

BALLYMURPHY: A TALE OF TWO SURVEYS, by A. E. C. W. Spencer. *Queen's University of Belfast, Department of Social Studies*. Distributed by University Bookshop Ltd., University Road, Belfast 7. in cooperation with Ballymurphy Tenants' Association. £1.

Ballymurphy is an area in Belfast which many people know something about. In the belief that no one knew *enough* about it the local Tenants' Association commissioned a Survey to be made by Mr Anthony Spencer of the department of social studies in Queen's University, Belfast.

Mr Spencer had already carried out surveys in England and countries abroad. Some of his work had been done for the Catholic hierarchy in Britain who wanted to know about the state of Catholic practice there. That survey, however, did not please, and much of the results of it are now reposing in sad oblivion somewhere in England. As Mr Spencer remarked when the Ballymurphy survey was published, 'We have to learn that the investigation of a sick society can often be sickening'.

The Ballymurphy survey was made over a period of three years. Very much of the work was done by the tenants of Ballymurphy themselves with the fits and starts and disappointments which were to be expected in an area where the residents had suffered so much. The Tenants' Association itself had struggled for many years of the Ballymurphy estate's 25-year existence to bring about much-needed reforms, house repairs, community amenities, etc. It was an uphill struggle in which neither the church or the state offered enough help.

Unemployment was disastrous, as high perhaps as between 30 and 40 per cent. The apathy of the people for many years was equally disastrous, as they believed not only that they were in a desperate plight but that there was nothing that could be done. But there were enough residents in the estate who believed in themselves and in their neighbours and in the possible future prosperity of Ballymurphy to keep alive some hope. There were even some residents with a spark of genius. Paradoxically more community activity has gone on in Ballymurphy over the last five years than in any other parish in the city of Belfast. The artificial crowding of one section of the population into an area like this has the effect of concentrating social problems. But it also has the effect of bringing together in one place a larger number of people of high intelligence than might be expected if conditions were normal. Perhaps this goes some way towards explaining why tenants in Ballymurphy and staff and students of Queen's University managed to work so harmoniously together.

The resulting survey was in many aspects a

severe document. It blamed the failures of Belfast Corporation, of the Catholic Church, of the Government to provide enough amenities or employment or spiritual comfort. It described in great detail how the housing in this post-war estate not only was bad but could have not been good considering the materials used. The large families which people had in common with other poor people and in common with other Catholics in other countries, needed good household management, good nourishment, good houses and security. In Ballymurphy as in other parts of Belfast they too often had none of these. The report recommended therefore that on the one hand employment should be provided and better housing for large families, and on the other hand that the Church should take seriously its duty of providing information and training for people who in such circumstances had reason to consider seriously the size of their families.

Since the survey was made and the report published much has changed. Ballymurphy is today one of the most thriving centres of community action in Belfast. Given a chance there is a distinct possibility that it could become one of the most creative areas in this tormented city. There are new playing fields and new factories. Not many but some. The Government has undertaken to industrialise the whole of West Belfast. The Church community shows signs of coming to life although the losses to public worship have been considerable. A resident priest asked for by the report based upon the survey is there now and another priest to keep him company. The sudden departure of Mother Teresa's Sisters was a setback to what was becoming a thriving little Christian community based upon a real love and respect for people and in which rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant mingled very happily. If the survey were made today there would be some reason for it being more optimistic.

Yet the survey and report were not all darkness. True, chronic sickness was greater than should be expected. Child health was grossly deficient and still is. There are still too few youth centres and too great a church debt hanging around the necks of the people. But the people themselves are beginning to stir and it is probably true to say that none of the amenities provided in the last two years were brought in without a certain involvement of at least some of the people in bringing them. This says a lot for the local tenants' and other citizens' associations. It also says a lot about

the possible development of Ballymurphy in the future.

The report suggested that the authorities should act with urgency, for instance, that on the one hand the Catholic church should teach about the size of families and on the other that the authorities should knock houses together to provide sufficient accommodation for large families; that some houses should be swept away and playgrounds put in their place, or factories for that matter.

The enormity of some of the problems encountered in this survey can be seen from the following data:

'While the unemployment rate of men and women together rose in Ballymurphy from 21.1 per cent in April-May, 1971 to 23.5 per cent in February, 1973, in the Belfast unemployment area it declined from 6.1 per cent to 5.3 per cent. The Belfast rate for men fell from 8 per cent to 6.4 per cent. For women it rose from 3 per cent to 3.3 per cent. In April-May, 1971, Ballymurphy unemployment was 3.40 times the Belfast rate for men, and 2.84 times the Belfast rate for women. In February, 1973, Ballymurphy unemployment was 4.25 times the Belfast rate for men, and 4.82 times the Belfast rate for women.

The average number of persons per dwelling can be compared with that for all inhabited private dwellings in Belfast. The 1971 average of 6.5 per dwelling in Ballymurphy was twice the Belfast average of 3.35 in 1966. Another measure is the average number of persons per room. The Ballymurphy average of 1.27 in 1971 was one and three quarters the Belfast average of 0.73 in 1966. A third, and much more stringent measure is the proportion of the population living in private

dwellings at a density of more than 2 persons per room. Ballymurphy in 1971 had 13 per cent of its population living at this density, more than double the Belfast proportion of 5.9 per cent in 1966'.

The general picture emerging therefore from the survey by Anthony Spencer and his team was one of serious neglect resulting from bad planning and bad economic policies. But there was also the hopeful picture of citizens who had taken in hand the control of their own density and the increasing willingness of Government to correct the mistakes of the past. But much violence and tragedy had intervened and progress had been made at the cost of much heart-break and disappointment.

One has only to read the recommendations in each chapter of the survey and report to realise that there is not a single problem in the Ballymurphy area which is not soluble, given the resources and the will to create a new situation. In all probability the time necessary to change Ballymurphy from a deprived, dissatisfied, frustrated and tragic 'ghetto' into a thriving and intensely vital community need be hardly more than two years.

Whether this will happen or not depends of course upon whether the militants call a cease-fire and whether the overall political situation improves sufficiently to enable a good government to emerge. These are big pre-conditions and those who were concerned in the drawing up of the survey and report and those who will benefit by it can afford only a conditional and limited optimism. But the optimism is there nevertheless.

DESMOND WILSON

WHERE THE WASTELAND ENDS: POLITICS AND TRANSCENDENCE IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY, by Theodore Roszak. *Faber and Faber*, London, 1973. 492 pp. £3.75.

Bringing Theodore Roszak's books out in London assumes that Britain is simply a backward province of the United States and that what is happening over there will eventually occur here too. The theme of the earlier book, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, is that the most radical and potentially the most effective alternative to the increasingly hideous brutality of our society lies in the thought and action of the student generation (as of 1968) because they were alerted by such thinkers as Paul Goodman and Herbert Marcuse to that whole dimension of human life which the prevailing social and political structure excludes or distorts—namely the religious dimension. The 'one-dimensional man' who runs our society must give way to a generation more open and sensitive to the possibilities of 'transcendence'. Only a politics

that takes the poetic element of human nature seriously can give a human face to the necessary revolution.

Rozzak's negatives are always persuasive. He has a good eye for all the human blankness and crass mindlessness in the public thinking of such powerfully placed pundits as Robert McNamara, Henry Kissinger, Herman Kahn and Norbet Wiener—and if our very own domestic think-tank operates almost silently in comparison with the American model it perhaps only deceives us that more effectively. If it is true that Lord Rothschild swung the decision to go on with Concorde, the machine must work on the same anti-social principles, in favour of the first-class passengers. But what has always been troubling about Rozzak's analyses is the uncertainty (to say the least) of his positive commitments.