

## BOOK REVIEW

Patricia Elliot (1993). RETHINKING THE FUTURE: THE FIFTH HOUSE READER NUMBER TWO. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, paperback, 244 pages. Price \$16.95. Reviewed by David Johnston.

There is a pervading sense of unease, a feeling that things aren't the way they should be -that politicians don't tell the truth, that they lie or at best don't uphold their contract with the people. So we have Clayoquot Sound. And we have an unprecedented massive swing of votes away from traditional parties in this federal election to new ones, to the Reform Party and the Bloc Quebecois. It is, according to a growing consensus, a protest vote, although one with an accent on regional concerns. In my mind, it is much more: It is a voice that speaks to a growing uncertainty, to the feeling, barely articulate, that something is not right about how we govern our affairs, that something is deeply in need of change.

Rethinking the Future speaks to this concern. The book consists of a collection of twenty-one indicative essays by thoughtful Canadians on topics of vital interest concerning the direction the country is heading. As one author, John Dixon warns, "leaving the running of the world ...to God or nature is now and forever closed to us." We must be involved, and hopefully with as much intelligence and humanity that we can muster. If we aren't, we risk the danger of contributing to a series of serious disasters while remaining locked into a 'Brave New World' the result of being fixated on a one-sided ideology of scientific and technological progress. Although the idea of our living in a 'Brave New World' is not new, the drawing realization that it comes together with potentially catastrophic events in the natural world of monumental

proportions is. As a second author, Doris Anderson suggests that women in particular are not happy with the way things are, and they want 'quite a different world.'

Indeed, in the hearts of Canadians, everywhere, one hears echoes of Clayoquot Sound. George Erasmus, another author, informs the reader that in the third world, "rainforests" which "regulate our global climate" are disappearing at "the rate of a hundred acres every minute" and that world wide at least half the original acreage has been destroyed. There is a need, therefore, he argues, for sustainable development.

There are other echoes, some of which cut closer to the source of the dilemma we find ourselves in. The nature of our social conditioning, the hubris in our collective lives and the undercurrent of greed, requires acknowledgement and clarification, and the implications understood. So does the nature of Canada's place and responsibility in the interconnected web of global villages. There is a need, too, of being informed of the direction science is heading, for instance, in biotechnology and eugenics, and the major voices today behind the current decision making [big business]. Finally, there is a need to come to terms with the transformative nature of T.V. [and the internet] in our collective lives, and its perilous conditioning effects on morality and truth. So the authors warn.

Generally, they suggest that being properly informed and educated will help us to create a future more in harmony with our deeper human needs. But that is not enough. Decision making requires priorities based on value. It requires, argue some authors, an ethical attitude

and ethical deliberation. It requires liberation of the imagination from contemporary social constructs as well as more room for cultural and regional differentiation, argues another. It requires more value placed on contemplation, says a third and there needs to be more room for philosophical inquiry into the direction of our collective lives, writes a fourth. Other authors make concrete political-economic suggestions for possible change.

The underlying sense that things aren't as they should be, goes beyond most issues addressed by our politicians today. It goes beyond Clayoquot Sound although it can be heard in the silence of its echo. Rethinking the Future cuts through to deeper concerns, although there are some noteworthy lacunae. For instance, there are no essays concerning spirituality or religion, and nothing on the place of the arts and beauty in our lives or most importantly, the role of individuals, especially creative individuals in advancing culture. These omissions notwithstanding, the book does contain a series of provocative and stimulating essays that would interest anybody concerned about life in Canada as we come face to face with the twenty-first century.