I always seem to have a pile of plain hand-sewing, but I try to work through this whenever a close friend comes for the day. This leaves me free to chat for hours with no guilty feeling of wasted time.

If you are not naturally particularly houseproud, be sensible and keep up a steady level of work that will be sufficient to produce at least a reasonable standard. A sudden, over-enthusiastic burst of spring-cleaning will probably induce a violent antipathy to polish and pail. Emergencies are always unexpected. Keep an adequate store cupboard and a goodish reserve of clean linen; the household can then run itself for a few days without undue difficulty. A deep-freeze is certainly a marvellous aid to home management but is by no means essential. (I know—I lived without electricity for the first nine years of my marriage.)

Planning the week ahead

It helps me to make a rough plan of the week ahead, so getting some idea of the amount of time available for special jobs. This exists as a general guide only, since some interruptions or changes can’t be foreseen. Sometimes one is extra busy. A dentist’s appointment, a school medical and a parent-teacher association meeting fall in the same week as an unexpected trip that involves a whole day out. In that case, accept right away that that new dress won’t be finished till next week; don’t struggle to do the impossible.

I have finally admitted to myself that my own work pattern is clearly of the fits-and-starts variety. This much accepted, I no longer find it disturbing that I have periods of frantic activity followed by days of lying relatively fallow. I can achieve an enormous amount on my energetic days and am rarely idle on slacker ones, though much less efficient.

I find that it really does help my morale enormously if I always make time early in the morning to put on proper make-up, even though I expect to remain indoors all day. If I promise myself to fit it in later on, I seldom get round to doing so, and then a casual glimpse in the mirror shows such a depressing, messy creature!

If you, too, are of the ‘up-or-down’ temperament, try to accept the fact and learn how to live with it. When you feel like work, really get on with it—but still take adequate rest. If you have a lethargic spell, do the best you can without forcing the pace. Sometimes it helps to promise yourself the ‘treat’ of a day spent on your favourite hobby. Above all, don’t feel guilty if you know you haven’t done as much today as you did yesterday.

One of the most notable phenomena of the last two years has been the sudden growth of what might be called the ‘ecological movement’. I think myself that ‘ecology’ is a bad word to use in this context; I take the word to mean the systematic and dispassionate analysis of interrelationships between various kinds of life-forms and their physical environment—and the movement is not yet very systematic and is certainly not dispassionate.

It seems to have moved, generally speaking, pretty rapidly from the study of the natural environment to the study of the artificial environment and has become much concerned with what is called ‘the quality of life’—which seems to mean the quality of man’s life.

This shift has meant that all sorts of political and protest groups have infiltrated the movement, and I am not at all sure that all these groups are going to go on advocating the same things. Of course herein lies first the difficulty of finding a good portmanteau title for the movement as a whole, and secondly the danger that the movement may split into fragments if it comes under pressure.

I use the word ‘danger’ deliberately, and so declare my interest, because I wholly welcome a movement which aims primarily to reduce the intensity of the self-destructive forces in society. The movement is predominantly youthful which is a very agreeable thing. For myself, as I drift worriedly round my scented boudoir and look at the thing from the lofty age of twenty-nine, I wonder if the youngsters really appreciate the strength of the entrenched attitudes they are up against. I fear they may be forced into ridiculous nihilistic attitudes largely because of their own impatience; and if they are made to look ridiculous then, of course, the forces of reaction will sweep down upon them.

I think it’s up to us middle-aged fogs to join in with this movement to improve the quality of life for
succeeding generations. One of our difficulties will be that we shan’t know quite what it is we’re joining; another difficulty will be to overcome our own deeply-entrenched attitudes and opinions. These difficulties become apparent when we consider that one of the objectives that all members of ‘the movement’ seem to be striving for is de-development.

We’ve heard of development and redevelopment and underdevelopment and ribbon development, but de-development (or)—the systematic winding-down of our material standards of living—is a new one to us 29-year-olds, and a difficult challenge. We’ve been conditioned for years to go onwards and upwards: to buy a first car, then a second car, or to ‘progress’ from icebox to fridge to freezer.

Challenge it will be, but we’ve got to rise to it; and of all the floggers that must rise to it, I think we social workers must be the first. Social work itself is being overwhelmed by an avalanche of social casualties: we’ve got to reduce the pressures.

Well, where to start? Charity begins at home, they say. I worry about all those hundreds of social workers—more every year—who are encouraged to drive about in cars. They must first be scattered amongst the community and given caseloads which are all within walking distance.

Then, I will gladly give £5 to any nominated charity when the first Director of Social Services offers his staff a horse allowance or provides a new worker with a Council pony-trap (or gig or phaeton or barouche or what-have-you). As soon as sufficient horses are in post, and a ‘Council Blacksmith’ has been appointed, then NALGO should take the lead in getting car-allowances actually reduced. (Or should NALGO take the lead now and cut car-allowances straight away? I hope their General Secretary will reply to me on this.)

Then, residential establishments: an end, I say, to all man-made fibres—they’re only using up irreplaceable sources. There are something like 30,000 children in residential establishments: if they’re all dressed in cotton or wool (replaceable materials) the change will make a sizeable dent in the wasteful society.

How many Social Services Committees are actively supporting family planning programmes, using Section One of the 1963 Children and Young Persons Act as their remit?

Once you start on this de-development lark it can take your thoughts in all sorts of directions. Let’s turn back to residential care. How many authorities are building shiny, middle-class, ruinously expensive hostels for mentally ill people where the standards are so high that the clients are either frightened away or break down under the strain of conformity? It seems ludicrous: we’re sophisticating ourselves out of business. Yet what local authority is boldly prepared to build a messy grubby place where messy grubby people can be happy? And if an authority tried, would this frenzied DHSS of ours, with its bloated capital building programme, really be prepared to lower its abominable standards?

And what about casework itself—doesn’t that need de-developing as well? It’s becoming slower, more complex and less effective all the time: some agencies can’t even accept inarticulate people who are in distress, because these clients can’t understand the language. How about more hot-gospelling and less of the let’s-discuss-your-ejection-from-the-womb?

And finally (this is just a note to our Editor, I’m sorry you’re all eavesdropping), what about MIND itself? Ought it not to appear on special paper with special ink so that, once read, it can be boiled down with a tablespoonful of water and turned into sauce tartare?

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