

SWITCHBOARD

FREE

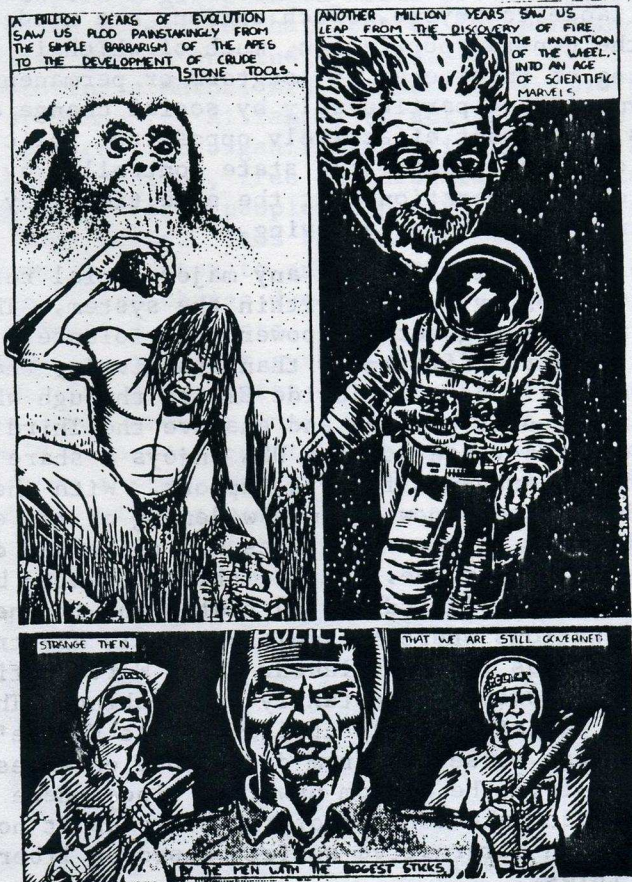
v.2#5 Jan 29-Feb 4

published weekly by
COMMUNITY SWITCHBOARD
24 Ryerson #309, 868-0113

one block north of Queen, one block east of Bathurst

Community Switchboard offers a forum and research facilities to those concerned with analyzing the need for basic social change and establishing an alternative social system, economically and ecologically sound, whose principles of small-scale technology, self and co-operative employment and human-scaled social units will contrast with those of the corporate state. Anyone who shares these goals is invited to contact the Switchboard to discuss means of working together towards achieving them.

OFFICE HOURS: The Switchboard is usually open Tuesday thru Saturday afternoons. Spontaneous visits are always welcome, but visitors wishing to verify the office being open are invited to phone in advance.



A STRATEGIZING MEETING TO DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF THE ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS PROJECT will be held Tuesday February 4, 7:30 p.m. at the 519 Church St. Community Centre, third floor. Anyone interested in the question of how to expand opportunities for self and co-operative employment is welcome to attend. More details on page two.

ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

A strategizing meeting on alternative economics will be held Tuesday, February 4 (7:30 p.m., 519 Church St., 3rd floor.) Since this meeting will determine in what direction(s) the attempt to establish an alternative economy will move, it is important that anyone interested turn out. This article will summarize the thinking behind the project, its progress to date and possible future directions.

By an alternative economy, we mean one in which the options of self and co-operative employment are available to anyone. Such options are needed both by the general population, much of which is experiencing or threatened by longterm or permanent unemployment, and particularly by social change activists who cannot effectively oppose the policies of the corporate state (the state controlled by multinational corporations) at the same time they remain dependent on it for a living.

It is unlikely that any major social reforms will be won by working within the system. The state intrinsically generates power and violence. Having done so more efficiently than its rivals, the USA has established a worldwide Empire through which the multinationals pillage and enslave the Third World; Canada as a vassal of the USA enjoys a share of the profit in exchange for its support. With the growth of the Empire's power comes widening of the economic gap between well-to-do elites and those who depend on wages to survive. We see this happening both in the tributary (Third World) states and in the industrial nations where the multinationals are transferring jobs to cheap labour Third World nations and labour's power is constantly diminishing. The only way we can effectively challenge this Empire's power is to free ourselves from dependence on wages and create--from the bottom upwards, since there is no way we can take control of the state as it now stands--an alternative society based on libertarian principles.

In the fall of 1985, the free university sponsored an introductory forum on alternative economics with short talks on various aspects. The next step

was formation of the Community Switchboard to provide an ongoing focal point for the discussion of alternative economics and sponsor discussions at 519 Church. The most recent meeting, at which the Mondragon film was shown and discussed, attracted over thirty people.

Out of the meetings to date and personal experience have come proposals, complimentary rather than mutually exclusive; we can work on as many as there is interest and energy for. These include:

- Breaking the economy down into areas--food, health, education, manufacturing, housing etc--each to be studied by a separate group which would prepare proposals for increased access to that area by independent and co-operative groups and individuals.

- Fostering a Mutual Aid Network (or People's Assistance or Community Alliance) to act as a loose federation of alternative organizations (ie food and housing co-ops, credit unions, free universities etc.) to encourage sympathetic people to patronize the goods and services they offer. This Federation could publish a basis of unity charter to encourage groups and individuals to join, and charge dues which could be applied towards community projects.

- Promoting a barter system.

- Promoting a community of workers' co-ops, either within an urban area or in a small town or rural area, which would be encouraged to exchange goods & services.

- Forming a study group to explore the possibility of starting a village community whose members would generate the means to satisfy as many of their needs as possible within the community.

We are still open to other suggestions. The Feb. 4 meeting will determine where peoples' interests and possible commitments of energy lie. A decision must also be taken as to whether the Community Switchboard is of sufficient relevance to this effort to justify its continued maintenance. It is important that we have as many viewpoints and commitments as possible February 4. If you are interested but unable to attend, please contact the Switchboard before the meeting to let us know where your interests lie.

Please note the change in opening hours policy on page one; the Switchboard will still be generally open 5 afternoons, but not necessarily noon to six.

ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES EXPLORED IN PETERBOROUGH

by Jennifer Sells

A conference called "The Price of Freedom" was hosted by some Trent University students aided by OPIRG (Ontario People's Interest Research Group) in Peterborough on the weekend of January 17-19. Murray Bookchin, the keynote speaker, opened the conference with an impassioned talk on the devastating costs of progress in psychological, ecological and spiritual terms, and put forward the idea that we should work to redefine progress for ourselves and make wise choices in our approaches to modernity.

The Saturday sessions opened with a panel discussion of consumption in industrial society in which advertising, food and culture were addressed. In the small group discussion which followed, people talked about the need to redefine the "good life" for ourselves and to find ways to make this more ethically rooted and ecological way of life both workable and desirable. Individual solutions were rejected as being insufficient on their own, although personal empowerment was seen to be a necessary first step. The afternoon session (Work in Industrial Society) opened with a dreary rehash of a Marxist perspective, which offered no respite from a future vision of the same unless we are to believe that automation will make all of us creatures of leisure. An introduction to the Illichian critique of economics was more lively, and provided us with some theoretical tools for dismantling our over-inflated economy through shifting our attention and resources to the subsistence or alternative economic sector.

A socialist feminist gave an analysis

of women's work, explaining that women's unpaid labour in the home contributes to their feeling of alienation, undervaluation and dependence on the patriarchy. This said, she went on to suggest that women should be paid by the state (another patriarchal institution, by the way) to lessen their feeling of undervaluation and dependence on one patriarch. It was difficult for me to see the advance in this thinking, as it is well known now that women had better be strictly monogamous to the state which gives them money or risk welfare fraud. The Illichian idea of getting away from the usual economic route and developing an alternative economy was more to my taste as a long term goal.

On Saturday evening, a dance and fundraising dinner were held for Oxfam and attended by most of the conference participants and proved a great success, underscoring the strong community feeling which seems characteristic of that city, where people of all ages come together for events such as this.

Sunday's discussion focussed on alternatives, with Murray Bookchin relating the experiment of rooftop solar collectors and French intensive gardening in the Puerto Rican slums of New York. Nora Borhwell from the Alderville Ojibway Reserve spoke about a craft cooperative she had been involved in setting up. A director of Oxfam related third world examples which Oxfam had been involved in supporting.

Overall, it was an interesting and stimulating conference although a little short on the "where do we go from here" question.

PATRIARCHAL FAMILY, NOT FEMINISM, CAUSE OF WOMEN'S MISERY

In an article headlined "It's time to admit that feminist vision was limited" (Buffalo News 26-1-86 pE-7), it is suggested that "the feminization of poverty has come about precisely as sexual discrimination has decreased--thanks to social and legal prohibition. Among the points made to support this view are:

-U.S. men have benefited, and women have been harmed, by no-fault divorce laws. A study of 3,000 cases shows that, as a result of these laws, divorced women and their children suffered an immediate 73% drop in their standard of living, while their ex-husbands enjoyed a 42% rise in theirs.

-Of the 10 million female-headed households in the USA, 35% live below the poverty line. Few of these women were poor when they lived with their husbands or parents. One sociologist states: "What middle-class white feminists construed as oppressive, the family, has been the main source of economic stability of poor black women."

-Government aid to unwed mothers has reduced women's incentives to remain with their husbands and increased the number of female-headed households, particularly among blacks.

What the article of course ignores is the considering what would happen if societies were to adopt a feminist outlook rather than trying to graft one or two reforms onto a fundamentally rotten system. To suggest that women would be better off remaining with their husbands ignores the reality of family life for large numbers. The current issue of Grub, a regular newsletter from Dragonfly Farm in the Bancroft region, contains a fact sheet on domestic assault against women which reveals that

-an estimated two in every ten Canadian women are assaulted by their husbands or partners.

-assaulted women come from all walks of life.

-domestic assault includes not only physical assault but also sexual, psychological and emotional abuse. All control by inflicting pain and inducing fear.

-it is men who beat women; 95% of the victims of domestic assault are women. Wife beating rarely happens only once.

-British and Canadian law allowed men to beat their wives until 100 years ago. The law still tends to view behaviour within the family as no one else's business.