the truth or not. Since we can't all go to Saigon and check out the situation ourselves, we have to rely on the media.

So your view of the world-that is, THE WORLD, the big overview-can be likened to the way a man might perceive his surroundings if he were enclosed in a tomb equipped with TV cameras to the outside. His view is first, incomplete, because the camera only shows part of the landscape, and second, incorrect, because even the best color TV does not produce exactly true-to-life colors. Furthermore, his TV cameras are likely to be covered with filters, depending on the biases of the various cameramen. One screen has a red tinge, one a blue tinge, another a red white blue hue. And finally, the viewer himself has preconceptions that color everything as well as a selectivity that governs which screen he views.

Imagines the wretch who tries to keep tabs on matters which are of real concern to him. That means he must keep tabs on Congress, the President, the oil companies, the stock market, cost-of-living, crime rates, impending wars, riots, revolutions, unemployment, because all these things affect him one way or another, and he wants to be a responsible citizen, right? Now: If after keeping up on all this, and writing his Congressman, and working for his favorite political organization, do you think he will have time to go to work? (or as is your case, class?)

This wretch is known as the public, or The People. Now some folks can devote all their time to making decisions that affect The People. They are called rulers. Some folks are paid to spend all their time keeping up on a few specific areas, and to influence the rulers in behalf of their clients. We call such men lobbyists. The People are too busy working to inquire into their interests. They invariably get screwed by the rulers and the lobbyists. Even if you gave them all power, they'd be too damn busy to exercise it.

Right now somebody in Washington, or Moscow, or New York is doing something that will affect your life. Here in Cambridge they may be building your next war. And quite possibly you'll never know it till it hits you, because you're an ignorant idiot, and you've no way to become wise.

Possibly none of this is new to you. If that's the case, how is it that there are so many of us, right here at this marvelous intellectual oasis, that seem to be so damned sure what it's all about? The Corporation sits smugly while being called pigs, then complacently sits down to such—nothing is wrong! While others are absolutely certain that there's nothing worth saving, how can anybody be sure they've got it all psyched out? The next time you think you understand the big picture (as the Army likes to call it) start repeating, "I'm an ignorant idiot, an ignorant idiot, I..."

Makes you feel humble, but a bit more amenable to reason. If it frustrates you that you can never really know what's going on in the world, think of your grandchildren. Think of a time when there are twice as many people and even more sophisticated technology. Assuming the world lasts that long, your grandchildren may envy you the simple life.

So there's a world out there. It's big and it affects you powerfully; you can at most know only about a fraction of it and when you try to respond to it, to affect it... Sometimes, it doesn't seem you, little man, can affect it.

PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Positions are in the Career Civil Service
(An Equal Opportunity Employer)