as being limited to the latter. Contrary to the great expectations of a few years ago, the counter-culture has become a marginal phenomenon: America as a whole did not "green". Still, it has become "greener". Indeed, part of the reason that the assault on "Middle America" has become more quiet is that it has already been so successful. The old values, the old morality, are very much on the defensive today. People who continue to live by the "Protestant ethic", in many places today, are more than a little ashamed of their own supposed "backward" or "uptight" way of life.

Value change, of course, is not necessarily a sign of decadence. One could even argue that such change is conducive to the vitality and the survival capacity of a society. But it is the specific character of the change that must be looked at. Put simply, what is changing are those values upon which the productivity of the society depends. Without readiness for work, discipline and a measure, at least, of self-denial, no society can look forward to much of a future.

But the most alarming erosion of plausibility has been taking place in the political sphere. The American nation is unusual in that it has been, from the beginning, based explicitly on a specific political creed, which was incorporated in the documents (most notably, of course, the constitution) emerging from the struggle for national independence. During the last decade this creed has undergone the severest shocks. The racial crisis, the Vietnam war and Watergate mark the stages of this erosion, but is is by no means clear that there are not more stages ahead.

No political order can survive many such shocks, least of all a democratic one. When all is said and done, a political order can rest on only two foundations—consensus and coercion: as consensus wanes, reliance on coercion increases, must increase. Or, of course, the political order starts to fall apart. It is sobering to recall that the two greatest revolutions of modern times, the French and the Russian, were each preceded by scandals that led important segments of the people to conclude that there was ineradicable corruption at the very heart of power—the affair of the queen's necklace in France and the Rasputin affair in Russia. The rhetoric and the ceremonialism of the political order can then go on for a while longer, but it has become "empty", devoid of inner meaning or conviction. It would be hard to assess how far the erosion of American political symbols has gone in the same direction. There can be no question but that *it has gone a long way from the early 1960s, when, for instance, President Kennedy could still inaugurate his administration with an unambiguous and virtually unchallenged appeal to the virtues of patriotism and democracy.